

# Sentence level exploration for GCSE writing

Focus on grades 4 and 5

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## Sentence level focus at grades 4 and 5

- The notes in this resource come from scrutiny of a collection of marked exemplars of writing shared by the exam boards.
- It is important to remember that teaching should be pitched above this level in order to allow some scope for the errors and infelicities that occur when students are under pressure – pitch teaching, marking and feedback more ambitiously.

# Impact of improving sentence structure on GCSE writing

## A05

- Contributes to overall mood/tone/atmosphere
- Supports organisation of narrative or argument
- Creates links between sentences/paragraphs
- Contributes to overall structure of text

## A06

- Demonstrates flexible application of grammar for effect
- Creates opportunities to demonstrate accuracy in punctuation
- Creates a framework within which to deploy ambitious vocabulary and therefore demonstrate correct spelling of challenging words

# Teaching at sentence level

- Explicitly teaching a repertoire of sentence structures that can be adapted for a range of different tasks
  - opportunities for deliberate practice and retrieval – revisable!
  - manipulate material and ideas
  - use ambitious vocabulary in a range of contexts (and therefore secure understanding of meaning)
  - creates conditions for success, supporting motivation
  - students feel confident going into exams
  - Added benefit: awareness of sentence structures and the reasons for writers' choices in analytical work

## Grade 4 expectations at sentence level

- Vary sentence types and structures and use vocabulary for some purpose and effect
- Spell, punctuate and use grammar accurately overall, with some errors
- (Produce texts with clear overall structure and understanding of purpose)

### What this means in practice:

- *Some errors in subject-verb agreement or tense agreement won't necessarily stop a student achieving grade 4*
- *'Some errors' seems to mean 'quite a few'*
- *Commas should be used correctly most of the time but some comma errors (including some splicing) can be forgiven*
- *Punctuation: full stops, question marks, apostrophes, inverted commas*

# Grade 5 expectations at sentence level

- Vary sentence types and structures and use appropriate to purpose and effect
- Spell, punctuate and use grammar accurately overall, with occasional errors
- (Produce coherent, well-structured and purposeful texts)

## What this means in practice:

- *‘Occasional errors’ seems to mean ‘a few’, not ‘almost none’ but the range of error type should be narrow – multiple examples of the same error type can be more readily forgiven than lots of different kinds of error*
- *‘Appropriate to purpose and effect’ seems to mean that the student deliberately makes sentence choices for atmosphere in narrative and for persuasive impact in argument.*
- *Commas should be used accurately most of the time (few splices)*
- *Punctuation: full stops, question marks, apostrophes, inverted commas, semicolons, punctuation for parenthesis*

# Most common sentence preparation approaches – which do you already use?

Bank of sentence starters?

Because/But/So?

Sentence frameworks to memorise and adapt?

Checklist of techniques and sentence types?



# Sentences that seem to characterise Grade 4 writing

## Narrative

- As I ---ed, the...
- It was as if...
- I could almost
- The sound of.../ The smell of.../The feel of...
- The *adjective, adjective, adjective noun* was...

## Argument

- XXXX is a very controversial topic.
- Some people would argue that...
- Others may argue that...
- I personally believe that...
- This means that...
- Therefore, I believe that...
- This is because...
- Rhetorical questions followed by answers, eg *Is it wrong to...? I would say no.*



## Sentence features that appear to be distinctive to Grade 5 and above – narrative

- Deliberate juxtaposition of longer and shorter sentences
- Multiclausal sentences that contain both ‘but’ and ‘because’, (mostly) correctly managed with commas
- A range of verb tenses to manage the narrative thread
- Balance in sentences – deliberate patterning in sentences of two halves
- Prepositional phrases to root the writing in the real world
- Descriptive phrases in parenthesis (apposition)
- Anaphora
- Passive voice

Students succeeding at grade 5 tend to use patterning, which creates the impression that sentences are deliberately crafted for impact.

# Grade 5+ sentence features in argument

- Rule of three used well – eg by increasing the number of syllables in each item in the list, or by using phrases rather than single words, or by beginning each item in the same way
- Naming an issue, followed by an explanation/statement (should use a colon to introduce the additional detail but often uses full stop after a phrase and starts a new sentence)
- Standard frames to create balance eg *On the one hand... on the other hand*
- Noun phrases including ambitious vocabulary
- Inverted commas around words to call them into question (scare quotes)

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