HOW TO USE

THE STUDENT GUIDE TO WRITING BETTER SENTENCES

In The English Classroom

1&2

TICKING MIND

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USING THE GUIDES FOR GRAMMAR INSTRUCTION

Both books of *The Student Guides to Writing Better Sentences* begin with the same two chapters: one on parts of speech and one on punctuation. These two chapters introduce students to some essential grammatical understandings that underpin the explicit writing instruction throughout the rest of the chapters. The section below suggests some ways to introduce students to this basic grammatical knowledge at the beginning of a year.

INTRODUCING PARTS OF SPEECH

Teaching grammar is really about giving students a common language so they can talk about the mechanics of writing at a sentence and word level.

We can explain it to students like this:

> *"Any person who has the job of understanding how a complex thing works needs to know the names of the parts of that complex thing. For example, a doctor needs to know the names of all the parts of the body; a mechanic needs to know the names of the different parts of a car; a gardener needs to know the names of lots of types of plants. It's important to know the names of things so you can be specific about what you are talking about. Imagine if one doctor said to another doctor – 'We need to operate on the red thing inside the patient's chest'. Oops – they operated on the heart when it was meant to be the lung! Writing is a complex thing. We need to know the names for the types of words, rules and elements we use when we write sentences so we can be clear and specific when we're talking about how to write well."*

The above script can help demonstrate to students at the start of the year *why* we need to learn grammar. We can follow this up by introducing students to the basic parts of speech they'll use again and again throughout the year as they develop their writing skills.

The sticky note activity on the next page can be used in conjunction with reading through the first chapter of the textbook on Parts of Speech.

STICKY NOTE PARTS OF SPEECH

This activity works best if students are equipped with different coloured sticky notes (but using notes of all the same colour works nearly as well).

NOUNS:

Ask students to look around the room and to pick out five things they can touch. Tell students that each of these things has a name. For example, the name of the thing they're sitting on is 'chair' and the name of the thing the chair is sitting on is 'carpet'.

Now, ask students to write down the name of five other things in the room – one per sticky note – and to go and stick their sticky notes on each of those five things. After this, move around the room and read out some of the things students have labelled. As you do so, emphasise that these types of words are *nouns*. The word *noun* literally means *name*.

Students can then read through the noun section on page 3 of their textbook.

ADJECTIVES:

All of the nouns that have been labelled can be described using adjectives. Get students to write words on their sticky notes to describe nouns that have already been labelled and to stick their new notes next to the nouns.

You can then discuss adjectives and read about them on page 5.

VERBS:

Students can use sticky notes to find examples of other parts of speech in the classroom. Once they know what nouns are, you can tell students that each noun performs some type of action. For example, a chair *supports*, a door *opens*, a data projector *shows*. Ask students to look around the classroom at different nouns that have been labelled. Using a different coloured sticky note (if they have them), they should write down the actions five different nouns in the room perform (one per sticky note) and place the sticky note next to the nouns. After this, move around the room and read out some of the words that students have come up with. Tell students that these words are called *verbs*. Students can then read through the section on verbs in the textbook on page 4.

ADVERBS:

With adverbs, instead of asking students to brainstorm their own words, you might first explain what adverbs are by looking through page 8 of the textbook. You might also point out that, just as adjectives describe a noun, adverbs describe verbs. Then, give students a list of possible adverbs to go with the nouns and verbs that have already been labelled in the room.

For example, you might ask students to think about which noun–verb combinations in the room these adverbs can go with:

- sadly
- enthusiastically
- slowly
- angrily
- grimly.

PREPOSITIONS:

Students can also use the sticky note procedure to label the classroom with prepositions.

Read through page 6 of the textbook and then list on the whiteboard these prepositions:

- in
- on
- over
- beyond
- behind
- ahead
- below.

Students can look around the room at the different nouns that have been labelled and think about what preposition they would use to describe where that noun is. For example, they might say *the door is **in** the wall, or the data projector is **on** the ceiling*.

Students should write a sticky note with a short sentence that features a noun and a preposition and stick that sticky note next to the noun.

An alternative or follow-up activity to the sticky note procedure described above is to use images of artworks, events or people that contain lots of things to describe. These images can be projected on the classroom whiteboard and students can use sticky notes to label the images with parts of speech following the same procedure as the classroom-based activity. Using images also provides the opportunity for students to identify idea nouns – not just concrete nouns.

We could ask students to brainstorm possible idea nouns to finish these sentence starters about an image:

In this picture, there is a feeling of…

In this picture, there is an idea of…

INTRODUCING PUNCTUATION MARKS

This chapter splits rules into two categories: essential rules about full stops and apostrophes that students need to be clear about now; and rules about commas, which they'll learn more about as they experiment with different types of sentence writing.

INTRODUCING RULES TO KNOW NOW

This part of the chapter is about making clear to students the punctuation rules we expect them to use all the time – full stops at the end of a sentence, capital letters at the start and apostrophes in the right places. Looking at this part of the chapter at the start of the year sets up the expectation about the type of writing standards we expect students to *always* meet throughout the rest of the year.

It's important to take students carefully and clearly through the role of the full stop at the start of the year, because although this punctuation mark seems simple, students so often get it wrong. The problem lies with the vague but pervasive advice to students to 'put a full stop at the end of your sentences' or 'put a capital letter at the start'. This advice is based on the assumption that students have mastered the skill of always knowing where a sentence begins or ends. They haven't. Taking the time to read through pages 12–14 will make explicit some of the knowledge about sentences we assume students understand. You can follow this up with some basic sentence study activities like those outlined on the next few pages.

SENTENCE BUILDING

After looking through page 14 of the textbook, you can emphasise to students:

> *"Your sentences can have one more idea. As a writer, you'll always need to think about how many ideas you want to put in a sentence, and where you should end it so that the idea or ideas make the best sense."*

Students should create their own sentences to punctuate, which will reinforce their understanding of the basic components of a sentence – that is, a noun and a verb – and that it must make sense:

1. Give students a random topic to think about such as *bananas*.

2. On slips of paper, students individually brainstorm as many statements (opinions, descriptions or facts) about bananas as they can. These statements must not be any longer than seven words and must include a noun (*Bananas*) a verb (such as *are*, *can*, *have*, *taste*, *provide*) and further information to make sense.

   For example:

   Bananas are a yellow fruit.

   Bananas are tasty.

   Bananas are a great snack.

   Bananas are easy to squash.

   Bananas go brown.

   Bananas have peels.

   Bananas are disgusting

3. Students form small groups of 3–4 and share their statements. They can then discuss which of the statements have similar ideas and could therefore be joined in a sentence. They should group the statements into 'sentence groups' and use the conjunctions 'and' or 'because' to link them into a single sentence.

   Some of the statements might not be able to be combined, so will remain in a sentence on their own, like in the example sentences below:

   Bananas are a yellow fruit ***and*** *are tasty.*

   Bananas have peels.

   Bananas are disgusting ***because*** *bananas are easy to squash* ***and*** *go brown.*

   When students have thought about how some of the statements do or don't go together, we can question them about their decisions. Why do these two or three ideas work well together in the same sentence? Why do they make sense? Why does this one work best on its own?

   Afterwards, students can write the statements out in a sequence that makes sense, substituting 'bananas' for the pronoun 'they' where appropriate, like this:

   Bananas are a yellow fruit. Bananas are an easy snack to pack because ***they*** *have peels. Bananas are disgusting because* ***they*** *are easy to squash and go brown.*

This activity shows students that they will always have to make choices about the best place to put their full stops. Punctuation is about making ideas clearer or about linking ideas for the reader. Good writers are always thinking about where to put punctuation in order to make things clearer or to link ideas for their audience.

SIGNPOSTING RULES TO LEARN ABOUT LATER

The other part of the punctuation chapter contains rules that students will learn more about as they complete writing activities throughout the book. This provides meaningful and structured opportunities to teach punctuation in context. Most of the punctuation you'll teach in context will be comma rules.

It's a good idea to flick through pages 17–20, which contain the comma rules, and say to students:

> *"You can see from these pages that there are lots of rules about how commas work. You don't need to know them all straight away. We're going to try to become experts on how to apply these rules slowly throughout the year. Every time we do a writing activity that needs a comma, we'll look back at the right rule from this section."*

When students need to use a particular punctuation mark such as a comma to complete a writing activity throughout the book, there is a punctuation alert with a punctuation icon and a brief reminder about the rule to employ. When students come across these rules for the first time, you'll need to look at the explanation of that rule from the punctuation chapter. For example, when completing the 'Recount an Anecdote' persuasive writing activity on page 27 of Book 1, students will need to use the **introductory information comma rule**. As a class, you can read about this rule on page 18. One of the things you can do as a teacher when reading about a comma rule is to discuss not just what the rule is, but why it's important. Rewriting the example sentences in the punctuation section without the punctuation can help you have this discussion.

For example, you might ask students to think about what happens to the clarity of this sentence when the comma is removed:

You'll need to reinforce comma rules every time you do a writing activity that requires a comma.

You can do this by:

- as a class, looking again at the rule from the punctuation section
- pointing out to students that a writing activity requires a comma and questioning them about how the rule works
- as a teacher, completing an example of a writing activity for the class without a comma and asking them where the comma should go and why
- asking students to look back at the comma rule if they have forgotten how it works.

USING THE GUIDES FOR EXPLICIT WRITING INSTRUCTION

During your writing units, there are four different ways you could use *The Student Guides to Writing Better Sentences*:

1. Structured writing after a learning activity
2. Quick Writes to begin a lesson
3. Scaffold students to draft a whole piece
4. Provide targeted feedback to students.

1. STRUCTURED WRITING AFTER A LEARNING ACTIVITY

The sections in these textbooks are designed to supplement any of the activities that you already do in the English classroom. Whenever students have completed a thinking or discussion activity, they should be provided with opportunities to put their understanding into writing.

So, for instance, if students are working on a Persuasive Writing Unit, one of the earlier activities you may do in class is to ask students to brainstorm possible arguments for and against a proposal. Students may brainstorm a range of reasons that 'School uniform should be banned' (or not!) and then turn to the activities on pages 29–30 of Book 1 and write their arguments out using the 'Help' and 'Hurt' verb chart on page 30. This means that, in addition to thinking about *what* their arguments should be, students are scaffolded into thinking about *how* their arguments could be framed in a way that makes them more persuasive.

Text type	Learning activity	Suggested writing activities
Persuasive writing	Students read or research evidence for their arguments	Students write about their evidence using the charts from pages: **Book 1:** 35–37 **Book 2:** 38–40
		Students should then explain the significance of their evidence using the activities from pages: **Book 1:** 38–43 **Book 2:** 41
Text Response	Students have done a learning activity about the major themes in a text	Students practise writing about these ideas using the activities on pages: **Book 1:** 57–60 **Book 2:** 67–68
	Students are given a list of quotes to think about and analyse	Students practise analysing these quotes, using the activities on pages: **Book 1:** 63–65 **Book 2:** 78–81
	Students re-read a key scene and complete close reading analysis	Students practise writing about the key scene using the activities on pages: **Book 1:** 66 **Book 2:** 74–77
Creative Writing	Students are given photographs or pictures of scenes that they must describe in detail	Practise writing about settings and scenes with the activities on pages: **Book 1:** 79–81 **Book 2:** 129–133
	Students plan an action scene for a story they are writing, describing a couple of events that will take place	Practise writing about the events using the models on pages: **Book 1:** 96–97 **Book 2:** 142

2. QUICK WRITES

Quick Writes are any short, targeted writing activities that we get students to complete in order to both demonstrate and practise their current skills. For this reason, Quick Writes work well as a warm-up activity at the beginning of a lesson so students can practise independently using a skill that has been explicitly taught in a previous lesson.

For example, if students had previously been taught about how to use prepositions to add descriptive details to a creative sentence, we could start a lesson with the instruction:

> *"Write two sentences creatively describing the classroom. Use at least three prepositions in each of your sentences. Turn to page 81 (Book 1) for a list of prepositions."*

Here, the textbook acts as a reminder of what students have previously done and helps them complete the task independently and at their own pace.

Here is a range of suggestions for other Quick Writes:

WRITING TYPE	Book 1 Quick Write task	Book 2 Quick Write task
Persuasive	Do you prefer remote learning or face-to-face learning? Write one sentence and use at least one comparative or superlative adjective from page 82 to argue why one is better than the other.	Write one sentence arguing why we should or shouldn't replace teachers with robots. Refer to page 36 to use a positive adjective and noun or a negative adjective and noun in your sentence.
Text response	What is one key thing the protagonist learns in the text? Write one sentence using the table on page 52.	Refer to page 68 to help you write four sentences about the four main characters we have been discussing in class.
Creative	Describe the classroom in detail. Use the preposition activity on page 81 to help you. You must write at least three sentences and each sentence must have 2–3 prepositions.	Rewrite this short passage by starting or finishing each sentence with adjectives. Use page 135 to help you.

3. SCAFFOLD A WHOLE PIECE OF WRITING

Each chapter of the textbooks is divided into sections that show students how to write sentences from the very beginning of their piece to the conclusion. There are sections that show students how to write the sentences needed for a good introduction, for body paragraphs and for conclusions.

At the stage of a unit where students are planning or drafting a whole written piece, these sections can be used in different ways:

1. **Work through each section together as a class to draft a whole piece**

   This approach means the whole class works at the same pace and is an excellent approach if the entire class needs similar scaffolding and support to complete a written piece.

   Following this system, the teacher would guide students like this:

Text type	Example
Text response	*Today, we're going to draft an introduction to our essays. Let's turn to page 50 (Book 1) and have a go at writing the first sentence. We'll look at the example first, then I'll model how to write a sentence on the book we're doing, then you'll have a go at writing your own.*
Persuasive	*Today, we're going to practise writing an introduction to a persuasive piece where we label the issue. Let's turn to page 32 (Book 2). We'll look at the example first, then I'll model how to write a paragraph on the issue of 'The canteen should sell more healthy food', then you'll have a go at writing a paragraph on your own issue.*

2. **As a resource for creating a planning template for students**

   The textbooks can be used as a planning resource, so that students are able to work at their own pace, referring to the textbooks to support their writing. For example, when planning for persuasive writing, students might have a template that requires them to plan the argument they will be using and then practise persuasive writing for each body paragraph. You could ask students to write their arguments into separate rows of a table (like in the example table below) and then practise writing about that argument by using strategies from specific pages.

   Here's an example:

	Argument	Put it into practice
BP1		Use a strategy from pages 33–36 (Book 2)
BP2		Use a strategy from pages 38–40 (Book 2)
BP3		Use a strategy from pages 45–47 (Book2)

3. **Use *The Student Guides to Writing Better Sentences* to differentiate instruction**

Each section of the textbooks includes a range of writing strategies – some basic and some more advanced. This creates a resource for teachers to differentiate instruction. During the drafting stage, using either of the approaches outlined above, a teacher can use *The Student Guides* to set writing strategies that all students need to master as well as some that more advanced students can progress to.

Below are some examples of what this might look like for different units:

	All students	Just advanced students
Persuasive	All students to master using a mental picture (Book 1, page 26) to write an introduction to their persuasive piece.	Stronger students can experiment with using a startling or shocking fact (page 28) to begin their persuasive piece.
Text response	All students to master writing basic topic sentences (Book 2, pages 63–64)	Stronger students to write more complex topic sentences (Book 2, page 65)
Creative	All students to master using prepositions to create detailed descriptions of the setting (Book 2, page 129)	Stronger students to use personifying verbs to create vivid pictures of the setting (Book 2, page 131)

4. PROVIDE TARGETED FEEDBACK TO STUDENTS

In the English classroom, good feedback identifies a specific element of writing that a student can improve and provides them with a concrete, explicit strategy they can implement to improve in that area. *The Student Guides* can help you provide clear improvement strategies for students. For example, a student may hand in a creative story where there are lots of action sentences but very few descriptive sentences.

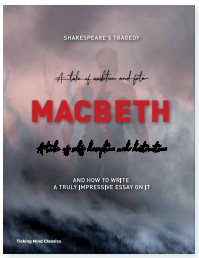
We could give this feedback to the students:

> *"There is a lot happening in your story. Action can make a story exciting – but you need to create a good picture of what the action looks and feels like. Re-write the paragraph I have circled so there are only two action sentences but at least three description or emotion sentences. Re-read through page 105–106 (Book 1) so you are clear about these types of sentences."*

Here are some further examples of how to use the textbooks to provide feedback:

	Typical student problem	Example feedback
Text response	Not enough analysis of evidence	*"In two of your paragraphs, you haven't used or analysed any quotes to discuss your points. I've highlighted a few possible quotes you could use on the quote sheet. Look at page 78 (Book 2) for a guide on how to insert and analyse these quotes."*
Creative	Sets out dialogue incorrectly or without variation	*"I've underlined all the places you used dialogue in your story. In a number of places, you have set out the dialogue incorrectly. Re-read through pages 99–100 (Book 1) to remind yourself of the rules – then re-write the dialogue using the correct rules."*
Persuasive	Repetition of the same persuasive strategies	*"Each of your paragraphs has a clear argument and example but you've tended to start all of your sentences the same way. I've highlighted two sentences in each paragraph that are very similar. Try rewriting these sentences using the different sentence starters on pages 37 and 43 (Book 2)."*

ALSO AVAILABLE FROM TICKING MIND



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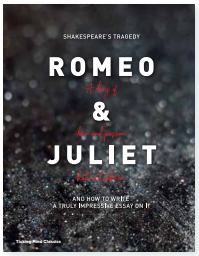

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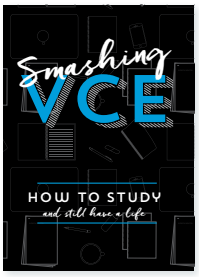

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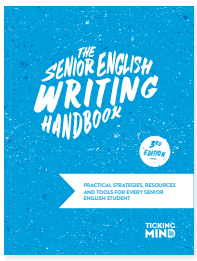

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