

The components of effective sentence-level instruction



The Writing For Pleasure Centre

- Promoting research-informed writing teaching

Good sentence construction, the act of writing multiple words in sentence types that make semantic and syntactic sense, is needed for clear and meaningful written expression (Young & Ferguson [2022a](#), [2023a](#)). However, struggling writers can lack the linguistic knowledge and skills required to produce complete, interesting, and varied sentences.

We recommend that teachers teach sentence-level mini-lessons which are in keeping with [the principles of SRSD instruction](#) (see below). Essentially, pupils learn about a type of sentence structure (what we call a sentence *craft move*) before being invited to use it for themselves during that day's writing time (Young & Ferguson [2022b](#)).

The components of effective sentence-level instruction	
Step One:	Orientate Remind the children of the class writing project you are currently working on. This includes checking they know what they are writing and who they are writing it for.
Step Two:	Discuss <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Introduce the <i>sentence-level move</i> you want the children to try out in writing time today. Name the <i>craft move</i>. For example 'If..., then... When..., then...'. (Young & Ferguson 2022b).• Then be a salesperson. Tell your class why this <i>craft move</i> is so fantastic and how its use could transform their writing. Share how you've used the <i>craft move</i> in the past.• Link the <i>craft move</i> to the class' product goals for the writing project (Young & Hayden 2022). For example: 'If..., then... When..., then...' is going to help us achieve 'explain why things happen', which is on our product goals list.
Step Three:	Share Models or Model Live Share models. Show children examples of where other writers have used this <i>craft move</i> in their writing. There should certainly be an example of where you've used the <i>craft move</i> in your own writing. You should also show examples from other students' writing. Invite children to ask you questions.

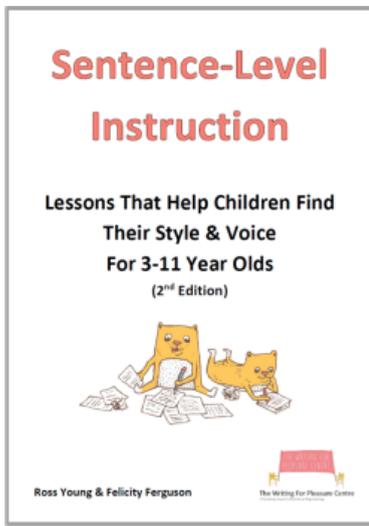
	<p>Or</p> <p>Model using the craft move live in front of your class. Share some of the writing you are currently working on and show how you're going to use the <i>craft move</i> to enhance your writing. Invite children to ask you questions.</p>
Step Four:	<p>Provide Information</p> <p>We always recommend turning your instruction into a poster or resource which the children can refer to throughout writing time. This helps them memorise the <i>craft move</i> and any conventions it might involve. For example, you might make a poster to accompany a lesson on using <i>subordinating conjunctions</i>. The poster can almost always be pre-prepared to save time and can remain up in the classroom over many days, weeks or even months. Children will be showing independent, self-regulating behaviour every time they consult the poster.</p>
Step Five:	<p>Invite</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Invite children to use the technique during that day's writing time. ● Monitor children's use of the <i>craft move</i> during your daily pupil-conferencing (Ferguson & Young 2021). ● Sometimes you might feel you want your children to practise the <i>craft move</i> prior to using it in their own writing. However, in all honesty, we find this is rarely necessary.
Step Six:	<p>Evaluate</p> <p>You can invite children to share how they used the <i>craft move</i> in their writing during class sharing and <i>Author's Chair</i> (Young & Ferguson 2020). If you have noticed a student who has used the <i>craft move</i> in a particularly powerful, innovative or sophisticated way during your pupil-conferencing, you should invite that child to share their writing with the class. The class can then discuss their friend's writing and its impact.</p>

If your teaching of these sentence *craft moves* is well planned and, above all, responsive to what your pupils need instruction in most, then, over time, children will internalise these strategies for themselves and so become confident, agentic, personally responsible and independent writers (Young & Ferguson [2020](#); Young et al. [2021](#)).

It's important to remember that the stages shared above constitute a good guide. However, teachers should also feel free to experiment with them if they want to. The professional judgement made by a particular teacher might be that a certain stage could be omitted altogether and that another stage might need more time devoted to it. For example, some teachers like children to practise the *craft move* prior to using it in their own writing, while others find this an unnecessary distraction. Some like to model the *craft move* live, and create their poster in front of their class, while others like to have made their poster prior to the lesson, or to share writing they have already crafted.

Recommended text:

Teachers will find our eBook [Sentence-Level Instruction For 3-11 Year Olds](#) useful as it showcases over 50 mini-lessons used by *Writing For Pleasure* teachers. All these mini-lessons follow the routine shared above.



Writing sentences in the EYFS and KS1

We've found that many schools ask children to write extended pieces or to write 'at length' too soon. As a result, children don't receive a good foundation in what a sentence is and what it tries to achieve. However, this doesn't mean writing sentences needs to be divorced from meaning-making and meaning-sharing. Infact, to do so would be an instructional mistake (Young & Ferguson [2022a](#)).

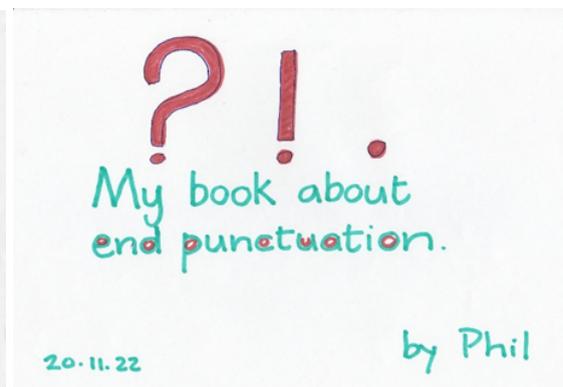
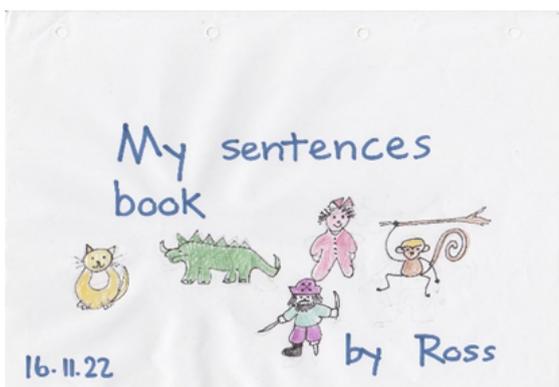
In *Writing For Pleasure* schools, children from Nursery to Year Two are expected to compose simple and compound sentences across multiple pages in their 'book-making projects' (The Writing For Pleasure Centre [2023](#); Young & Ferguson [2022c](#)). Children soon recognise that a page can reflect a complete thought - often a sentence. These skills are further developed in KS2. By the end of LKS2, children are expected to draft relatively fluently and compose a variety of diverse sentences (Young & Ferguson [2022b](#)).

For children in schools who may not have received such an apprenticeship, they may need to 'go back to go forward' and book-make for a period of time. We've found that book-making naturally supports children of all ages develop their understanding of writing sentences (see Young & Ferguson [2022b](#) for more details).

Sentence-level book-making projects

Beyond delivering sentence-level mini-lessons, teachers may find undertaking specific book-making projects useful. The examples below can be used with children of any age. They look to give them a solid apprenticeship in what constitutes a sentence but in a way that is orientated towards function, meaning-making and meaning-sharing. These book-making projects can be found in our publication [Sentence-Level Instruction For 3-11 Year Olds](#).

- The 'what is a sentence?' book-making project
- The 'what is end punctuation?' book-making project



Finally

Teachers' instruction should always be in the service of helping children craft their most successful and meaningful texts. We want children's compositions to be a place where they can meaningfully use and apply what they've learnt about sentences. We should be able to spot what we've taught them when we read through their manuscripts at the end of the day. Through this process of 'playing with sentences,' children can see how their writing is getting better before their very eyes.

References

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