



Sentence Stretchers – Syllabus

Course Description: The sentence is the foundation for all other writing, yet many beginning writers struggle with the process of constructing sentences. At first, writing a sentence can seem overwhelming or impossible. This class will take students from the grammatical foundations of a sentence (subject and verb) through the process of stretching their sentences by providing detail in various ways. By the end of the course, students will be confident in their ability to write super sentences!

Course Outline:

Week One: Review: What Makes a Sentence?

Week Two: First Stretches: Who, What, When, Where, Why

Week Three: Adding Basic Description:

- A. Using Adjectives
- B. Using Adverbs

Week Four: Show, Don't Tell

Week Five: More Show, Don't Tell

Week Six: Building Power Sentences I

- A. Choosing Vivid Verbs
- B. Using Synonyms

Week Seven: Building Power Sentences II

- A. Different Lengths
- B. Different Beginnings

Week Eight: Super Sentence Activities



Sentence Stretchers – Grading Outline

Sentence Stretchers will be graded with a combination method.

Some assignments are exercise-based and will be graded like a grammar assignment, considering the total number of answers in each section. For example, if a student must underline ten nouns in an assignment and misses two, he would receive an 80% on that assignment.

Some assignments will be graded according to *The Beginning Writer* grading rubric, with a focus on ideas and content and understanding and application of principles.

All assignment grades for this course will be averaged to receive a final course grade.



Sentence Stretchers

Lesson Four: Show, Don't Tell

(emotions & experiences)

SAMPLE LESSON

Your words have the power to paint pictures for your reader. However, the success of your word pictures depends on how well you use your words. Many beginning writers do a lot of *telling*. On the other hand, you can stretch your sentences and greatly improve your writing by *showing* instead.

Think about it this way. My young son loves to paint pictures. In any given week, he might paint several pictures, but they always end up looking very much the same. He asks for all eight colors from our paint collection but then mixes them into a muddy purple/brown and smears it all over the page. In the end, he tells me that one picture is a painting of the ocean; another is a painting of a train; another is a painting of a hamburger. He TELLS me what his paintings are, but the paintings do not actually SHOW me an ocean, a train, or a hamburger. They show me a big blob of muddy purple/brown paint.

Now, think about it in terms of a sentence:

- “She was excited to see her dad.”

This is a proper sentence, but it just TELLS me that the girl was excited to see her dad. When I am reading, I am not actually there to see the girl's emotions, facial expressions, or body movements. I cannot hear the noises she makes or hear the words she is saying. So, although you are telling me that she was excited to see her dad, I don't see it. This sentence is not super, because it doesn't SHOW me the girl's excitement.

Now, try this:

- “When she saw her dad enter the auditorium, she sprinted across the room, jumped into his arms, and buried her head in his chest.”

Notice how the verbs and additional phrases create description and emotion. Knowing that the girl *sprinted* and *jumped*, we can FEEL her excitement. When she buries her head in his chest, we feel her emotion and connection with her father. This sentence shows us the girl's delight in seeing her father, and we understand exactly how this played out.

Although you can practice showing a lot of different things (people, places, AND objects), we will focus our attention this week on people – emotions and experiences. Since a lot of our writing talks about ourselves or the people we love/know, learning how to SHOW rather than merely TELL our emotions and experiences stretches our writing in wonderful ways.

But how do you know what to write in order to SHOW? Here are some ideas of descriptions you could use for various emotions or experiences. These descriptions utilize both the five senses (sight, hearing, taste, smell, touch) and action details.

EXCITED <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • mouth/eyes wide open • heart pounding • squealing • jumping with joy • legs moving • sprinting • grinning • beaming 	HAPPY <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • smiling face • clasping hands • jumping up and down • laughing • skipping • giggling • talking quickly/brightly 	SHOCKED <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • jaw drops • fall to knees • heart beating fast • hand over mouth • mouth wide open • speechless • nervous giggle
AFRAID <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • hands shaking • breathing hard • heart pounding • wobbly knees • goosebumps • eyes wide open • hiding behind something • whimpering • pale 	NERVOUS <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • lips locked • bouncing legs • tapping fingers • fidgeting • biting nails or lower lip • butterflies in stomach • looking down • arms crossed • lump in throat 	EMBARRASSED <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • covered face • sigh • hold back tears • run away • stomach flips • red hot cheeks/blushing

TIRED <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • droopy eyes • yawning • stretching • slouching • rubbing eyes • bags under eyes • scratchy voice • walking slowly 	ANGRY <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • breathing heavy • red hot face • clenched fists or jaw • stomping • slam the door • speaking loudly • hands on hips 	HOT <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • bright red face • wiping sweat • fanning yourself • panting • moving slowly • thirsty or drinking water • sticky • no energy
SAD <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • tears in eyes • trembling lips • hanging head • shoulders drooping • shaky voice • red face • puffy eyes • heart ache 	COLD <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • shivering • rubbing hands together • arms crossed • see breath • purple or chapped lips • teeth chattering • red or dripping nose • goosebumps 	SHY <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • speak softly • mumbling • stay by yourself • looking down • hiding • blushing

Another helpful way to think about it is to consider how the emotion or experience is conveyed in the character's face, body, and voice. Look at the great graphic attached with this week's lesson; then proceed with your assignment!

Assignment 4A: In the following examples, compare the sentences that TELL us how the character feels with the descriptions that SHOW us how the character feels. Answer the questions that follow each description.

Telling sentence: Bella was happy.

Showing sentence: A gigantic grin spread across Bella's face and her eyes lit up like the sky on the 4th of July. Jumping up and down, she exclaimed loudly, "This is the best moment of my life!"

1. **From the description, how do you know that Bella was happy?**
2. **Does this description contain details about Bella's face, body, and voice?**
3. **Which of the five senses (sight, hearing, smell, taste, touch) does the description use?**

Telling sentence: Jeremiah felt sad.

Showing sentence: An ache started deep in Jeremiah's stomach. He turned away as his eyes welled up. Jeremiah tried to explain what he was feeling, but his voice caught in his throat and he stood there shaking, quiet tears dripping from his eyes.

1. **From the description, how do you know that Jeremiah felt sad?**
2. **Does this description contain details about Jeremiah's face, body, and voice?**
3. **Which of the five senses (sight, hearing, smell, taste, touch) does the description use?**

Telling sentence: Molly is a wonderful person.

Showing sentence: Molly is always there when anyone needs her. She's the first to arrive with a meal when someone is sick, the first to send a note of encouragement to those who are troubled, the first to offer a hug to anyone, at any time.

1. **From the description, how do you know that Molly is a wonderful person?**

2. **This description does NOT contain details about Molly's face, body, and voice and does not use the five senses. Instead, what kind of description does this paragraph use? Do you think this works to convey the message?**

Assignment 4B: Now you try it! Write a group of showing sentences for each telling sentence. You may choose to utilize the five senses (sight, hearing, smell, taste, touch), the body/face/voice method, or the use of action.

1. **Telling Sentence:** Henry felt embarrassed when he fell down.
2. **Telling Sentence:** Lucy is creative.
3. **Telling Sentence:** Noah is always nervous when he gives a speech.
4. **Telling Sentence:** Mom looked tired.
5. **Telling Sentence:** Grace acted shy when she met Mrs. Casey.