

Jul 21st, 2:45 PM - 3:45 PM

My pet frog, a former teen beauty queen, is a narcissist.

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My pet frog, a former teen beauty queen, is a narcissist: Using subordination to reach and teach

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Summer Literacy Institute
July 21, 2016

Why subordination?

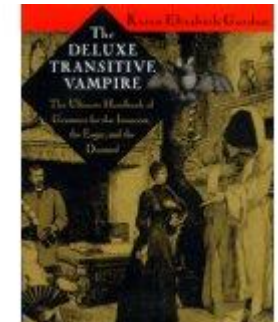
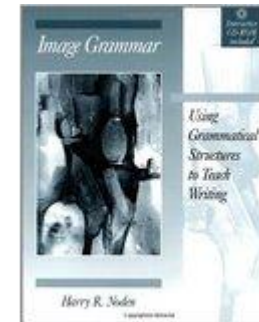
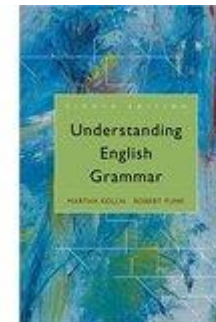
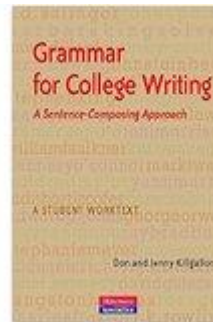
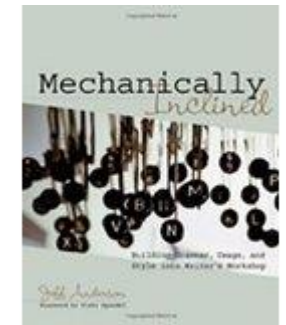
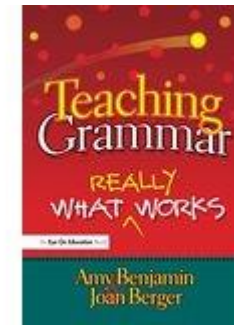
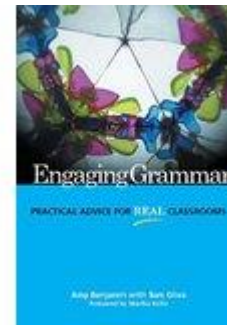
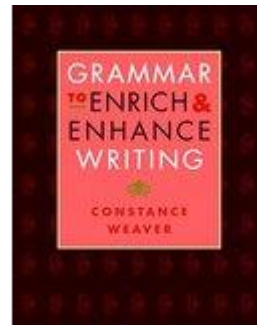
Learning to write and practicing writing rich, varied sentences with many kinds of subordination can improve students' ability to

- develop skills in elaboration, sentence variety, and comma use;
- intentionally consider their readers; and
- read and comprehend complex texts.

Work in subordination can serve as a common thread/organizing principle for grammar instruction, focusing on syntax and creation rather than correction--*without* inadvertently disparaging students' dialects.

Everything is stolen/adapted from these folks:

- Constance Weaver
- Amy Benjamin
- Joan Berger
- Jeff Anderson
- Don & Jenny Killgallon
- Martha Koln & Robert Funk
- Harry Noden
- Karen Gordon





What is subordination?



Why is it important to teach subordination?

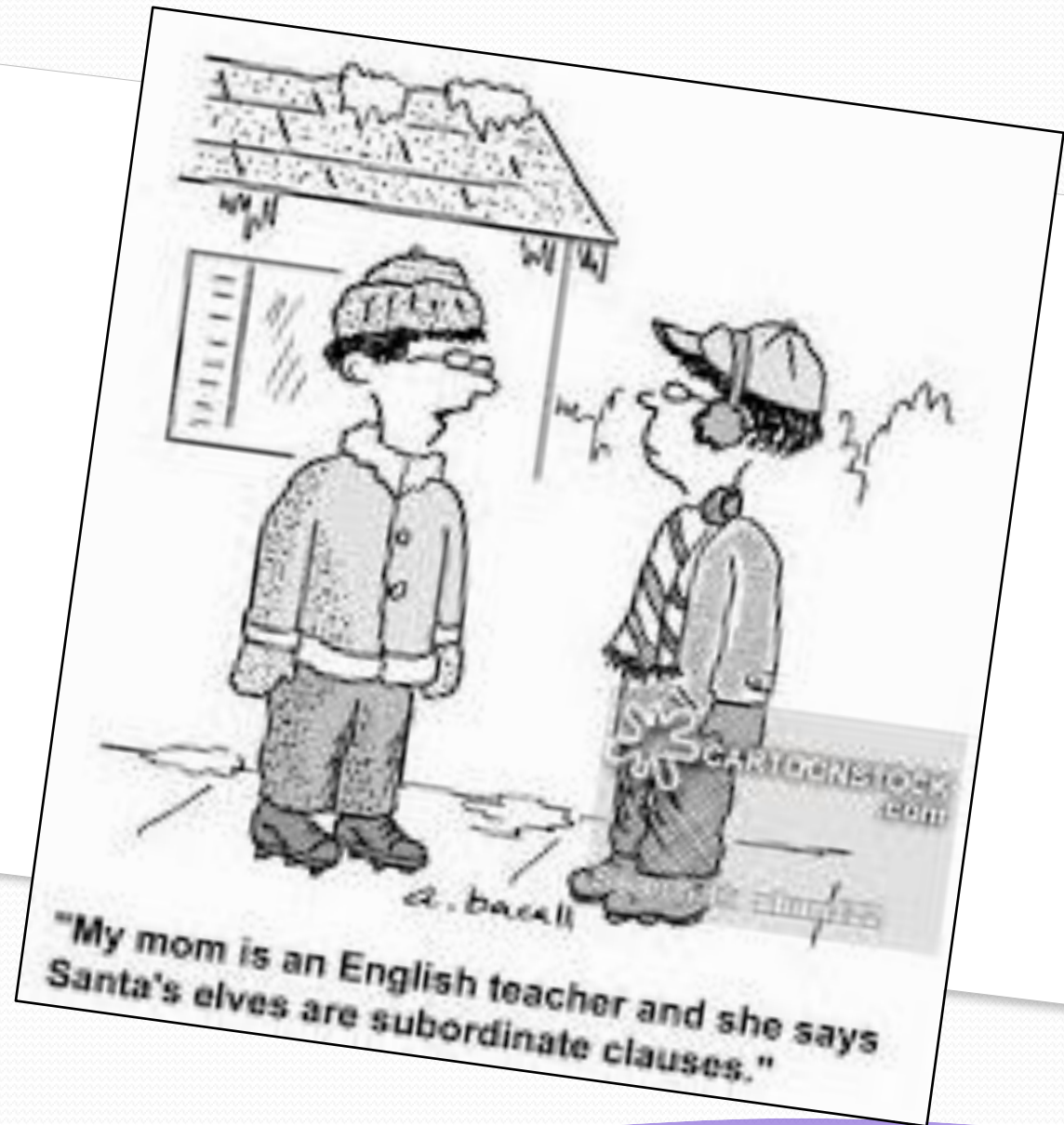


How can we teach subordination?



Practice: What does it look like in a classroom?

What is subordination?



Define *subordination*:

- In linguistics and grammar, the **syntax** or organization of words in a particular order to establish hierarchy
- **Syntactic** units—words, phrases, clauses—of sentences are often either subordinate or coordinate to each other
- Understand subordination best by contrasting it with coordination
- Old English was paratactic (using coordination); Middle English became hypotactic (using subordination) and began losing inflections. Not all languages are hypotactic—certainly not to the degree academic English is.

What's the difference?

Coordination

- Things are the same & equal
- Immature: By 5th grade, students should “edit for excessive coordination,” “vary sentence structure” and “use strategies for elaboration” (VA SOL)
- Comma use: with compound sentences and FANBOYS (coordinating conjunctions); for list of ≥ 3 things

Subordination

- Things are different; some more important
- More polished: Forces the writer to decide what's important and *how* ideas connect; supports varied sentence structure; provides strategies for elaboration; reinforces higher level reading
- Comma use: introductory elements, extra information [requires understanding of syntax]

Coordination

- She was kicked by the soft shoe of destiny, and she landed in Wales.
- The mannequin gave the baby vampire her phone number; she knew he'd never call.
- The debutante lives under the bridge, but she took to the outdoors as if she'd been raised by wolves.

Subordination

- **After she was kicked by the soft shoe of destiny,** she landed in Wales.
- The mannequin gave the baby vampire her phone number **although she knew he'd never call.**
- The debutante **who lives under the bridge** took to the outdoors **as if she'd been raised by wolves.**



Which is better? Why?

1. The children fried, and the house burned.
2. The children fried while the house burned.
3. The house burned while the children fried.
4. While the house burned, the children fried.
5. While the children fried, the house burned.



Why is it
important to
teach
subordination?



Grammar instruction should enhance writers'

- Ability to create effective, engaging text
- Ability to read and comprehend complex texts
- Enjoyment of language

BUT is often limited to correcting “errors” in usage and mechanics

Status–marker & error frequency studies

- Hairston: “If you encountered the sentence in a report or business letter, would it lower your estimate of the writer and how much?”
- **Comma misuse serious**
- **Many serious status-marking “errors” are dialect usage issues: verbs, double negatives, using objective case pronouns as subjects**
- Hairston (1981)
- Connors & Lunsford (1988)
- Lunsford & Lunsford (2008)



Seriousness of “Errors”

Hairston’s (1981) study

- 41 different errors—including commas and usage
- Convenience sample of 101 professionals from 63 separate occupations in her community; 83% of the sample returned the survey
- Some were perceived as so egregious that Hairston described them as “status markers.”
- Many “errors” were connected to dialect; **respondents—and Hairston--made mistakes about which sentences had “errors,” but they judged others on what they felt was right!**

20 Most Common Errors in Order of Frequency*

1. No comma after intro element (2)
2. Vague pronoun reference
3. No comma in compound sentence (13)
4. Wrong word
5. No comma with nonrestrictive/essential element (11)
6. “Wrong”/missing inflected endings
7. “Wrong”/missing prepositions
8. Comma splice (16)
9. Possessive apostrophe error
10. Tense shift
11. Unnecessary shift in person
12. Sentence fragments
13. “Wrong” tense or verb form
14. Subject-verb agreement
15. Lack of comma in a series (Not in 2008)
16. Pronoun agreement error
17. Comma with restrictive element (7)
18. Run-on or fused sentence (15)
19. Dangling or misplaced modifier
20. It’s vs its error

*Red = dialect issues; purple = commas (1998 Connors & Lunsford study of college writing; in parentheses 2008 Lunsford & Lunsford study of college students, from Fredrickson 2014)

Changes in rules for “correct” usage

1965

- **None** of us **is** driving home from the bar; we can’t walk—much less drive!
- Everyone whooped and clapped **his hands** as I shoved my sister’s phone number into the back pocket of that hot vampire’s jeans.

2015

- **None** of us **are** driving home from the bar; we can’t walk—much less drive!
- Everyone whooped and clapped **their hands** as I shoved my sister’s phone number into the back pocket of that hot vampire’s jeans.

[*Washington Post* and American Copy Editors accepted singular *they* in 2015.]

Usage & change

- **Don't confuse the current prestige dialect with “correct” grammar.**
- Usage: Pronoun case and agreement, prepositions, verb tenses, noun plurals, subject/verb agreement, adjectives and adverbs—all inflectional issues except prepositions
- Usage—*the only aspect of grammar that varies based on dialect*—is in transition as English continues its historic loss of inflectional affixes. “We vote for change with our mouths.”
- **Pronoun and verb usage are dialect-dependent and constantly changing.**
- Focus on topics such as pronoun case can be frustrating for teachers and student and even counter-productive.

All “errors” are not equal.

1. *Me and Tom* left early. (S)

2. *You and Tom* left early. (S)

3. *Who* are you hiring? (DO)

1. He left it to *Tom and I*. (OP)

2. He left it to *Tom and you*. (OP)

3. *Whom* are you hiring? (DO)

- Which sentence 1 is worse—the one on the left or right? Why?
- Is using *you* for both subjects and objects tacky or wrong in sentence 2? English once had a nominative and objective case *you* as well as singular and plural forms and formal and informal versions. We don't now. Is that bad?
- We are losing the *whom* inflection. What happens during the transition?
- As English lost inflections and subordination increased, syntax (word order) became more important.

Syntax: Reading & writing

- **Sentence fluency:** Varied sentence structure; expanded & embedded details; clarity; syntax (word order, rhythm, flow)
- Many students suffer from sentence formation problems—they don't understand the hierarchy and connections among sentence elements.
- These syntactic problems are disabling to readers and writers.
- Recursive, constant practice making various parts of a sentence fit together to accurately articulate complex ideas can improve students' ability to read and comprehend complex texts and help them to enjoy language.

Coordination

She was kicked by the soft shoe of destiny, **and** she landed in Wales. The mannequin gave the baby vampire her phone number; she knew he'd never call. The debutante lives under the bridge, **but** she took to the outdoors as if she'd been raised by wolves.

Flesch-Kincaid reading level 4.0

Subordination

After she was kicked by the soft shoe of destiny, she landed in Wales. The mannequin gave the baby vampire her phone number **although** she knew he'd never call. The debutante **who** lives under the bridge took to the outdoors as if she'd been raised by wolves.

Flesch-Kincaid reading level 6.0

Readability Statistics

Coord ¶

Subord ¶

Counts

Words

47

47

Characters

204

209

Paragraphs

1

1

Sentences

3

3

Averages

Sentences per paragraph

3.0

3.0

Words per sentence

15.6

15.6

Characters per word

4.2

4.3

Readability

Flesch-Kincaid grade level

4.0

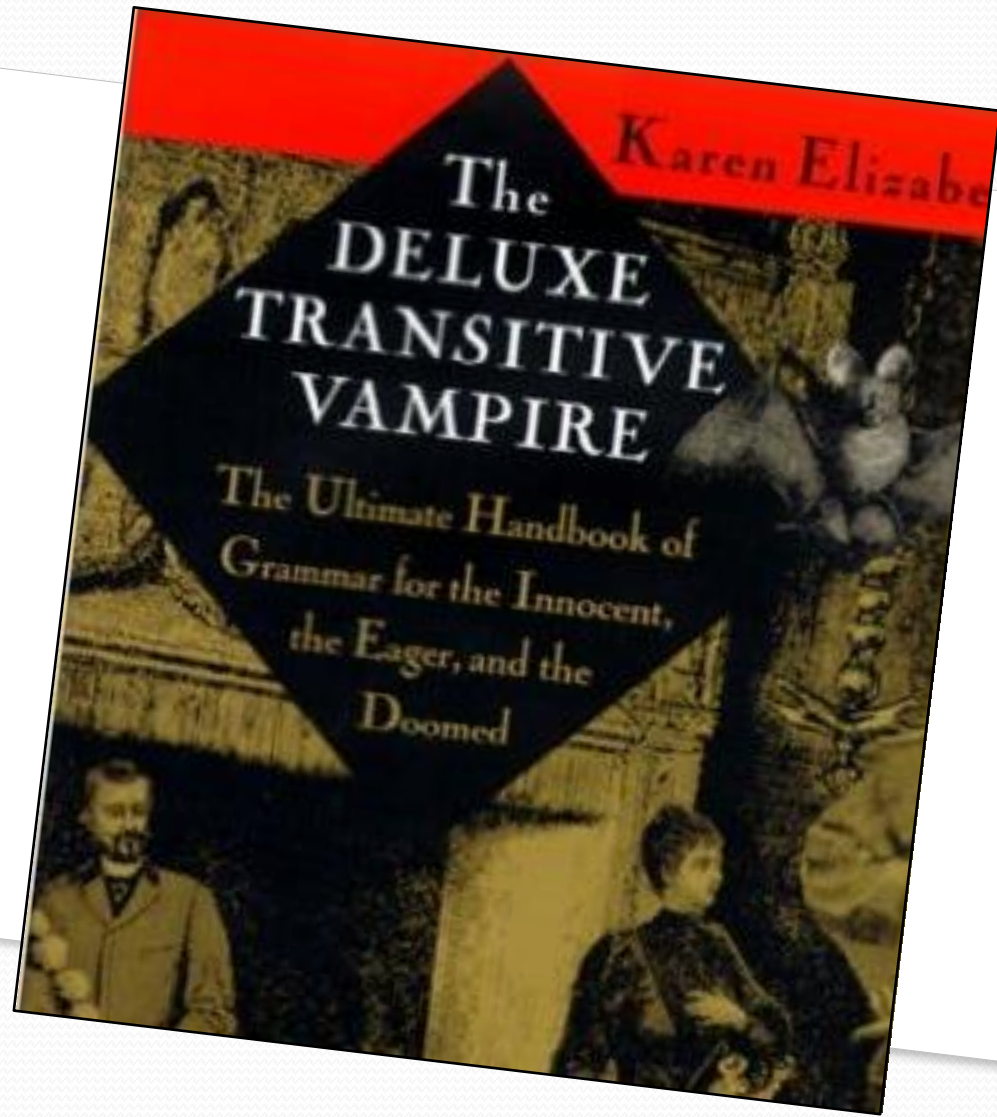
6.0

What if instead of focusing on correcting errors,

we use subordination as an organizing principle to enhance students'

- Ability to create effective, engaging text that considers the reader;
 - By developing clarity (organization, word choice, word order, sentence fluency, comma use) and
 - Style (sentence variety, elaboration, rhythm, flow, voice);
- Ability to read and comprehend complex texts; and
- Enjoyment of language?

How can we
teach
subordination?



How should we teach any grammar?

- **Teach. Not mention.**
- **Teach. Not correct errors.**

Teach grammar in the context of reading and writing—using mentor texts, modeling, practicing, engaging different learning styles, being recursive—*always showing respect for students' home dialects.*

NOT using daily language workouts

What do students learn from correcting this?

- Incidentally, two of comedian, Charlie Chaplin's, finest funniest movies are City Lights (1931) and The Gold Rush (1925)
- Incidentally, two of comedian Charlie Chaplin's finest, funniest movies are City Lights (1931) and The Gold Rush (1925).

- ***What are the cumulative effects of seeing errors day after day in activities like daily language workouts?***
- ***What about using mentor texts full of interesting models of effective, engaging sentences instead?***
- ***What about creating varied and effective sentences over the course of the year?***

Show mentor texts

“One figure, whose wounds were so dreadful that he more resembled meat than man, tried to rise but could not.”

--Charles Frazier, *Cold Mountain*

“Snape smirked as he swept off around the dungeon, not spotting Seamus Finnigan, who was pretending to vomit into his cauldron.”

--J. K. Rowling, *Harry Potter and the Chamber of Secrets*

Have students practice revision, not just editing errors

- According to Constance Weaver (2008), we should make studying grammar “more of a *creational* facility rather than a *correctional* facility” (p. 139).



Sixth grader Samantha's first draft:

Drama always starts on Monday. Everybody had all weekend to be bored and make up things about this person or that. Somebody decides they want to start some stuff by talking smack.

This girl is pointing at that one and standing real close. Too close. Her voice gets loud. Too loud. Then someone pulls some hair or slaps a face, and then everyone makes a big circle around them.

That means the teachers will be there soon, telling everyone to back off, blowing whistles, and making a big scene.

What revision/editing suggestions would you have for Samantha?

Sixth grader Samantha's first draft:

Drama always starts on Monday. Everybody had all weekend to be bored and make up things about this person or that. **Somebody** decides **they** want to start some stuff by talking smack.

This girl is pointing at that one and standing real close. **Too close**. Her voice gets loud. **Too loud**. Then **someone** pulls some hair or slaps a face, and then everyone makes a big circle around **them**.

That means the teachers will be there soon, telling everyone to back off, blowing whistles, and making a big scene.

Are the first things you noticed fragments and pronoun disagreement?

Samantha's CORRECTIONAL editing:

Drama always starts on Monday. Everybody had all weekend to be bored and make up things about this person or that. **Some girl decides she wants** to start some stuff by talking smack.

This girl is pointing at that one and standing real **close—too close**. **Her voice gets loud—too loud**. Then someone pulls some hair or slaps a face, and then everyone makes a big circle around the **girls**.

That means the teachers will be there soon, telling everyone to back off, blowing whistles, and making a big scene.

The pronoun agreement and fragment issues have been fixed. Do these corrections make the piece significantly more effective or engaging for you?

Samantha's CREATIONAL revision:

Drama always starts on Monday. Everybody had all weekend to be bored and make up things about this person or that. Some girl decides she wants to start some stuff by talking smack.

As soon as someone talks smack, the drama begins. This girl is pointing at that one and standing real close. Too close. Her voice gets loud. Too loud. Someone pulls some hair or slaps a face, and then everyone makes a big circle around the girls.

When a big circle forms, that means the teachers will be there soon, telling everyone to back off, blowing whistles, and making a big scene.

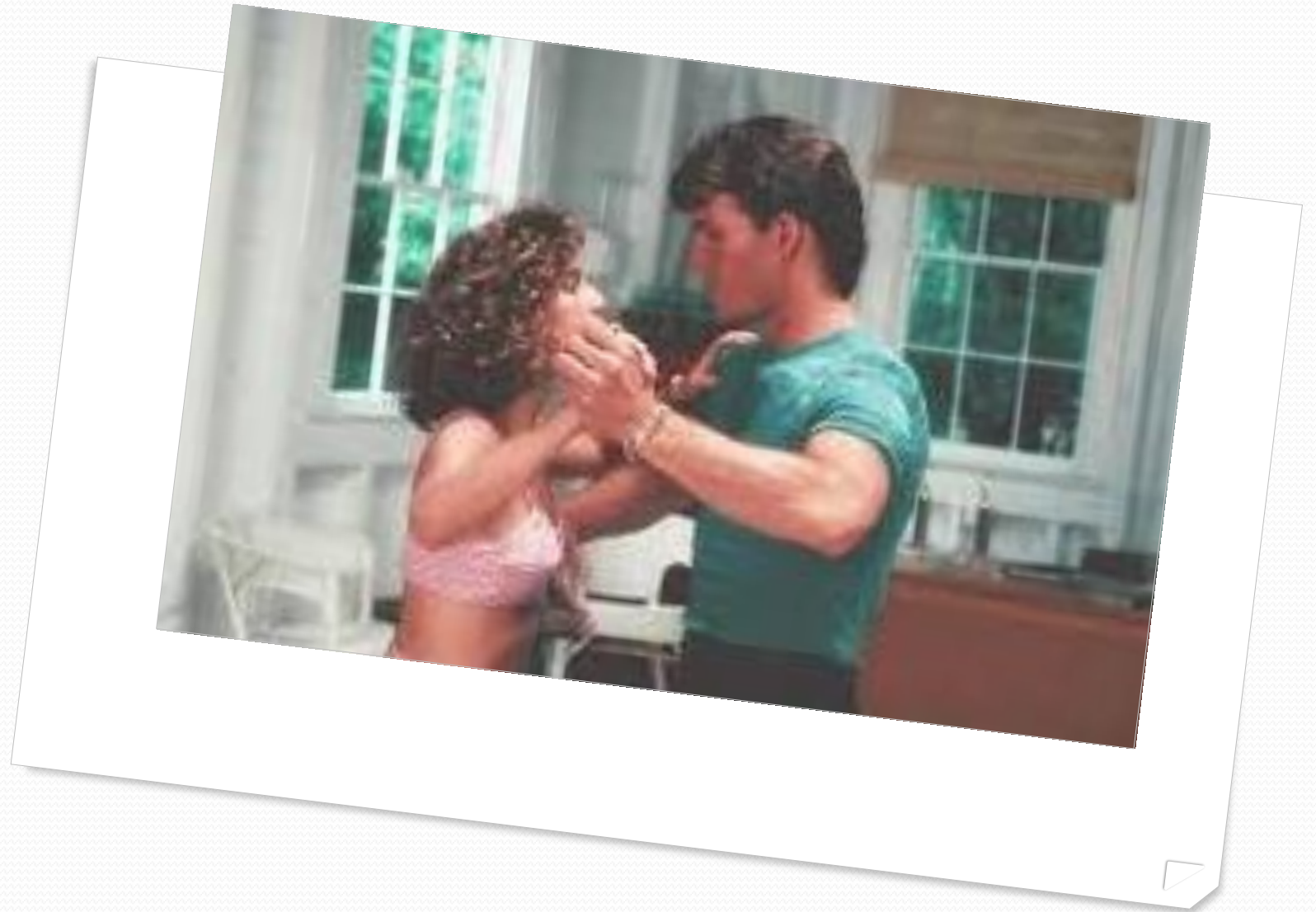
The creational revision. . .

- Uses complex sentences, increasing maturity of writing
- Improves reading because involves complex sentences
- Helps the reader by providing effective transitions from one paragraph to the next
- Involves practice using commas with introductory elements (#1 on common errors)

How do we teach subordination?

- Use scope & sequence as well as student writing samples to select best grammatical structures to teach
- Scaffold: Teach structures using student & mentor texts, visuals & manipulatives
- Scaffold: Model & practice creating structures with increasing independence
- Teach & practice recursively; connect to reading & writing
- Make it useful and engaging

Practice!



Basic skill: Chunk sentences into. . .

- Complete subject
- Complete verb
- Object/Complement

Noun clauses*

- When you were on skid row and drinking cheap wine was the time I liked you best.
- The fact that you made me look so good was why I adored you.
- I believe that is my head you're carrying.
- This delusion, that your cat is more powerful than mine, may cost you dearly.
- My dislike of you started with that sleazy trick you played on my pet tarantula.

*These are useful for teaching complete subject, complete verb, and object/complement. Students who can't chunk sentences like these will be confused as readers and writers.

Noun clauses

- *When you were on skid row and drinking cheap wine / was / the time I liked you best. (S)*
- *The fact that you made me look so good / was / why I adored you. (SC)*
- *I / believe / that is my head you're carrying. (DO)*
- *This delusion, / that your cat is more powerful than mine, / may cost you dearly. (App)*
- *My dislike of you / started / with that sleazy trick you played on my pet tarantula. (OP)*

Syntax and chunking sentences

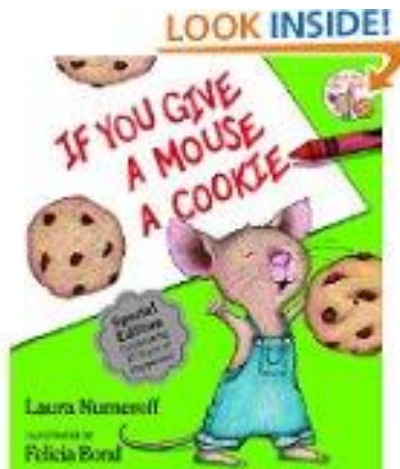
1. *That you love me / is / irrelevant.* (NC as S)
2. *I / believe / that you love me.* (NC as DO)
3. *The fact that you love me / is / irrelevant.* (ADJ C)

Basic skill: Identify sentence boundaries

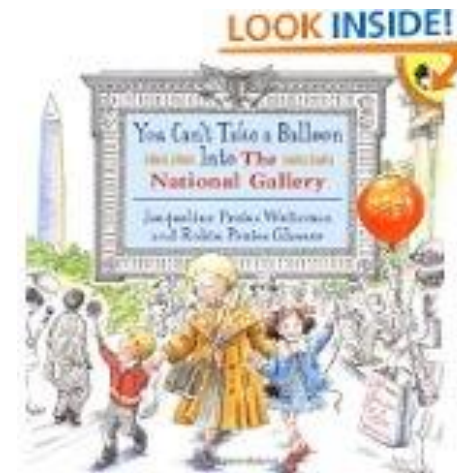
- Independent clauses
- Dependent clauses
- Phrases

Guess what? (Which is an independent clause?)

If You Give a Mouse a Cookie

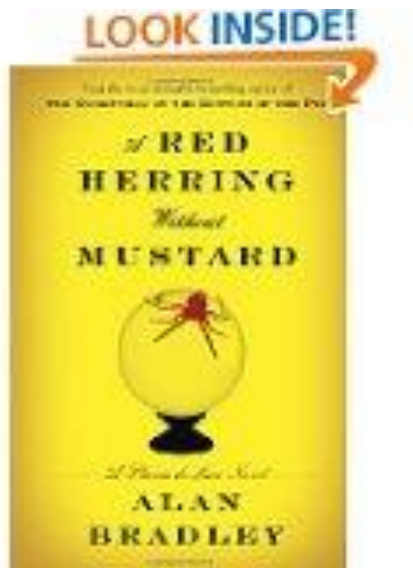


You Can't Take a Balloon into the National Gallery

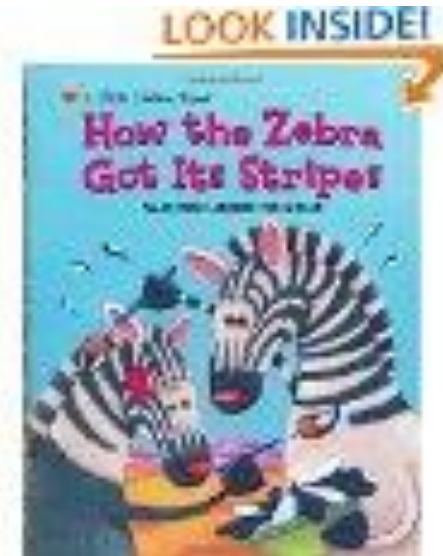


Guess what? (Which is an independent clause?)

A Red Herring without Mustard



How the Zebra Got Its Stripes



Basic skill: Commas & clarity

What?!

- Let's eat Grandpa!
- This book is dedicated to my parents, Ayn Rand and God.
- Highlights of Peter Ustinov's global tour included encounters with Nelson Mandela, an 800-year-old demigod and a dildo collector.

Better!

- Let's eat, Grandpa!
- This book is dedicated to my parents, Ayn Rand, and God.
- Highlights of Peter Ustinov's global tour included encounters with Nelson Mandela, an 800-year-old demigod, and a dildo collector.

Basic skill: Commas & clarity

These serious problems...

- Run-on, comma splice, or fused sentence
- Sentence fragments*
- No comma after intro element*
- No comma in compound sentence
- No comma in nonessential element*
- Comma with essential/restrictive element*
- Lack of comma in a series

Require understanding...

- Subjects & verbs*
- Clause boundaries*
- Main/independent clauses*
- Subordinate/dependent clauses*
- Phrases*
- Syntax*

**Connected to subordination*

Basic skill: Comma use

L: Commas to separate ≥ 3 items in a **list**

I: Commas to set off **introductory** elements before the subject or main/independent clause

E: Commas to set off **extra** information (nonessential elements)

S: Commas to set off **side-by-side** sentences when a coordinating conjunction is used

Basic skill: Recognize & imitate patterns

Model: Slowly, very slowly, the snake raised its head until its eyes were on a level with Harry's.

- A. Tense, very tense, Alfredo approached his boss, someone he always considered a sarcastic, unpleasant curmudgeon.
- B. Quietly, very quietly, Bridgette crossed the room until her hands were on the diary of her sister.

Subordinate elements we will consider

- Noun clauses
- Adverb clauses
- Adjective clauses
- Appositives
- Absolutes

Adverb clauses*

- We'll let the rest of you go *when Lucifer confesses*. (When?)
- He scratched her flesh *where he imagined it itched*. (Where?)
- I've put a spell on you *because you could use a little control*. (Why?)
- *If you have any questions about the thongs and coat hangers*, flash us a signal from the dead oak tree. (Under what conditions?)
- *After the podiatrist pounced on her*, he buffed her heels and tweaked her toes. (When?)

*These help develop logical connections, transitions, and sentence variety.

Adjective clauses*: Essential or nonessential?

Essential

- The frog *that emerged from the samovar / was / once / a beauty queen*.
- The hand *that is languishing on the windowsill / once / was / mine*.
- The dowager *who strokes gargoyles / is / in love*.

Nonessential

- My frog, *who was a former beauty queen*, couldn't stop looking in the mirror.
- The languishing hand, *which once was mine*, applauded.
- Alyosha Luminosa, *who strokes gargoyles*, is in love.

*These are useful for embedding details and enhancing sentence variety.

Appositives*

- Leopold, ~~who was a late bloomer~~, has lost his pants.
- The leprechaun, ~~who is a cousin of mine~~, rebuked me for dancing on his rainbow.
- My pet frog, ~~who was a former teen beauty queen~~, is a narcissist.
- We ate the first course, ~~which was a fuzzy caterpillar~~, with gusto.
- We ate a fuzzy caterpillar, ~~which was the first course~~, with gusto.

*These are useful for embedding details and enhancing sentence variety. Making deliberate choices about whether to use an appositive or adjective clause or which noun phrase to use as the appositive can help students learn control over the rhythm and flow of sentences as well as how to select engaging details.

Develop content knowledge and skills

Sentences

1. Jonas is an inquisitive boy.
2. Jonas can no longer share ideas with Asher.
3. He loves his sister, but he cannot confide in her.
4. Jonas's father disappoints his son.
5. He needs advice from the Giver.

Appositives

- a. a wise man
- b. an adorable girl with braids
- c. a respected nursery-school principal
- d. a fun-loving boy
- e. the book's main character
- f. a well-known superhero
- g. a great athlete
- h. a fabulous singer
- i. a good teacher

Absolutes*



1. The cobra rears its head.
2. The puppies huddle.
3. Describe what you see or hear:

*their tails drooping
their bodies quivering
its hood flaring
its fangs bared
its body coiled to strike
venom dripping
rattles threatening*

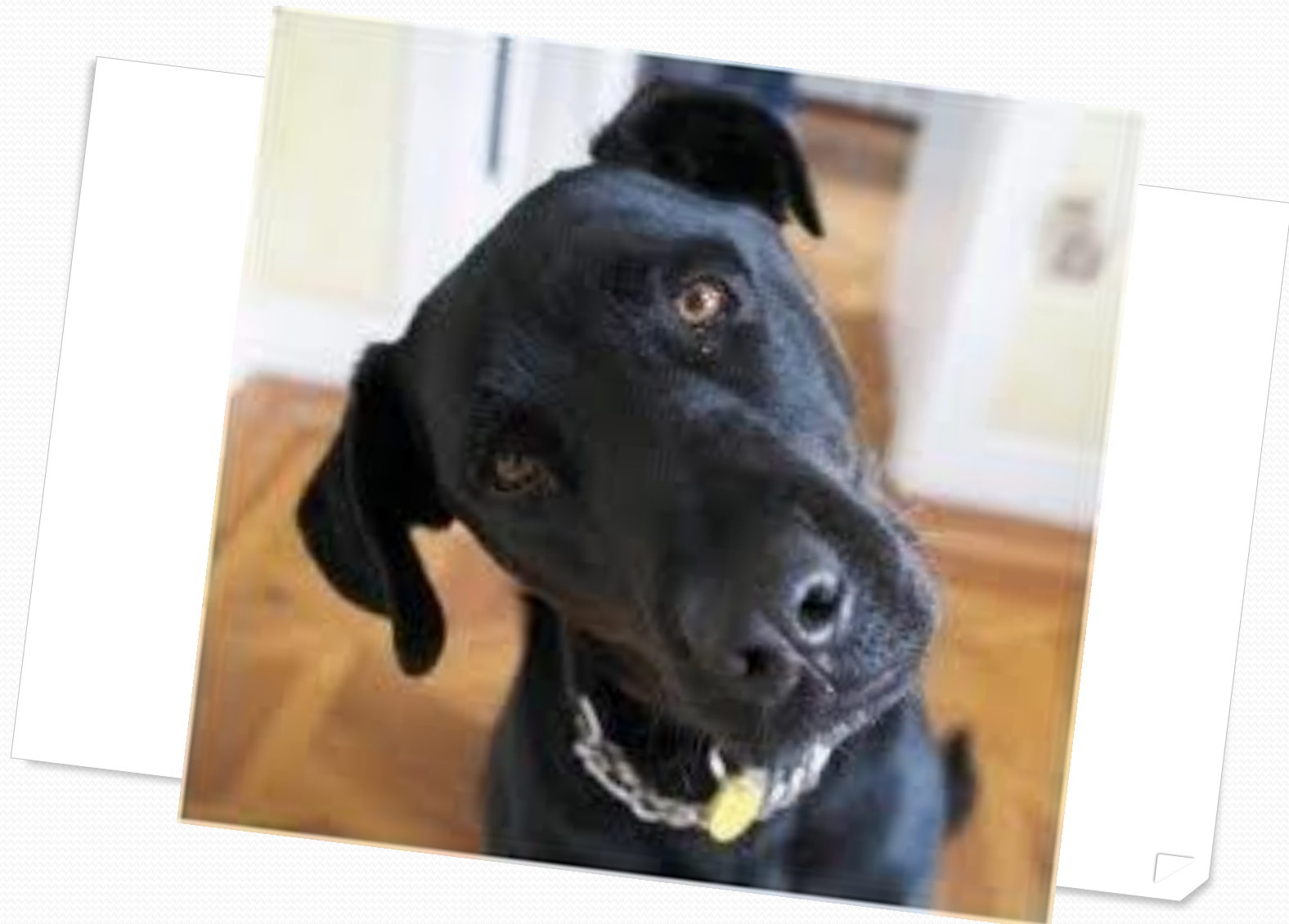


*These add visual detail and can aid sentence variety.

Practice groups

- Noun clauses, p. 3
- Adverb clauses, pp. 3-4
- Adjective/relative clauses, pp. 4-5
- Appositives, pp. 5-7
- Absolutes, pp. 7-9

So what?



Grammar instruction should

- Focus on grammatical structures that will help students create products that give them credibility as writers: embed and expand details, vary sentence structure, punctuate usefully;
- Include modeling and mentor texts;
- Include hands-on activities that enhance understanding of English syntax to improve both writing and reading;
- Be planned, systematic, recursive—making connections between topics by using a unifying principle such as subordination; and
- Focus on creation not correction.

Resources

- Anderson, J. (2005). *Mechanically inclined: Building grammar, usage, and style into writer's workshop*. Portland, ME: Stenhouse.
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- Fredrickson, K. (2014). *With so little time, where do we start? Targeted teaching through analyzing error egregiousness and error frequency*. Retrieved from the English Language and Literature Commons. (All Theses and Dissertations Paper 4129)
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- Killgallon, D. & Killgallon, J. (2010). *Grammar for college writing: A sentence-composing approach*. Portsmouth, NH: Heinemann.
[They also have books for elementary, middle school, and high school as well as fiction and nonfiction.]
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