

Grades 9–10 Playlist: Sentence Variety

Aligns with *CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.L.9-10.1.B*:

- Use various types of phrases (noun, verb, adjectival, adverbial, participial, prepositional, absolute) and clauses (independent, dependent; noun, relative, adverbial) to convey specific meanings and add variety and interest to writing or presentations.

Welcome

If writers always chose to use basic subject-verb-object sentences, or short, consecutive sentences, then texts would be boring, repetitive, and ineffective. That's why authors use various types of phrases and clauses: to keep readers interested and focused. Incorporating sentences of different types and lengths (while also joining closely related ideas) is what makes writing, reading, and speaking even more precise, and it enhances the audience's experience.

Objectives

In this playlist, students will learn how to:

- identify and use various types of phrases and clauses.
- explain how using sentence variety can add interest and meaning to a text.

Review

Key Terms

- A **phrase** is a group of words that does not contain the subject-verb pair that makes up a **clause**.
- An **independent clause** is a complete sentence, as opposed to a **dependent clause**, which is not a complete sentence on its own and must be connected to an independent clause to form a sentence.
- A **participial phrase** contains a participle (modifier of any verb or noun) that represents either past or present tense (e.g., *giggling*, *giggled*).
- A **prepositional phrase** starts with a preposition (indications of location such as *in*, *on*, *by*, *to*, *since*, etc.) and can act like an adjective or adverb, depending on the sentence.
- **Gerund phrases** begin with a gerund (*-ing* form of a verb; e.g., *writing*) and may also contain the object of the gerund or a complete object or subject phrase. Gerund phrases always act as nouns.
- **Infinitive phrases** begin with an infinitive (basic or simple form of a verb; e.g., *to come*, *to be*) and may also contain the object of the infinitive or a complete object or subject phrase. Infinitive phrases can function as nouns, adjectives, or adverbs (e.g., *to kick the ball*).



- An **adverbial phrase** is a group of two or more words operating adverbially—meaning that their function is to modify a verb, an adjective, or an adverb—and can explain how, where, why, or when an action takes place (e.g., I will sit *in silence*).

Watch!

This video reviews different types of grammatical phrases:

- <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=XtiUhYcZg08>

Practice!

Complete the following activity to practice identifying types of phrases:

- <https://www.opened.com/assessment/using-phrases-and-clauses-to-create-variety/1073493>

Exploring the Standard

One way to ensure sentence variety is to use a mix of different phrases and clauses. For example, a writer may choose to begin some sentences with prepositional phrases and other sentences with gerund phrases. Another way to add sentence variety is to use sentences of different lengths and rhythms. Alternating between short and long sentences can help to keep the reader's interest.

A Closer Look: Sentence Structure

Take a look at how the following sentences employ various types of phrases. These are a few examples of different types of sentences that writers can use while building solid, interesting paragraphs.

Prepositional phrases:

- In the crumb-filled, ruffled sheets, my sister sleeps. (*In* = the preposition; *the crumb-filled, ruffled* = modifiers; *sheets* = noun.)
- By chewing gum, we can make sure our ears don't get clogged when the plane takes off. (*By* = the preposition; *chewing* = gerund; *gum* = noun.)

Participial phrases:

- The water drained slowly down the pipe clogged with hair. (*Clogged with hair* modifies the noun *pipe*.)
- Glazed with a honey barbeque sauce, the baked chicken was delicious. (*Glazed* modifies the noun *chicken*.)

Gerund phrases:

- Walking on the beach is painful if large seashells wash up on shore. (*Walking on the beach* = gerund phrase, the subject of the verb *is*.)



Teaching Notes: Sentence Variety

The goal of L.9-10.1.B is for students to use various types of phrases and clauses to convey specific meanings and ensure sentence variety. The following information contains ideas that teachers can incorporate into their classroom to help students develop this skill. Additional resources to read and integrate into instruction as appropriate are also included.

Activities

1. Provide students an informational paragraph on a chosen topic (teachers may wish to copy and paste or retype the paragraph to make it double-spaced). Ask students to first identify each sentence as a simple (S), compound (CD), complex (CX), or compound-complex (CD-CX) sentence, then note how many times each sentence type has been used. Have students discuss the balance of sentence types within the paragraph and identify ways in which the paragraph could be revised to add even more sentence variety.
2. With either the same paragraph or a new one, have students identify which type of phrase begins each sentence. Does the writer consistently begin sentences with the same type of phrase? If so, how could the sentences be revised to add more variety to the sentence structure?

Writing Prompt

Have students write an essay describing an important person in their life. Students should give background information about the person and explain why he or she is significant. After students write their first drafts, have them switch essays with a partner and conduct a peer review. Students should pay close attention to sentence variety in their partner's essay. Have students give feedback on how to incorporate the sentence structures, patterns, and lengths learned in the playlist.

Additional Resources

Consider these additional resources when teaching L.9-10.1.B:

- **Sentence Combining/Sentence Variety:** This worksheet is a great handout to provide students extra practice with combining sentences and using more compound-complex sentences:
https://www.sinclair.edu/centers/tlc/pub/handouts_worksheets/english/sentence_combining_and_sentence_variety.pdf
- **Sentence Variety Lesson Plan:** In this lesson plan, students analyze the sentence structure in a persuasive essay and then respond to a writing prompt to practice using sentence variety in their own writing:
http://www.ode.state.or.us/teachlearn/real/tlr/tlr_lessonplan.aspx?id=127
- **Strengthen Sentence Variety and Sentence Combining:** This interactive online lesson explains how to add sentence variety and combine sentences:
<http://projectsharetexas.org/resource/revision-strategies-strengthen-sentence-variety-sentence-combining-english-1-writing>

