



# SECTION 10

## MINI-LESSONS FOR THE MECHANICS OF WRITING

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## Mini-Lesson 46: Types of Sentences

Complete sentences are the foundation of written English. A complete sentence requires a subject and predicate.

### Procedure

1. Explain that written material is based on complete sentences.
2. Note that for a sentence to be complete, it must have a subject (noun or pronoun), which is the performer of the action, and a predicate (verb or verb phrase), which demonstrates the action or a state of being. You might wish to note that for some imperative and exclamatory sentences, the subject is understood to be “you,” though “you” is not stated. *Example:* Close the door.
3. Distribute copies of (or project) the accompanying “Sentences” and review the examples with your students.
4. Mention that sometimes writers use an incomplete sentence of one word or a phrase for emphasis, but this is rare. Offer this example:

Cold. That is all Jason remembered when he woke up in the ambulance. He was cold and shaking. Slowly he began to recall walking across the ice-covered pond, hearing the crack, and falling through into the numbing water.

Explain that the use of the word *Cold* to start the paragraph immediately catches the reader’s attention. Although this technique works here, note that using it too often becomes distracting, makes writing choppy, and disrupts the flow of ideas.



## Sentences

Written English is founded on sentences. Examples of the most commonly used types of sentences follow:

- A **simple sentence** may be one of four kinds:

*Declarative (statement):* Tara enjoys in-line skating.

*Interrogative (question):* Where did I leave my coat?

*Imperative (order or command):* Please close the window.

*Exclamatory (expresses great emotion):* Look out!

- A **compound sentence** contains two sentences joined by a comma and the conjunctions *and*, *but*, *or*, or *nor*:

The Smiths went on vacation to the mountains, and they took dozens of photos.

Sylvia likes to listen to jazz, but her sister prefers rock.

They could play outside in the snow, or they could stay inside and watch a movie.

- A **complex sentence** contains a main clause and one or more subordinate clauses:

Because of the blizzard, all flights to Denver were delayed indefinitely.

If it snows all night, there will not be any school tomorrow.

She could not remember where she left her keys.

## Mini-Lesson 47: Sentence Patterns

Most sentences in English are constructed in specific patterns that ensure a logical flow of ideas. Even long, seemingly complicated sentences can be broken down into basic patterns.

### Procedure

1. Explain that sentences in English follow basic patterns.
2. Distribute copies of (or project) the accompanying “Examples of Sentence Patterns.” Review the information with your students, noting that understanding these patterns can help them write more smoothly and with greater clarity.
3. Suggest that when students write or revise their work and find a sentence that seems unclear, they should identify its basic pattern. Identifying the pattern will help them to clarify the sentence.





## Examples of Sentence Patterns

English sentences are constructed in specific patterns. Five common patterns and examples are shown below.

1. S – V (Subject – Verb)

*Example:* Kittens played.

S V

2. S – LV – PN (Subject – Linking Verb – Predicate Nominative)

*Example:* Ann is the secretary.

S LV PN

3. S – LV – PA (Subject – Linking Verb – Predicate Adjective)

*Example:* Steve was happy.

S LV PA

4. S – V – DO (Subject – Verb – Direct Object)

*Example:* Lee plays the trombone.

S V DO

5. S – V – IO – DO (Subject – Verb – Indirect Object – Direct Object)

*Example:* Luis gave the puppy a biscuit.

S V IO DO

**Note:** Sentences may be expanded without changing the basic pattern. Examples:

The kitten played in the afternoon.

S V

Ann is the secretary of the hiking club.

S LV PN

Having won the election, Steve was happy.

S LV PA

Lee plays the trombone in the school band.

S V DO

Yesterday, after the training session, Luis gave the puppy a biscuit.

S V IO DO

## Mini-Lesson 48: Subject and Verb Agreement

The *subjects* of sentences must always agree with their *verbs*. Although this is not usually a problem for good writers, many students benefit from a review on this topic.

### Procedure

1. Explain that singular subjects require the singular form of verbs and that plural subjects require the plural form of verbs. Subjects and verbs must always agree in number.
2. Using the board or an overhead projector, offer these examples of singular subjects and the singular form of verbs in the present tense:

Juan works at the supermarket after school.  
He rides his bike to school.

3. Offer these examples of plural subjects and the plural form of verbs in the present tense:

The boys work at the supermarket after school.  
They ride their bikes to school.

4. Mention that *I* and *you* require the plural form of verbs in the present tense. Offer these examples:

I work at the supermarket after school.  
You ride your bike to school.

5. Note that the past tenses of verbs, except the verb “to be,” are the same for singular and plural subjects. Offer these examples:

Juan worked at the supermarket after school.  
The boys worked at the supermarket after school.

The boy rode his bike to school.  
The boys rode their bikes to school.

## Mini-Lesson 49: Compound Subject and Verb Agreement

A *compound subject* is formed when two or more words or groups of words are connected to form the subject of a verb. This causes agreement confusion for some students.

### Procedure

1. Explain that a verb may have a *compound subject*: two or more words or groups of words that form the subject. Depending on how they are connected, compound subjects may require either the singular or plural form of verbs.
2. Explain that when subjects are joined by *and*, they require a plural form of a verb. Offer these examples on the board or an overhead projector:

Victor and Serge look like brothers.

The puppy and kitten play together constantly.

3. Explain that when subjects are joined by *or* or *nor*, the subject closest to the verb determines its form. Offer these examples:

Either Ali or Bert collects tickets at the front door.

Neither Reg nor Maria has the directions to the party.

Neither Jamal nor his brothers have homework.

Peter, Sara, or Patrice is the leader of Group One.

## Mini-Lesson 50: Subject and Verb Agreement with Intervening Phrases

While most students have little trouble with the agreement between subjects and verbs when the verb directly follows the subject, sentences where phrases come between the subject and verb can pose problems.

### Procedure

1. Remind students that subjects and verbs must always agree in number. While in most cases this is relatively easy to do, some sentences require the careful attention of the writer to make sure that her subjects and verbs agree.
2. Write this sentence on the board or an overhead projector:

The number of compulsory figures was the same for all contestants.

Ask students if the sentence, as it is written, is correct. Some may say it is not, because they believe that the verb *was* should be *were* to agree with *figures*. Of course, the sentence is correct as it is. Explain that *number* is the subject and that it agrees with *was*. In its simplest form the sentence is:

The number was the same for all contestants.

Emphasize that this type of construction often leads to agreement mistakes. When a person writes a sentence in which the subject and verb are separated, the mind often links the verb with the nearest noun. Even professional authors make this mistake.

3. Offer these additional examples and point out the subjects and verbs:

The manager, as well as the fans, was angry at the umpire's call.

The students of Ms. Harper's class organize a charity drive each year.

The flowers beneath the tree grow despite the shade of the leaves.

Tamara, with three other students, writes the school announcements each morning.

## Mini-Lesson 51: Subject and Verb Agreement: Doesn't or Don't

A common agreement mistake students make is using *don't* with a singular subject, as in, “He don't go any more.” The following mini-lesson can help students understand the correct use and avoid such agreement errors.

### Procedure

1. Explain that the contractions *doesn't* and *don't* often lead to mistakes in agreement.
2. Note that *not* is not a part of the verb in either word. To ensure correct agreement of subjects with *doesn't* and *don't*, authors must match the subject of the sentence with *does* or *do*. Offer these examples on the board or an overhead projector:

#### Singular Subject

He doesn't finish his homework at night.

He does not finish his homework at night.

#### Plural Subject

They don't finish their homework at night.

They do not finish their homework at night.

3. Write these incorrect sentences on the board or an overhead projector:

He don't like history.

She don't believe in magic.

Ask how to correct these sentences. Obvious suggestions would be the following:

He doesn't like history.

(He does not like history.)

She doesn't believe in magic.

(She does not believe in magic.)

4. Suggest that to be sure they are using the correct forms, students should break the contraction into two words and see if the subjects and verbs agree. Offer this example:

She don't want to go skating.

She do not want to go skating.

Clearly this is incorrect. It should be, “She does not want to go skating.” Breaking the contractions often helps students to see problems with agreement.

## Mini-Lesson 52: Subject and Verb Agreement: There's, Here's, and Where's

In conversation, we may say something like, “There’s two ways you can go.” Because students often write the way they speak, those types of constructions may slip into their writing. Although such constructions may be acceptable in conversation, they highlight an agreement problem in written language.

### Procedure

1. Emphasize that subject and verb agreement is important to written English. Offer these two sentences on the board or an overhead projector:

There’s your keys.

There’re your keys.

Ask how many of your students think the first sentence is correct. Then ask how many believe the second is right.

2. Explain that the second is correct because *keys* is a plural subject of the sentence and requires the plural form verb *are*. Without the contraction, the sentence would read:

There are your keys.

3. Suggest that students break down contractions to make sure that they do not use constructions with faulty agreement. Offer these examples:

Where’s your sisters?

Where is your sisters?

This should be, “Where are your sisters?”

Here’s your boots, scarf, and gloves.

Here is your boots, scarf, and gloves.

This should be, “Here are your boots, scarf, and gloves.”

## Mini-Lesson 53: Subject and Verb Agreement: Indefinite Pronouns

Indefinite pronouns are words that do not refer to a specific noun. Because they lack specificity, they often cause agreement problems.

### Procedure

1. Explain that indefinite pronouns do not refer to a specific person, place, or thing. When used as subjects, they must agree with verbs.
2. Explain that some indefinite pronouns are always singular and require the singular form of verbs. Offer these examples on the board or an overhead projector:

each, either, neither, anyone, anybody, anything, something, someone, somebody, everyone, one, everything, everybody, nothing, no one

Offer these sentences:

Everybody wants to be successful.

Each of the girls has her ticket.

Emphasize that in both sentences, the indefinite pronouns are the subject and require the singular form of the verb.

3. Explain that some indefinite pronouns are always plural and require the plural form of a verb. Offer these examples:

few, many, several, both, others

Now offer these sentences:

Both of the schedules have mistakes.

Few were correct.

Point out that the indefinite pronouns require a plural form of the verb.

4. Note that some indefinite pronouns can be singular or plural, depending on how they are used in a sentence. Offer these examples:

all, any, some, most, none

Now offer these sentences. The phrases in brackets show the context:

Some [of the problems] were correct.

Some were correct.

Some [a part of a problem] was correct.

Some was correct.

## Mini-Lesson 54: Subject (Pronoun) and Verb Agreement

Most of the pronoun forms present few problems for students, because the pronouns are used in written language the same way they are used in conversation. A few, however, are often used incorrectly in conversation, especially when used as the subjects of sentences. It is little wonder these pronouns are often used incorrectly in writing as well.

### Procedure

1. On the board or an overhead projector, list the following subject pronouns:  
I, you, he, she, it, we, you, they, who, whoever
2. Mention that some pronouns are frequently used incorrectly as subjects. Offer these examples:  
Her and I play tennis together. (incorrect)  
She and I play tennis together. (correct)  
  
Tom and me are going swimming after school. (incorrect)  
Tom and I are going swimming after school. (correct)  
  
Teresa and them go to the movies each Friday. (incorrect)  
Teresa and they go to the movies each Friday. (correct)
3. Explain that a good test to be certain that subject pronouns are used correctly in sentences like the examples above is to separate the pronouns and read each with the verb. Offer the following:  
I play tennis. (correct)  
Her play tennis. (incorrect)  
She plays tennis. (correct)  
  
Tom is going swimming. (correct)  
Me is going swimming. (incorrect)  
I am going swimming. (correct)  
  
Teresa goes to the movies each Friday. (correct)  
Them go to the movies each Friday. (incorrect)  
They go to the movies each Friday. (correct)

## Mini-Lesson 55: Agreement of Pronouns and Antecedents

Many of the agreement problems your students will have are likely to center on subjects and verbs. Some students, however, have problems with the agreement between pronouns and antecedents and will benefit from a mini-lesson on the topic.

### Procedure

1. Explain that the *antecedent* of a pronoun is the word in a sentence to which the pronoun refers. If the antecedent is singular, the pronoun must be singular. If the antecedent is plural, the pronoun must be plural. If the antecedent is masculine, the pronoun must be masculine, and if the antecedent is feminine, the pronoun must be feminine. Offer these examples on the board or an overhead projector:

*Manuel* twisted *his* ankle at basketball practice.

*Marissa* twisted *her* ankle at basketball practice.

Note that *Manuel* is singular and masculine and agrees with *his*, and that *Marissa* is singular and feminine and agrees with *her*.

*Debbie* and *Rose* argued *their* points well.

Note that *Debbie and Rose* is plural and agrees with *their*.

2. Explain that singular indefinite pronouns should be linked with singular pronouns. Offer this example of a common mistake:

*Everyone* put *their* coats on.

Explain that although this construction is commonly used in conversation, it is incorrect. *Everyone* is singular and requires singular pronouns. *Their* is plural. Offer ways this sentence can be corrected:

*Everyone* put *his* or *her* coat on.

*Everyone* put *his* coat on.

*Everyone* put *her* coat on.

*They* all put *their* coats on.

Mention that the trend today in writing is to be nonsexist. If using the phrase “his or her” proves to be awkward, authors often alternate the use of “his” and “her.” Whenever possible, many authors use a plural construction.

## Mini-Lesson 56: Possessive Nouns

The possessive case of nouns gives many students (and their teachers) severe headaches. While most students readily grasp the concept of ownership, using apostrophes correctly to denote that ownership in their writing often turns out to be guesswork. Even when they get the apostrophe right, some students do not know why.

### Procedure

1. Explain that when a noun is used to show that a thing belongs to someone or something, an apostrophe is needed.
2. Emphasize that the possessive case of nouns is determined by three rules. Explain the rules, and offer examples on the board or an overhead projector.

- The possessive case of singular nouns is formed by adding an apostrophe and an *s*.

the dog's leash

the boss's briefcase

New York's skyline

Janice's car

Note that for words that have more than one syllable and end in an *s*-sound, the singular possessive case may be formed by adding only the apostrophe. This avoids the awkward repetition of *s*-sounds:

Moses' Commandments

the princess' ring

- The possessive case of plural nouns that end in *s* is formed by adding an apostrophe after the *s*.

the two boys' camping equipment

the puppies' pillow

- The possessive case of plural nouns that do not end in *s* is formed by adding an apostrophe and an *s*.

the women's basketball team

the children's playhouse

3. Suggest that a helpful way to remember these rules is to try to remember them with an example:

*Singular possessive:* the kitten's toy

*Plural possessive:* the three puppies' bed

*Plural possessive:* children's bikes

## Mini-Lesson 57: Paragraphing

Although most of your students know that a paragraph is a group of related sentences about a main idea, many still have trouble developing solid paragraphs. A review of paragraphing is helpful, or even necessary, for many students.

### Procedure

1. Explain that a paragraph is a group of sentences that describes a main idea. A paragraph is usually a part of a larger work, but it can be an article in itself. This is especially true of short pieces.
2. Explain that in nonfiction, paragraphs usually have three parts:
  - A topic sentence*, which states the main idea
  - Supporting sentences*, which provide details about the main idea
  - A concluding sentence*, which summarizes or emphasizes the main idea and acts as a transition to the next paragraph
3. Explain that in fiction, paragraphs are dependent on various factors, including characters, action, dialogue, and suspense.
4. Mention that paragraphs are usually indented five spaces.
5. Explain that paragraphs vary in length. The length of a paragraph should be based on the amount of material necessary to explain its main idea fully.
6. Note the two most common weaknesses of paragraphs:
  - The topic sentence is unclear. To correct this, the topic sentence should focus on the main idea.
  - Too few details support the main idea. To correct this, general statements should be replaced with specific ones that clearly support the main idea.

### Extensions

- Distribute copies of the accompanying “Developing Paragraphs, Sample 1.” Instruct your students to read the selection about alligators. Point out that it lacks paragraphs and instruct them to mark where they feel new paragraphs should begin. When they are done, discuss where the paragraphs should be. You may distribute copies of (or project) the accompanying “Developing Paragraphs, Sample 2,” which shows where new paragraphs should begin.
- Suggest that students reread a work in progress and look for examples of weak paragraphs. They should revise the paragraphs.



## Developing Paragraphs, Sample 1

**Directions:** Read the following selection and mark where you think new paragraphs should start.

### Return of the Alligator

A few hundred years ago, alligators thrived in the southeastern part of the United States. It is estimated that Florida alone had more than a million of these reptiles. With the coming of great numbers of people during the colonial period, the days of alligator supremacy were about to end. Alligators were hunted for sport and killed for their hide, which was made into prized leather. As farms, towns, and cities spread across the land, alligator habitats were destroyed. By the mid-1960s alligators were in danger of becoming extinct, and in 1967 they were declared an endangered species. Hunting was prohibited, and habitats were protected. It was hoped that such measures would enable the alligator population to increase. Alligators have taken advantage of this protection. They have made a remarkable comeback. Their numbers have grown so rapidly that in many places hunting is allowed again. In fact, there are so many alligators in parts of Florida that they wander onto lawns and find their way into residential swimming pools!



## Developing Paragraphs, Sample 2

### Return of the Alligator

A few hundred years ago, alligators thrived in the southeastern part of the United States. It is estimated that Florida alone had more than a million of these reptiles.

With the coming of great numbers of people during the colonial period, the days of alligator supremacy were about to end. Alligators were hunted for sport and killed for their hide, which was made into prized leather. As farms, towns, and cities spread across the land, alligator habitats were destroyed.

By the mid-1960s alligators were in danger of becoming extinct, and in 1967 they were declared an endangered species. Hunting was prohibited, and habitats were protected. It was hoped that such measures would enable the alligator population to increase.

Alligators have taken advantage of this protection. They have made a remarkable comeback. Their numbers have grown so rapidly that in many places hunting is allowed again. In fact, there are so many alligators in parts of Florida that they wander onto lawns and find their way into residential swimming pools!

## Mini-Lesson 58: Varying Sentences to Make Writing Interesting

I often remind my students that a piece can be technically sound yet not be an example of good, interesting writing. Such writing is often bland or monotonous, adding up to boring. In many cases, such pieces lack a variety of sentence constructions.

### Procedure

1. Explain that writing flows when the author uses a variety of sentence constructions and sentence lengths.
2. On the board or an overhead projector, offer these sentences with their revisions that demonstrate how sentence structure can be varied. Note how easily sentences can be changed by repositioning phrases and making minor changes to clauses:

The storm clouds appeared without warning.

Without warning, the storm clouds appeared.

He soon became exhausted and had to drop out of the marathon.

Soon becoming exhausted, he had to drop out of the marathon.

Susan realized that she would not finish the report on time, because she could not obtain the information she needed.

Because she could not obtain the information she needed, Susan realized that she would not finish the report on time.

It was late, and Tom decided to leave.

Since it was late, Tom decided to leave.

Sara got caught in the rain and arrived home wet and cold.

Having gotten caught in the rain, Sara arrived home wet and cold.

### Extension

- Suggest that students reread one of their pieces in progress and pay close attention to sentence construction. They should revise where necessary to achieve variety in their constructions.

## Mini-Lesson 59: Combining Sentences for Variation

A major reason many students rely on simple sentences throughout entire pieces is that they are unsure how to construct longer sentences. To be safe, these students use several simple sentences in succession, which makes writing choppy and awkward.

### Procedure

1. Remind students that varying sentences is necessary to help make writing flow smoothly.
2. Distribute copies of (or project) the accompanying “Example of Combining Sentences.” Instruct your students to read the two paragraphs and then discuss why the second one flows more smoothly than the first. Point out how combining some of the sentences enhanced the flow.
3. Emphasize that combining short sentences can vary sentence construction. Offer the following examples on the board or an overhead projector. Point out how the sentences were combined:

The human heart is a marvelous biological machine. It is the size of a person’s closed fist.

The human heart, which is the size of a person’s closed fist, is a marvelous biological machine.

Tanya had to do her homework. Then she went to work.

After Tanya did her homework, she went to work.

Jermaine came home at midnight. He was exhausted. He went right to sleep.

Exhausted, Jermaine came home at midnight and went right to sleep.

Ruby was sure that Tate had stolen Mrs. Wilson’s purse. She did not know what to do.

Ruby was sure that Tate had stolen Mrs. Wilson’s purse, but she did not know what to do.



## Example of Combining Sentences

Read the following two paragraphs. Note how they are alike and how they are different. Which one flows more smoothly? Why?

Randall looked in the mirror. He squirmed. He felt uncomfortable in the tux. He did not like the way the jacket fit his shoulders. The collar was too tight. The bow tie seemed to be strangling him. He turned to see himself from different angles. He began to think that maybe it was not so bad. He was going to his sister's wedding. Plenty of her friends would be there. He should look his best.

Randall looked in the mirror and squirmed. He felt uncomfortable in the tux. He did not like the way the jacket fit his shoulders, the collar was too tight, and the bow tie seemed to be strangling him. Turning to see himself from different angles, he began to think that maybe it was not so bad after all. He was going to his sister's wedding, and plenty of her friends would be there. He should look his best.

## Mini-Lesson 60: Sentence Fragments

*Fragments* are incomplete sentences. Occasionally authors use a fragment for emphasis or to enhance a mood, but in most cases, fragments distract readers and should be avoided.

### Procedure

1. Explain that *fragments* are parts of sentences. They lack a subject or predicate (or both) and fail to express a complete thought. Offer these examples on the board or an overhead projector:

The stars twinkled like diamonds. In the night sky.

Point out that although “In the night sky” begins with a capital letter and ends with a period, it does not express a complete thought. It lacks a subject and predicate. Read by itself, it means nothing.

Since he could not find his homework. Tom did it over.

In this example, the opening clause is not a complete thought.

Pam enjoys various activities. Such as skiing, horseback riding, and reading.

In this example, the second statement lacks a subject and predicate.

2. Explain that sometimes authors write fragments because they are writing as they are thinking. Since thoughts often come in short bursts, they may find their way into writing as sentence fragments.
3. Emphasize that the best way to avoid writing fragments is to make sure every sentence has a subject and predicate and expresses a complete thought.
4. Suggest that a good way to find fragments is to read each sentence out loud and see if it can stand alone. If it cannot, it is a fragment.
5. Explain that a good way to correct fragments is to combine the fragment with another idea, making a new sentence. Fragments can also be corrected by adding the missing subject or verb.

### Extensions

- Students work with a partner and read a recent piece written by their partner. Each is to circle any fragments he or she finds in the partner’s work. After discussing the fragments, authors should revise their work.
- Distribute copies of the accompanying “Find the Fragments.” Instruct your students to read the article, circle all the fragments, and revise them. Read the article and go over the revisions as a class.

*These are the fragments:* Because of fragments; Parts of sentences that do not carry a complete thought; By reading your sentences out loud; To share your ideas.

Accept any reasonable revisions.



## Mini-Lesson 61: Run-On Sentences

A *run-on sentence* is a sentence that should be rewritten as two or more individual sentences, or the individual ideas should be combined with a conjunction. Instead of expressing one complete thought or using a conjunction or semicolon to link two related thoughts, a run-on “runs” together more than one complete thought in a way that confuses or distracts most readers.

### Procedure

1. Explain that a run-on sentence is precisely what its name implies: a sentence that keeps going long after it should stop. A run-on sentence must be revised. Offer these examples on the board or an overhead projector:

Peter is an excellent athlete, he lettered in three sports.

They went to the park they had a picnic.

In both examples, point out the two separate thoughts in the run-on sentence.

2. Explain that most run-on sentences can be corrected easily in either of two ways: (1) divide the sentence into two separate sentences or (2) revise the sentence with a conjunction. (In some cases, a semicolon can be used instead of a conjunction, but this is less common.) Offer these examples:

Peter is an excellent athlete. He lettered in three sports.

Peter is an excellent athlete, and he lettered in three sports.

They went to the park and had a picnic.

3. Suggest that reading sentences out loud to see if each part of the sentence can stand alone is a good way to find run-on sentences. If the parts of a sentence can stand alone, it is likely to be a run-on. Also, suggest that students listen for pauses as they read aloud. A pause often indicates the need for a period.

### Extensions

- Distribute copies of the accompanying “Finding and Fixing Run-Ons.” Ask your students to read the sentences. They are to identify and correct the run-ons. Caution them that some sentences are correct. *Answers:* Numbers 2, 3, 4, 6, 7, 8 are run-ons. Accept any reasonable revisions.
- Suggest that students reread a work in progress and correct any run-on sentences they find.



## Finding and Fixing Run-Ons

**Directions:** Read each sentence. Find those that are run-ons, and correct them. If a sentence is correct, write "correct."

1. Once the rain started, Josh was certain the baseball game would be rained out.

\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

2. After school Tyrone went to soccer practice he stopped at the library before going home.

\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

3. Jennifer is a fine dancer, she hopes to be a dance instructor someday.

\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

4. Lori finished her homework, she went online to check her e-mail.

\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

5. On Saturday, Ashley had to work at her part-time job, finish her science report, and baby-sit for her neighbor.

\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

6. While on vacation, the Smiths went swimming, boating, and hiking they also went sightseeing and visited museums.

\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

7. Theo enjoys school he doesn't enjoy homework.

\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

8. Susan and Tara shopped at the mall, they went to the movies.

\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

## Mini-Lesson 62: Avoiding Misplaced Modifiers

Modifying clauses and phrases can add details and variety to writing. Generally, modifiers should be positioned close enough to the word they modify so that there is a clear relationship. When writers allow modifiers to slip away from the word they want to describe or provide no word for the modifier to describe, expression becomes confused (and sometimes unintentionally amusing). Such modifiers are called *misplaced*, or, sometimes, *dangling modifiers*.

### Procedure

1. Explain that modifying clauses and phrases describe a word or words in a sentence. When it is unclear what a modifier describes, it is called a *misplaced modifier*. This weakens writing by muddying the meaning of a sentence.
2. On the board or an overhead projector, offer these examples of misplaced modifiers:

Driving alone for the first time, the sputtering motor frightened her.

Note that the modifying phrase, “Driving alone for the first time,” seems to imply that the motor was doing the driving.

While in the final mile of the race, her ankle twisted.

The modifying phrase, “While in the final mile of the race,” seems to modify *ankle*. It sounds as if the ankle was in the final mile of the race. Although technically it was, that is not what the author intended to say.

Magnificent and awe inspiring, he wanted to reach the peak of the mountain.

This construction sounds as if the mountain climber was “magnificent and awe inspiring” when the phrase is supposed to describe the peak.

3. Explain that to avoid misplaced modifiers, writers must make sure that modifying phrases and clauses clearly are linked to the words they are supposed to describe. Show students the ways to correct the above examples:

Driving alone for the first time, she was frightened by the sputtering engine.

The opening phrase clearly modifies *she* in this construction.

While in the final mile of the race, Kelly twisted her ankle.

The opening clause modifies *Kelly*.

Because the peak of the mountain was magnificent and awe inspiring, he wanted to reach it.

He wanted to reach the magnificent and awe-inspiring peak.

In either revision for this sentence, it becomes obvious that “magnificent and awe-inspiring” modifies the mountain peak.

4. Mention that modifying clauses usually modify the word right next to them.

### Extension

- Suggest that students reread a piece in progress and look for examples of misplaced modifiers. Encourage them to revise any they find.

## Mini-Lesson 63: Tenses: Choosing the Present or the Past

Before writing a piece, the author must decide whether to use the present or past tense. Although use of the past tense is far more common, there are times when students find the present tense helpful in communicating their ideas.

### Procedure

1. Explain that articles or stories can be written in the present or past tense.
2. Note that the past tense is the most commonly used tense in stories and articles, because most pieces are written about events that have already happened. Using the past tense therefore is logical. Offer these examples of simple past tense on the board or an overhead projector:

Sammy applied for the job.

She was elected class president.

3. Discuss that the present tense, although rarely used in stories, is commonly used in essays, editorials, and how-to articles. Authors use it when they want to communicate a feeling that something is occurring right now. Use of the present tense can evoke a sense of immediacy, as if the reader, along with the author, is experiencing the events as they happen. Offer these examples:

She plays clarinet in the state orchestra.

First, attach the hinges to the door, and then set the door in the frame.

4. Emphasize that whatever tense an author selects, he or she should be consistent with it. Switching from past to present and then back to past is disruptive and confusing to readers.

### Extension

- Explain that writers sometimes use future tense. Future tense verbs show action that has not happened yet. Offer this example:

Ben will drive his sister to school tomorrow.

## Mini-Lesson 64: The Past Perfect Tense: Showing Previous Past Action

Most students handle simple past tense adequately. They are familiar with it because they use it in speaking. Showing previous past action, however, can be troublesome.

### Procedure

1. Explain that action that happens before some other past action needs to be designated in writing. The most effective way of doing this is to use the past perfect tense. This verb form uses *had* and the past participle of the main verb. Offer these examples on the board or an overhead projector:

After she had gone to evening school, she applied for the position of manager.

Note that the action of going to school came before applying for the manager's position, and it is shown by the past perfect verb phrase "had gone."

He had had good seasons, but this one was the best.

Point out that "had had" is correct. Many students assume this form is wrong because of the repetition of *had*. The sentence, however, shows that he "had" good seasons in the past, before the one that "was the best."

After she had made the plans, the vacation was canceled.

Note that "had made" shows that the plans were made before the vacation was canceled.

2. Emphasize that past perfect tense is often used to introduce flashbacks for stories. (See Mini-Lesson 37 in Section Nine.) Note that once the flashback is established, the past perfect is dropped in favor of the simple past. Overusing the past perfect can result in cumbersome, awkward writing.

### Extension

- Explain that along with past perfect tense, there are times when writers need to use present perfect tense or future perfect tense. Explain that present perfect tense shows an action that started in the past and continues in the present. This form requires the helping verb *has* or *have* with the past participle. Offer this example:

Sasha's mother has driven her to school all year so far.

Explain that future perfect tense shows a future action that will have ended before another action starts. This form requires *will* (or *shall*) *have* and the past participle. Offer this example:

Sasha's mother will have taken her to school this morning before going to work.

## Mini-Lesson 65: Using Did or Done Correctly

Some students make the mistake of using *done* for the past tense of *do*. This mini-lesson can reduce the confusion.

### Procedure

1. Explain that the past tense of *do* is *did*. Some students mistakenly write *done* instead. Although *done* is used as the past tense in some places in spoken language, it is not used in that manner in correct English. Offer this example on the board or an overhead projector:

They done the project at home. (incorrect)

They did the project at home. (correct)

2. Note that *done* always requires a helping verb; for example, *was done*, *has done*, *had done*, *will have done*, and so on. Offer these examples:

The firefighters could not have done anything more.

The job will be done on time.

3. Caution students to avoid using *done* as the past tense with singular nouns and pronouns. Offer this example:

Dan done all he could to find the missing ring. (incorrect)

Dan did all he could to find the missing ring. (correct)

## Mini-Lesson 66: Writing with Sounds That Are Not Words

Many authors, particularly students, use sound effects in their writing. To help ensure that they use such words correctly, consider offering this mini-lesson.

### Procedure

1. Explain that authors sometimes use sound effects in their writing. Sound effects can heighten drama, add emphasis, or make dialogue seem more realistic.
2. Caution students not to overuse sound effect words, because they can become distracting and undermine ideas. Moreover, used too often, they may make writing sound juvenile.
3. On the board or an overhead projector, offer these examples of sound effect words with their meanings:

*aah*—a pause, or an interjection that shows emotion

*arghhh*—agony or pain

*gasp*—a short, sharp intake of breath, usually during great emotion

*hmm*—a thoughtful pause

*mmm*—a sound of noncommitment

*oh*—an interjection that usually shows surprise or great emotion

*shh*—an urge to silence

*sigh*—a long exhalation of breath

*uhh*—hesitation

*uh-huh*—yes

*uh-oh*—oh no

*uh-uh*—no

*yeah* or *yeh*—yes

*yah*—a cheer

4. Note a caution on the use of *gasp* and *sigh*. Occasionally these words are used with dialogue: “Look out!” gasped John, or “It’s finally over,” she sighed. In a technical sense, neither construction is correct. A person cannot gasp or sigh words. A gasp is a short intake of breath. When one takes breath in, he or she cannot speak. Speech is formulated by the exhalation of air over the vocal cords. When one sighs, he or she releases air but does not speak. A person who is speaking is not sighing.

## Mini-Lesson 67: Avoiding Double Negatives

*Double negatives* are considered to be poor usage because they use two negative words when only one is needed. There are several word combinations that result in double negatives.

### Procedure

1. Explain that double negatives are instances in which two negative words are used when one is necessary. Negative words imply *no*. Offer this example of a glaring double negative on the board or an overhead projector:

We don't have no gym class today because of the assembly.

Point out that the *no* and *not* in *don't* are two negatives. In a strict reading, if you *don't* have *no* gym, you *have* gym. Thus, in many cases, double negatives cancel each other out and result in the opposite meaning. Offer the corrected sentence:

We don't have any gym class today because of the assembly.

We have no gym class today because of the assembly.

2. Explain that several common uses result in double negatives. Words like *hardly*, *scarcely*, and *but* when combined with *not* often result in double negatives. Offer this example with its following correction:

You can't hardly tell the differences among the varieties of tomatoes.  
(incorrect)

You can hardly tell the differences among the varieties of tomatoes.  
(correct)

3. Emphasize that the best way to eliminate double negatives is to drop one of the negative words.
4. Note that, for fiction, having a character speak with double negatives can be an excellent means of showing an uneducated character.

## Mini-Lesson 68: Using Italics for Titles and Names

*Italics* are used to identify or designate certain titles and names. *In print, italicized words lean to the right, as this sentence shows.* When writing in longhand or using a typewriter or word processor that does not have italicizing capabilities, writers indicate italics by underlining. Students often confuse italics with quotation marks, especially for titles.

### Procedure

1. Explain that italics is a print style in which words lean to the right. Show students an example (if possible from one of their texts) or copy or project the top part of this page.
2. Write the following examples of the uses of italics on the board or an overhead projector:
  - Titles of books
  - Titles of magazines and newspapers
  - Titles of movies
  - Titles of plays
  - Titles of operas and long musical compositions
  - Titles of paintings and statues
  - Names of planes
  - Names of trains
  - Names of ships
  - Names of spacecraft
3. Note that if they cannot show italic type in their writing when it is needed, students should use underlining.

## Mini-Lesson 69: Using Italics for Emphasis

*Italics* are often used for emphasis. Since many students misunderstand the use of italics in general, a mini-lesson showing how italics can highlight words and ideas can be helpful.

### Procedure

1. Remind students that italics are indicated by words that are slanted to the right.
2. Explain that italics have two important uses: to (1) designate titles (see Mini-Lesson 68) and (2) provide emphasis for words and ideas. Mention that quotation marks can also be used for emphasis and that writers choose how they highlight their work. Offer these examples on the board or an overhead projector:

“Did you see *that*?” Carol said.

Note how the use of italics for *that* indicates the word is to be emphasized.

She read the final clue on the treasure map: “*Look below the hollow oak.*”

Note that the clue is italicized, which adds emphasis.

3. Caution students not to overuse italics for emphasis. Too much italicized text, for example, calls attention to itself and undermines the words and ideas it is supposed to be highlighting.

## Mini-Lesson 70: Using Quotation Marks for Titles

*Quotation marks* have many uses in writing. One of these uses is to designate titles. (For the use of quotation marks with dialogue, see Mini-Lesson 35 in Section Nine, and for the use of quotation marks for emphasis, see Mini-Lesson 71.)

### Procedure

1. Show an example of quotation marks “ ” on the board or an overhead projector.
2. Explain that one of the uses of quotation marks is to identify the titles of stories, magazine articles, short poems, chapters in books, and episodes of TV shows. Offer these examples:

“The Open Window” by Saki (H. H. Munro) is an amusing short story.

“Ozymandias” is a poem written by Percy B. Shelley.

“How to Travel with Your Pet” is an article that all pet owners who travel with their pets should read.

Chapter 6, “Acing Your Tests,” was the best part of the book *Study for Success*.

The TV show “I Love Lucy” remains popular today.

3. Emphasize the distinction between quotation marks and italics for titles. Offer these examples:

*Gone with the Wind* is a novel about the Civil War.

*The Matrix* was an excellent movie.

Many consider *Death of a Salesman* to be a classic American play.

## Mini-Lesson 71: Using Quotation Marks for Emphasis

Along with other uses (such as setting off dialogue, quoting sources, and identifying titles), quotation marks can be used for emphasis. (For the use of quotation marks with dialogue, see Mini-Lesson 35 in Section Nine, and for the use of quotation marks for titles, see Mini-Lesson 70.)

### Procedure

1. Explain that quotation marks can be used to emphasize words that an author uses in special ways. Offer this example on the board or an overhead projector:

Tom is “energetic.” He has trouble sitting still in one place very long.

In this case, “energetic” was used to suggest politely that Tom is hyperactive. The author is drawing attention to a case of deliberate understating.

2. Point out that quotation marks can be used to emphasize the introduction of new or unfamiliar words. Offer this example:

E-mail, “electronic mail,” has become a popular means of communication.

In this case, the quotation marks are used to highlight the full term of e-mail.

3. Mention that in most cases, quotation marks for emphasis can be replaced with italics or underlining (in lieu of italics).

## Mini-Lesson 72: Using Parentheses

*Parentheses* are used for including additional, but not essential, information to a sentence. Separating this information from the rest of the sentence makes the sentence easier to understand.

### Procedure

1. Show the parentheses sign ( ) on the board or an overhead projector.
2. Explain that parentheses are used to provide additional or incidental information to a sentence. Since this information is not as important as the rest of the material, it is separated from the rest of the sentence with parentheses. Offer these examples:

Ernest Hemingway (1899–1961) is one of the best-known American authors.

Note that since the years of his life are not essential information, they are put in parentheses.

The inside of a computer (see Figure 3) has few moving parts.

The reference to Figure 3 directs readers to a picture that supports the text. This information would disrupt the sentence if it were not in parentheses.

3. To check if they have used parentheses correctly, suggest that students ask themselves if the material they placed inside parentheses is necessary to the sentence. If the answer is yes, parentheses should not be used. The exception might be in informal writing, as in the case of an authorial aside.
4. Explain that punctuation marks fall outside parentheses unless they apply to the information inside. Offer these two examples:

He could not go (not that he wanted to).

John said (surprise!) that he did not want to go.

## Mini-Lesson 73: Using the Dash

*Dashes* should be used conservatively in writing. Too many make an author's style choppy. However, the dash can be used effectively as a dramatic pause or to set off information to come.

### Procedure

1. Show students the dash — on the board or an overhead projector. Mention that most word processing software contains the dash, but on typewriters, the dash is made by typing two hyphens, with one space on either side.
2. Explain that the dash can be used for a dramatic pause or to set off information. It may set off information at the end of a sentence, or it may interrupt a sentence. Offer these examples:

There was no way out of this—Lisa had to tell her parents the truth.

She was convinced that she had been here before—she knew every detail of the ruins—but that was impossible.

3. Mention that dashes should be used only when necessary. Too many disrupt the flow of an author's style and make writing rough.



## Mini-Lesson 74: Using Hyphens with Compound Words and Numbers

*Hyphens* are used to form some compound words and compound numbers from 21 to 99, or numbers that end with 21 through 99. Students often have trouble with, or ignore, the use of hyphens in such instances.

### Procedure

1. Explain that hyphens are used to form some compound words. Compound words may also be closed (homeroom) or open (home run). Offer these examples on the board or an overhead projector of hyphenated compound words:

brother-in-law      all-around      good-looking  
able-bodied          well-to-do      life-size

2. Note that compound words can be tricky. Even dictionaries do not always agree as to which ones need hyphens. Students should consult a dictionary whenever they are uncertain whether to use a hyphen for compound words.
3. Many word processing software spell checkers correct compound words.
4. Point out that hyphens should always be used to join two or more words that form a single adjective before a noun. Offer these examples:

fifteen-year-old girl      well-known author

5. Explain that hyphens are used with compound numbers from 21 to 99. Offer these examples:

twenty-one                  ninety-nine

6. Mention that as a compound construction becomes part of the language, the hyphens usually disappear. The exceptions are when the result would be unwieldy, for example, “brotherinlaw” or “welltodo.”

## Mini-Lesson 75: Writing Lists with Colons and Commas

Most students know that commas are used with lists such as “apples, pears, and oranges” (or, depending on the style used, “apples, pears and oranges”). Some, however, are not familiar with the use of colons to set off lists.

### Procedure

1. Explain that commas are used to separate items in a list. Colons are sometimes used to signal that a list is to follow. Offer these examples on the board or an overhead projector:

*With commas only:* They packed sandwiches, lemonade, and cookies for the picnic.

*With colon and commas:* The following students earned awards: Renée, Sheila, and Paulo.

2. Note that a colon should not be used after a verb or a preposition.

The afternoon’s major events are: tug-of-war, relay races, and softball. (incorrect)

Point out that the list follows the verb *are*.

Here are the afternoon’s major events: tug-of-war, relay races, and softball. (correct)

There were several sports he excelled in: football, basketball, and soccer. (incorrect)

Point out that the list follows the preposition *in*.

He excelled in several sports: football, basketball, and soccer. (correct)

## Mini-Lesson 76: Spelling Strategy 1: Dictionaries and Spell Checkers

Spelling is a weakness for many students. Although no spelling strategy and no amount of memorization will turn poor spellers into champions, the use of sound spelling strategies can reduce mistakes.

### Procedure

1. Explain to your students that correct spelling is important to their final copies. Pieces that are marred with spelling errors make a poor impression on readers. The errors stick out and detract from the writer's ideas.
2. Mention that any piece that is submitted to a publication should be free of errors in spelling and mechanics. Pieces marred by spelling errors fail to make good impressions on editors.
3. Point out that every time a person misspells a word, she reinforces that incorrect spelling in her mind. Thus, she is likely to misspell the word again. This is why some people keep misspelling the same words over and over. Likewise, every time a word is spelled correctly, the correct spelling is reinforced.
4. Explain that students should consult a dictionary whenever they are unsure of the correct spelling of a word. Even professional authors rely on dictionaries for the proper spelling, pronunciation, meaning, and usage of words.
5. Encourage students to use spell checkers when they write on computers. Virtually all word processing software includes spell checkers these days. Explain that the spell checker will give them alternatives to incorrectly spelled words, but that they must be sure that the alternative they select is correct. Note that sometimes they will still need to refer to a dictionary.
6. Be ready for the standard complaint of students. Inevitably, some will argue that they cannot hope to find words in the dictionary that they do not know how to spell in the first place. Explain that usually only a few letters in a misspelled word are wrong, often in the middle or near the end of the word. By looking up the first syllable or first few letters, they can find most words. (There are some exceptions, for example, *psychology*, but these are rare.)

## Mini-Lesson 77: **Spelling Strategy 2: Proper Pronunciation**

Many students (and adults!) spell words incorrectly because they mispronounce them. They spell the word the way it sounds to them.

### **Procedure**

1. Explain that proper pronunciation is one of the keys to good spelling. People who do not say words correctly often have trouble spelling them. On the board or an overhead projector, offer these commonly mispronounced and misspelled words with their correct forms:

idear—idea

childern—children

probly—probably

tempature—temperature

temperment—temperament

disasterous—disastrous

enviroment—environment

stold—stole

2. Emphasize that students should listen carefully to the way words are spoken. If they are unsure of a pronunciation, they should consult a dictionary.
3. Suggest that students record words they find hard to spell on a page of their journals. Once a week they might share the words with a partner.

## Mini-Lesson 78: Spelling Strategy 3: Spelling Confusions

Students often confuse words that have similar spellings. They may spell a word correctly, but it is not the word they intended. Homophones are a major source of such confusion, but they are not the only culprits.

### Procedure

1. Explain that *homophones* are words that have identical pronunciations but different meanings and spellings. Because of this, they are easy to misuse.
2. Note that in addition to homophones, other words close in pronunciation or spelling are also easily confused.
3. Distribute copies of (or project) the accompanying “Spelling Confusions” and review the pairs of words with your students. Note that these are only some examples; ask students to supply additional words for the list.
4. Emphasize that the best way to avoid misusing homophones and other easily confused words is to become familiar with the different forms or consult a dictionary.

### Extension

- Suggest that students keep a copy of “Spelling Confusions” for future reference.



## Spelling Confusions

Sometimes authors simply spell the wrong word. The following words are *homophones*: words that sound alike but have different meanings and spellings. Guard against misusing them, and others like these examples, in your writing.

allowed, aloud	ate, eight
brake, break	capital, capitol
chord, cord	coarse, course
dual, duel	flea, flee
foul, fowl	know, no
lead, led	lessen, lesson
made, maid	not, knot
one, won	patience, patients
peace, piece	pray, prey
principal, principle	rain, reign, rein
right, rite, write	sew, so
soar, sore	some, sum
stake, steak	tail, tale
who's, whose	your, you're

Homophones are not the only words that authors may confuse. Some words sound so much alike or are spelled so similarly that they are often used in place of each other:

advice, advise	bazaar, bizarre
breath, breathe	clothes, close
confidant, confident	country, county
device, devise	emigrate, immigrate
envelop, envelope	farther, further
later, latter	lightening, lightning
medal, metal	moral, morale
picture, pitcher	than, then
veracious, voracious	were, where

Note that there are many more words in both groups. Add more on the lines below:

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## Mini-Lesson 79: Spelling Strategy 4: Personal Spelling Lists

Maintaining personal lists of difficult words is an easy way for students to improve their spelling. Students may maintain lists in notebooks or as computer files.

### Procedure

1. Explain that keeping a personal list of hard-to-spell words is a helpful spelling strategy for many people. Every time the person misspells a word, he or she records its correct spelling for future reference.
2. For students who prefer to keep their lists on paper, suggest that they use notebooks with loose-leaf pages. They should enter the words alphabetically, skipping a few spaces between entries so that they can add more words later. (For students who have only a few troublesome words, suggest that they write them on a file card, which they can keep close by while writing.)
3. For students who wish to maintain their lists as computer files, caution them to make backup copies of their lists on disks. This not only maintains a second copy in case their computer crashes, but it also enables students to access their lists on other computers. Remind them that they should periodically update their backup files. Maintaining lists as computer files offers the added advantages of easy updating and printing as needed.
4. Emphasize that students should check their lists when they must spell a word that gives them trouble. Using the word correctly will reinforce the right spelling. In time, they will be using their lists less frequently.

## Mini-Lesson 80: Overusing So and Then

*So* and *then* are two of the most overused words in student writing. I have found that the major reason students rely on these words so much is that they are not aware of the alternatives.

### Procedure

1. Explain that *so* and *then* are often overused. They frequently result in awkward constructions. On the board or an overhead projector, offer these examples:

We didn't have our badges, so we couldn't get onto the beach.

Angelo finished work, then he decided to call Ralph.

Teresa saw the dark clouds gathering, so she knew it was going to rain.

2. Mention that the words *when* and *since* can often be used to revise sentences using *so* and *then*. Offer these revisions of the previous examples:

Since we didn't have our badges, we couldn't get onto the beach.

When Angelo finished work, he called Ralph.

When Teresa saw the dark clouds gathering, she knew it was going to rain.

3. Note that sometimes *so* and *then* can be replaced with a conjunction such as *and*, *but*, or *or*. Offer this example:

Teresa saw the dark clouds gathering, and she knew it was going to rain.

4. Caution students to avoid using *so* and *then* to start sentences. Offer these examples:

So I went to work late.

Then we got a ton of homework.

Note that *so* is unnecessary to the beginning of almost any sentence. Although *then* can start a sentence, particularly when a time change is needed, it should be used with care.

## Mini-Lesson 81: Using Affect and Effect Correctly

The use of *affect* and *effect* regularly confuses students and adults. A mini-lesson can clarify their meanings and use.

### Procedure

1. Explain that *affect* and *effect* are not synonyms, as many people believe they are. They cannot be used in place of each other.
2. Note that *affect* is most commonly used as a verb to mean influence, sway, or impress. Offer these examples on the board or an overhead projector:

The loss of the tennis match will affect Kelli's confidence.

The failure affected his mood for weeks.

You might mention that *affect* is used as a noun in psychology, meaning emotion or feeling; however, few students will see the word used in this manner.

3. Explain that *effect* is used as a noun or a verb. As a noun, *effect* means the result of some action. Offer these examples:

The effect of cooperation was an increase in production.

What was the effect of the boycott?

As a verb, *effect* means to accomplish something. Offer these examples:

The new class president effected several important changes in school.

The school administration will effect a new graduation policy by the spring.

4. Suggest that since these words are easily confused, students should consult dictionaries whenever they use them until they become certain they are using *affect* and *effect* correctly.

## Mini-Lesson 82: Using All Right and (Not) Alright

*All right* and *alright* are often found in print. I recall one article where the author used both forms within the space of a few paragraphs. Although many people use these words interchangeably, *all right* is the preferred usage.

### Procedure

1. Write the following two sentences on the board or an overhead projector and ask students which one is correct:

Everything is all right now.

Everything is alright now.

2. Explain that although they likely will see *alright* in some of the material they read, the word is not the preferred form in written English. It may be one day, as language is constantly evolving, but not yet.
3. Point out that the preferred form is *all right*. Offer these examples:

The thunderstorm is done, and it is all right to go outside.

“All right,” said Les. “I’ll see you at six.”

Is it all right to continue?

4. Suggest that students will find the correct form easier to remember by thinking of *all right* as two words. When they do they will most likely write *all right* and not *alright*.

## Mini-Lesson 83: Using Among and Between Correctly

In standard English, *among* and *between* have distinct uses. You should share the distinction with your students.

### Procedure

1. Explain that although many people casually use the prepositions *among* and *between* in the same constructions, the words have distinct uses.
2. Point out that *among* is used with more than two people, ideas, or things. Offer these examples on the board or an overhead projector:

The position of group leaders alternates among five people.

Ellen was uncomfortable among the other applicants.

3. Note that *between* is used when speaking of two people, ideas, or things. Offer these examples:

What is the difference between History I and History IA?

The puppy ran between Chuck and Brian and streaked across the yard.

There are many differences between mammals and reptiles.

## Mini-Lesson 84: Using **Bad** and **Badly** Correctly

*Bad* and *badly* are different parts of speech and have different roles in a sentence. Many students treat these words the same, however, which results in mistakes in use.

### Procedure

1. Explain that *bad* and *badly* have different functions in a sentence.
2. Note that *bad* is an adjective and can only modify nouns or pronouns. It is often used after the verb “to be” and verbs that refer to the senses, such as *feel*, *look*, *seem*, *appear*, *smell*, *sound*, and *taste*. Offer these examples on the board or an overhead projector:

He hated being called the bad apple.

*Bad* modifies the noun, *apple*.

After sweating all day, he smelled bad.

*Bad* modifies the pronoun *he*.

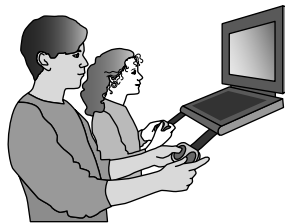
3. Explain that *badly* is an adverb. Most often it modifies verbs. It does not modify nouns or pronouns. Offer these examples:

He played badly and struck out three times.

*Badly* modifies the verb *played*.

Too many people drive badly in this town.

*Badly* modifies *drive*.



## Mini-Lesson 85: Avoiding Could Of and Similar Constructions

How many times have you heard your students say something like, “I could of done that”? You probably see that phrase and others like it in their writing just as often.

### Procedure

1. Explain that phrases like *could of* (which authors use to mean *could've*) easily slip into writing, because they are used in everyday speech. However, such phrases are careless expressions. Instead of *could of*, the author means *could have*. Offer these other examples of such phrases on the board or an overhead projector:

might of

must of

couldn't of

should of

shouldn't of

mustn't of

2. Point out that in all the above phrases, *of* should be replaced with *have*. Offer these examples of sentences with their corrections:

She could of asked him why. (incorrect)

She could have asked him why. (correct)

He shouldn't of done that. (incorrect)

He shouldn't have done that. (correct)

Rochelle must of spent \$500 on school clothes. (incorrect)

Rochelle must have spent \$500 on school clothes. (correct)

3. Emphasize that phrases such as “could of” are examples of incorrect writing. They must always be revised, replacing the *of* with *have*.

## Mini-Lesson 86: Using Farther and Further Correctly

Few students are aware of the different uses of *farther* and *further*. Teaching them such subtle points of writing will help them gain an appreciation for the depth and richness of English.

### Procedure

1. Explain that *farther* and *further* have different meanings.
2. Note that *farther* is concerned with physical distance. Offer these examples on the board or an overhead projector:

Randy hiked farther than he ever had before.

How much farther is the next rest area?

The sun is much farther from the earth than the moon is.

3. Point out that *further* is concerned with degree or quantity. It is often used to mean “more” or “in addition.” Offer these examples:

A further reason to leave early was to avoid rush-hour traffic.

“Further,” said Professor Stone, “economics was a major factor of the Civil War.”

Further investigation revealed that she had driven farther than she had claimed.

4. Suggest this easy way to remember when to use *farther* or *further*:
  - Distance requires *farther*; an example is “a mile farther.”
  - Quantity, degree, or reasons require *further*.

## Mini-Lesson 87: Using Fewer and Less Correctly

Many writers overlook the correct use of *fewer* and *less*. These two words represent one of the finer points of written language that your students should recognize.

### Procedure

1. Explain that *fewer* and *less* have different uses in the sentence.
2. Point out that *fewer* refers to the number of things you can count and is used before plural nouns. Offer these examples on the board or an overhead projector:

Fewer spectators watched the game yesterday.

Note that *spectators* is a plural noun and that *fewer* refers to the number of spectators.

This monorail seats fewer people than the last one did.

Note that *fewer* refers to the number of people.

3. Explain that *less* refers to degree or size or the amount of something that cannot be counted, such as hair or sand, and is used with singular nouns. Offer these examples:

With the camping equipment loaded, the car has less space for passengers.

Note that *less* refers to the amount of space in the car. Also note that *space* is a singular noun.

They had less trouble at last night's dance.

Note that *less* refers to the degree of trouble. *Trouble* is a singular noun.

There is less sand at this end of the beach.

Note that *less* refers to the amount of sand, which cannot be counted.

## Mini-Lesson 88: Using Good and Well Correctly

*Good* and *well* are often misused. Understanding their functions in the sentence can help students avoid mistakes with these two words.

### Procedure

1. Ask your students to raise their hands if they are sure how *good* and *well* are used in sentences. It is unlikely that you will see many hands up.
2. Explain that *good* is always an adjective. It modifies nouns or pronouns. It follows linking verbs such as *be*, *feel*, *look*, *seem*, *appear*, *smell*, *sound*, and *taste*. Offer these examples on the board or an overhead projector:

It had been a good day.

Note that *good* modifies *day*.

He felt good after his workout.

Note that *good* modifies *he*.

3. Point out that *well* may be used as either an adjective or an adverb. Explain that as an adjective, *well* is often used to refer to health. Offer this example:

Lance had a cold, but now he feels well.

Mention that as an adjective, *well* may also refer to a satisfactory condition. Offer this example:

After the initial problem was corrected, everything was well.

Note that as an adverb, *well* means to do something capably. Offer this example:

Mira performed well in the play.

4. Caution students to consult author's stylebooks or their language texts regularly until they gain a thorough understanding of *good* and *well*.

## Mini-Lesson 89: Using In and Into Correctly

Few students have any inkling of the different uses of *in* and *into*. Still, the distinction is an example of one of the finer points of writing that you should share with them.

### Procedure

1. Explain that *in* and *into* have slightly different uses.
2. Explain that *in* means within or being inside. Offer these examples on the board or an overhead projector:

They waited in the hospital's lounge.

Note that they were already inside; thus, *in* is used.

The old furniture is stored in the garage.

Note that the furniture is already within the garage, and the construction requires *in*.

3. Explain that *into* implies movement to the inside. Offer these examples:

They walked into the house.

Point out that the movement is from outside to inside.

After making her wish, Vera tossed the coin into the wishing well.

Note that the coin moves from outside the well to inside the well.

4. Suggest this easy way to remember the difference between *in* and *into*:
  - *In* means *already* inside.
  - *Into* means moving to the inside.

## Mini-Lesson 90: Using It's and Its Correctly

*It's* and *its* are two of the most commonly confused pronouns. Mistakes in their use even slip into printed material, and *it's* not surprising that students mix up the two forms.

### Procedure

1. Explain that to use the pronouns *it's* and *its* correctly, authors must understand the meanings of the two words.
2. Point out that *it's* is a contraction for *it is*. On the board or an overhead projector, offer this example:

It's going to rain.

*It is* going to rain.

Note that the contraction takes the place of *it is* and requires the apostrophe.

3. Emphasize that *its* is the possessive form of the pronoun *it*. An apostrophe is *not* used, which is an exception to the customary rules of possession. Offer this example:

The valley was a lonely place, but its beauty was breathtaking.

Note that *its* refers to the valley. The valley's beauty was breathtaking.

4. Tell students that by breaking apart the contraction for *it's*, they will be able to see if they are using the correct form. Offer this correct example:

It's a nice day for a picnic.

*It is* a nice day for a picnic.

Now offer this example, which highlights a mistake:

It's fur is brown and tan.

*It is* fur is brown and tan.

Emphasize that in this example, *its* is the correct form.

Its fur is brown and tan.

## Mini-Lesson 91: Using *There*, *Their*, and *They're* Correctly

These three words are bewildering for some students, as well as for some adults. Even after offering a mini-lesson about them, you will still need to review their use during writing conferences.

### Procedure

1. Explain that writers must understand the differences among *there*, *their*, and *they're*.
2. Point out the various meanings of *there*, and offer these examples on the board or an overhead projector:
  - *There* means in that place.  
The coat rack is over there.
  - *There* can start sentences when linked with the verb “to be.”  
There is a parking lot at the hotel.
  - *There* can be used as an interjection.  
There! I’ve finally finished.
3. Explain that *their* is a possessive pronoun. Offer this example:

They left their bikes behind the school.

Note that *their* is plural and must be linked to plural nouns or pronouns. Offer this example:

Someone left their gloves on the table. (incorrect)  
Someone left his or her gloves on the table. (correct)

Note that *Someone* is singular and requires a singular pronoun—either *his* or *her*. Changing *Someone* to *they* agrees with *their*.

4. Explain that *they're* is a contraction for *they are*. Offer this example:

They're planning to leave by six.

Note that to ensure they are using *they're* correctly, students should break the contraction and substitute *they are* in the construction:

They are planning to leave by six.

## Mini-Lesson 92: Using Who's and Whose Correctly

*Who's* and *whose* are the culprits of plenty of mistakes. A good mini-lesson can help students see and remember the differences between these two words.

### Procedure

1. Explain that *who's* and *whose* do not mean the same thing.
2. Note that *who's* is a contraction for *who is* or *who has*. Offer these examples on the board or an overhead projector:

Who's the driver of that car?

*Who is* the driver of that car?

Who's left the milk on the table?

*Who has* left the milk on the table?

3. Emphasize that *whose* is a possessive pronoun that shows ownership. Offer these examples:

Whose car is that?

Whose books are they?

Note that in the examples, *whose* indicates ownership of the car or the books.

4. Suggest that breaking the contraction *who's* can help with usage. Offer these examples:

Who's hat is on the rack?

*Who is* hat is on the rack?

Whose hat is on the rack?

Show your students that breaking the contraction makes it easy to see the correct form. Note that *whose* is correct in this sentence.

## Mini-Lesson 93: Using Your and You're Correctly

Like other pronouns and contractions that are homophones, *your* and *you're* are regularly substituted for each other. The following mini-lesson offers guidelines for proper usage.

### Procedure

1. Explain that *your* and *you're* are homophones. Although they sound the same, they have different spellings and meanings.
2. Point out that *your* is a possessive pronoun. Offer these examples on the board or an overhead projector:

Where is your jacket?

Your books are on the table.

Remember to lock your car doors.

3. Note that *you're* is a contraction for *you are*. Offer these examples:

You're taking Flight 209.

*You are* taking Flight 209.

Be careful where you're going.

Be careful where *you are* going.

4. Suggest that breaking the contraction can help ensure correct usage. Offer this example:

Your an excellent typist.

Ask how many students believe the sentence is correct. Substitute the contraction *you're*; then break it.

You're an excellent typist.

*You are* an excellent typist.

Emphasize the correct form.

## Mini-Lesson 94: Using Lay and Lie Correctly

It is the rare person who does not, at least on occasion, confuse *lay* and *lie*. This mini-lesson will help to reduce the confusion.

### Procedure

1. Explain that *lay* and *lie* are two verbs that are constantly being confused.
2. Note that *lay* means to put something down or to place something. Its principal parts are *lay*, *laid*, *(have) laid*, and *laying*. Offer these examples on the board or an overhead projector:

Reece laid the tools down on the table.  
“Lay the seat covers there,” said Martin.  
Where did I lay my books?

Note that in each case, *put* can replace *lay*.

3. Point out that *lie* means to rest or recline. Its principal parts are *lie*, *lay*, *(have) lain*, and *lying*. (Note that it is not *lying* as in speaking an untruth.) Emphasize that its past tense, *lay*, should not be confused with the verb *lay* (meaning to put). Offer these examples:

She likes to lie down after work.  
He lay on the couch and napped for an hour.  
Jules is lying in the hammock.  
Alisha is not feeling well; she has lain in bed all afternoon.

4. Suggest that the best way to use these verbs correctly is to memorize their parts. Offer these two tips as well:
  - When a verb is needed to express the action of reclining, *lie* should be used.
  - When a verb is needed to express the action of putting something down, *lay* should be used.

## Mini-Lesson 95: Using Lose and Loose Correctly

While most of your students will know the meanings of these two words, some will be unsure of the spellings and will use them incorrectly. A mini-lesson can be helpful.

### Procedure

1. Explain that *lose* and *loose* have different pronunciations and meanings.
2. Explain that *lose* means to experience a loss. Offer these examples on the board or an overhead projector:

When did you lose your keys?

Brad will lose the game if he does not concentrate.

3. Note that the past tense of *lose* is *lost*. Offer this example:

Brianne lost her purse.

4. Explain that *loose* means unconnected or not close together. Offer these examples:

The animals ran loose in the park.

The hinge of the door was loose.

5. Suggest that students remember when to use *lose* by recalling this example:

I hate to *lose* money.

*Lose* implies a loss of some kind. Note that understanding when to use *lose* will help students to know when to use *loose*.

## Mini-Lesson 96: Using Off Rather Than Off Of

*Off of* is frequently used when *off* is sufficient. This is an example of overwriting.

### Procedure

1. Explain that many people use the phrase *off of* when they should simply use *off*. Offer these examples on the board or an overhead projector:

William moved the box off of the table.

William moved the box off the table.

The squirrel jumped off of the tree branch.

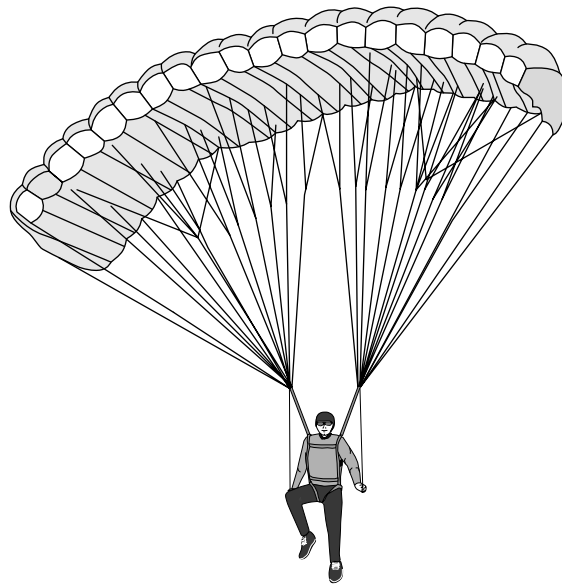
The squirrel jumped off the tree branch.

Note that in each case, *of* is not needed.

2. Note that sometimes the phrase *off from* is used. This, too, should be avoided because *off* is sufficient. Offer this example:

Shel climbed off from the ledge.

Shel climbed off the ledge.



## Mini-Lesson 97: Using Sit and Set Correctly

Since *sit* and *set* are commonly misused in speaking, it is easy to understand why they are regularly interchanged in writing. Even some professional authors have trouble with these two words.

### Procedure

1. Explain that *sit* and *set* are two commonly misused words. Offer these definitions on the board or an overhead projector:
  - *Sit* means to be in an upright position; sitting in a chair.
  - *Set* means to place or put something somewhere.

2. Offer these examples:

Julio is sitting in the third row.

He sat through a two-hour lecture.

Artie set the vase on the windowsill.

Priya is setting the table now.

3. Suggest that students remember the differences between the two words in this way:

After I *set* the table, I *sat* down and ate.

### Extension

- To give students more help with *sit* and *set*, offer the forms of these verbs on the board or an overhead projector:

	Past	Present Participle	Past Participle
<i>sit</i>	sat	is sitting	(have) sat
<i>set</i>	set	is setting	(have) set

## Mini-Lesson 98: Using Than and Then Correctly

*Than* and *then* are regularly confused. Only a clear understanding of their meanings and use can prevent mistakes.

### Procedure

1. Emphasize that in order to use *than* and *then* correctly, writers must understand their meanings.
2. Note that *than* is a conjunction, a word that joins parts of a sentence, especially before a comparison. Offer these examples on the board or an overhead projector:

Mary is taller than Rose.

Point out that *than* connects “Rose” with “Mary is taller.”

The science test was harder than the math test.

Here *than* connects the first part of the sentence with the second.

3. Note that *then* is usually an adverb. It means “at that time.” Its purpose in a sentence is to denote time, a relationship regarding time, or a sequence. Offer these examples:

First they went skating. Then they built a snow sculpture.

Kara finished the report on time and then relaxed by watching a movie.

4. Suggest that your students can remember the difference between *than* and *then* by recalling these sentences:

AA is greater than A. [*A* is for *than*.]

Remind them that *than* connects parts of a sentence, usually showing a comparison.

Do E first; then go on. [*E* is for *then*.]

Remind them that *then* denotes time or a sequence.

## Mini-Lesson 99: Using *To*, *Too*, and *Two* Correctly

At one time or another, most students misuse *to*, *too*, or *two*. A mini-lesson on the use of these words is necessary in most writing workshops.

### Procedure

1. Explain that *to*, *too*, and *two* are often misused.
2. Point out that *to* is a preposition or part of an infinitive. Offer these examples on the board or an overhead projector:

Carla went to Europe for three weeks.

*To* is a preposition.

After his car broke down, Tim had to wait three hours for a tow truck.

*To* is part of the infinitive *to wait*.

3. Note that *too* is an adverb. It usually means an excessive amount or also. Offer these examples:

It was raining too hard to walk home.

*Too hard* means an excessive amount.

Keeshon wanted to go, too.

*Too* means also. Note that when used to mean also, *too* is usually set off with commas. However, using commas with *too* is becoming less common.

We, too, missed our plane. (We, also, missed our plane.)

4. Emphasize that *two* is the numeral. Offer these examples:

They arrived at two o'clock.

Stan waited two hours for his train.

5. Emphasize that substituting *to*, *too*, or *two* for each other is easy. *Too* easy. To avoid misusing these words, authors must understand their meanings and proofread their work carefully.

## Mini-Lesson 100: Using Who and Whom Correctly

The correct uses of *who* and *whom* bedevil many writers. For many the confusion begins in elementary school and continues long afterward. By presenting a mini-lesson on the topic and reviewing the proper uses of these words during writer's conferences, you will help your students use them correctly in their writing.

### Procedure

1. Explain that authors must be careful to use *who* and *whom* correctly. These two words are often misused.
2. Point out that *who* is a nominative case pronoun and *whom* is an objective case pronoun. The easiest way to remember the correct use is to substitute *he* or *she* for *who* and *him* or *her* for *whom*. Offer these examples on the board or an overhead projector:

Who was at the door?

He [or she] was at the door.

Note that questions are rewritten as statements when *he* or *she* is substituted. Also point out that *He* fits the construction; therefore *who* is correct. Offer this next example:

Whom lost his keys?

Him lost his keys.

Note that substituting *Him* for *Whom* in this sentence is not correct. Obviously the sentence does not sound right. Instead of *whom*, *who* is needed. Offer this example:

Whom did Josie see?

Josie saw him [or her].

Note that in this case, substituting *he* for *whom* clearly is incorrect. Since *him* is the proper substitute, *whom* is correct.

3. Explain that *whom* often follows prepositions such as *to*, *for*, *with*, or *from*. Offer these examples:

To whom was the letter sent?

With whom did you drive to Texas?

4. Emphasize that memorizing the correct uses of *who* and *whom* is the best way to ensure using these words correctly.
5. Remind students that substituting *he* or *she* for *who* and *him* or *her* for *whom* is a good way to self-test the correct use of these words.