**Sentence Combining for HSE Students**

**Why use it?**

* Sentence combining is a good way for students to become more knowledgeable and confident with sentence structure and a good way to teach simple structures
* Research shows that sentence combining practice improves student writing
* Sentence combining provides an opportunity for students to learn basic grammar and sentence structure through hands on use, rather than learning rules and complex grammatical terminology
* Virtually every question on the writing skills section of the TASC involves sentence combining

**Guidelines and Tips for Using Sentence Combining in the Classroom**

* The first lesson should review what a sentence is.
* A sentence has a subject and a verb (“A sentence is a complete thought” is not as clear in terms of giving students criteria for deciding whether a group of words is a sentence or not). Students should be given the opportunity to look at several different types of statements and decide whether they are sentences or not, given that criteria
* It is not necessary to teach a lot of grammatical terminology.

ESOL students may know the terms, but HSE students often do not and it isn’t worth taking the time to teach them

* Teach one structure at a time (a suggested sequence is below, but is certainly not set in stone). Provide a lot of review
* As you teach the structure, teach the punctuation that goes with it, as this is tested (and also good to know). For instance, when you teach students to create compound sentences using and, but, so etc. teach them that the comma goes before the conjunction.
* Be sure you understand the grammar rule regarding each structure very well yourself, and can explain it clearly but simply. I always tell students that *we will be doing this many times*, so if you are confused now, don’t worry, you will get it.
* Once you’ve introduced a structure and students have had time to practice it, you can ask them to look for examples of a certain type of sentence in texts they are reading.
* You can combine vocabulary review, or the introduction of vocabulary words, with sentence combining. For instance, when you introduce appositives, you can teach adjectives that describe people, and then have students write sentences about people or each other or themselves using the new words, for instance, *Kate, who was disgustingly industrious, was typing this sentence guide on Sunday night.*
* If you provide stem sentences that relate to the content students are learning about, or draw from the texts students are reading, you will reinforce content while students work with the sentences.

**A Possible Sequence for Teaching Sentence Structures**

Lesson One: What is a sentence

Lesson Two: Commas in a series

Lesson Three: Constructing compound sentences with FANBOYS

Lesson Four: More work with FANBOYS;

Introduce the semi-colon as an alternative way to combine sentences

Lesson Five: Sentence Combining with Dependent Clauses

Lesson Six: More work with Dependent Clauses

Lesson Seven: Appositives and rules for using commas with appositives

Lesson Eight: Introduce dashes as a way to set off non-essential information in a sentence

Lesson Nine and Ten: Open sorts, with three or more stem sentences that students can combine using FANBOYS, dependent clauses, semi-colons, dashes, and signal words such as “therefore,” “however,” “consequently,” “as a result,” etc.

A few suggested resources:

Purdue OWL: owl.english.purdue.edu. This is a helpful site for teachers to understand the details of the grammar or punctuation they wish to introduce. The page on Sentence Punctuation Patterns is especially helpful.

Grammar Girl and Englishplus.com are other helpful resources.

As students get closer to the test, it’s a good idea for students to practice with some sample test questions involving sentence combining, as the sentences on the test can be quite difficult and nuanced, and students need to practice with samples to get the “hang” of it.

**A Few Sample Mini-Lessons** drawn from the “Governing Ideas” Curriculum

**Mini Lesson One**: What is a sentence?

Materials: Sentences—see below

Steps:

1. Write the sentences on the board. Write this question above them: Which one of these are sentences? Walk around as students discuss to hear what they are saying.

1. Time always seemed too short.

2. I voted.

3. Jose and Lisette complained about the lady at the welfare office.

4. Sometimes governments collapse.

5. Democracy has been our form of government for over 200 years.

6. That morning, the senator voted against the proposal and went to lunch.

7. Taxes can really take a chunk out of your paycheck.

2. It’s very important to walk around and get a sense of what students understand and what puzzles them, so the conversation that follows can address some of their confusions. When I teach this lesson, students are usually puzzled by some of the choices. They are not sure that a sentence can be two words, for instance.

3. Go through the sentences one by one, stopping and asking what students thought—if they think it is a sentence, why. If they think it is not, why not? Questions come up, and this leads to establishing the following points:

**A sentence is a group of words that has a subject and a verb.** Or, more accurately, a sentence is a group of words with a sentence and a verb, a capital letter at the beginning, and a period at the end. I tell students that they may have learned that “a sentence is a complete thought” but that seems like a confusing definition to me, so I prefer this one.

**Verbs.** I say that if you want to figure out if a group of words is a sentence, first you need to find the verb. I ask students what a “verb” is. Students will often say it is an “action word.” I will say that’s true, but some verbs don’t sound very “action-y” In the first sentence we see “seems.” That doesn’t seem like a very active word, does it? I tell students that they will often come across forms of the verb “to be”—am, was, were, is, have been, were going to, etc. These may not seem very “verby” but they are.

**Verbs change with the time.** So how can you tell a word is the verb? *It changes with the time.* You can put it in past tense, present tense, future tense. Take “always” (which some students will say is the verb if you ask them). Can you “always-ed?”

**A two-word sentence?** When we come to the second sentence, the question of whether a sentence can be two words comes up**.** There are usually some students who think that is not possible. I’ll ask them—is there a verb? Is there a subject that does the action of the verb? Then it’s a sentence.

**Subjects.** Once you know the verb, you can look for the subject. What is the thing that does the action of the verb? *I voted.* Who voted? With sentence 3, we talk about how there can be two subjects that do one action. Jose and Lissette *both* complained.

**Verbs can be more than one word.** We discuss this for sentence 5. The verb includes “has been.” There can be even more words in the verb: *might have been, had been doing*

**Two separate actions with *and.*** That is what we have in sentence #6. You can have one subject who does two (or more) separate things.

**Words between the two verbs.** We discuss this for sentence 7—taxes can really take a chunk…*really* is not a verb, but there are words that can tell us more about the verb, and these can come between the verbs two parts.

As we talk, I write some of these observations on the board and urge students to copy them down. I try to use as few grammatical terms as possible. I tell students that if they are confused not to worry, we’ll be doing this again and again and again.

**Mini-Lesson Two:** Deleting Repetitive Information and Creating a List of Items with Commas in a Series—Sample Stem Sentences

**Sentence Combining**

*For each set of sentences, delete the repetitive information and combine the rest into ONE sentence that is correctly punctuated with commas.*

Set 1

France is a democracy.

Germany is a democracy.

The U.S. is a democracy.

Set 2

Sweden is a constitutional monarchy.

The United Kingdom is a constitutional monarchy.

Spain is a constitutional monarchy.

Set 3

There are different levels of government in the U.S.

There is the federal level.

There is the state level.

There is the local level.

Set 5

The federal government makes laws.

The federal government collects taxes.

The federal government makes treaties.

Set 6

The state government regulates marriage.

The state government regulates divorce.

The state government collects state taxes.

Set 7

One example of local government is the Mayor of New York City.

Another example of local government is the City Council.

Another example of local government is the local school board.

In the U.S., senators are elected by the people.

In the U.S., representatives are elected by the people.

In the U.S., the president is elected by the people.

Set 8

One type of government is an oligarchy.

Another type of government is a democracy.

Another type of government is a dictatorship.

**Mini Lesson Three**: Using FANBOYS to combine sentences

Materials: Sentence sheet, attached.

Steps:

1. Briefly review with students what a sentence is. On the board, write two very simple sentence sets to review commas in a series. You might try:

* She was rich. She was intelligent. She was professional.
* He was handsome. He was kind. He was well-dressed.

1. Tell students that this is one way to combine sentences, but there are other ways, too. One important way is FANBOYS. Ask if anyone knows them. Write FANBOYS on the board in a column. Go through the letters. Students may be able to name some of them. Go through them one at a time and give the meanings. Talk about “for” “yet” and “nor” and tell students that we do not use them much.
2. Tell students that a fancy name for these is conjunctions, but it’s fine to just call them FANBOYS—it’s easier to remember.
3. Tell students the rule for combining sentences using two independent clauses and a FANBOY:

They must be two clauses that could each stand alone as a sentence.

There is a comma right before the FANBOY.

Write some examples: Lilian was tired. She wanted to go to sleep. (I like to use the names of students in the class and make observations about them using the sentences) How can you make these two “stubby” sentences into one? Lilian was tired, and she wanted to go to sleep.

1. Tell students that often when we use “and” in this way, the idea is that one idea flows from the other. Give a few more examples:

I don’t believe in capital punishment.

I think the executions in Saudi Arabia are terrible.

Have students help you combine. Give one more set:

I believe in school prayer.

I hope the Supreme Court changes the laws about prayer in schools.

1. Introduce “so.” Explain that “so” is a FANBOY that tells us about cause and effect.

Lilian was tired. She went to bed.

The teacher forgot an important handout. The class had to do a different lesson.

Lilian was tired. She didn’t want to get up and come to school.

Jose had worked all night. He wasn’t looking forward to four long hours of class.

Point out to students that when using “so,” cause has to come before effect.

If the stem sentences were: She bought the house. The house was cheap, would it mean the same thing if we said The house was cheap, so she bought it? Notice that when we use “so, “ the phrase that comes second may have to be flipped. The stem sentences were given as effect: She bought the house and cause: The house was cheap. When we use “so” to combine the two ideas because we want *cause* to come before *effect.* Cause and effect have to do with time: causes come before effects. Would it make sense to say She bought the house, so it was cheap?

1. Give out the sentence sheet and have students work in pairs to complete them. Walk around as students are working to provide support.
2. Have each pair of students put one of the sentences on the board. Review. Maybe write one of their own?

**Mini-Lesson Four** Vocabulary Review and Sentence Combining—Review of “and” and “so” to make compound sentences; introduction of “but”

Materials: Flip chart paper; Sentence-combining worksheet, attached

Steps:

1. As students come in, there should be pieces of flip chart paper on the walls and markers available to write on them. On each sheet, write one of the following vocabulary words: object, secular, promote, ban, policy, conservative, opponent, advocate. On each sheet, write a sentence starter. Ask students to go around to the different sheets (For the last three, “opponent,” “advocate” and “conservative” include brief explanations of the words. Have students work alone or in pairs to write a sentence using the sentence starter. Sample sentence starters for each word follow:

* One thing our government is doing that I *object* to is….because….
* What thing I believe our government should *promote* is….because….
* One thing I believe should be *banned* in public is…..because….
* I do/do not believe our government should remain *secular* because….
* A government *policy* I disagree with is….because…..
* One conservative value that I have is…..
* I am an opponent of ……….because……
* I am an advocate of ……because……

1. Write FANBOYS on the board. Ask what students remember. Write a few “and” and “so” sentence stems on the board. Have students help you combine them.
2. Introduce “but.” Remind students that they’ve been writing persuasive essays in which they express their views about national issues. They are making arguments, and when you make arguments, you are usually responding to what someone else is saying. You might say ‘yes, but…” Now they’re going to practice writing sentences using “but” that they might use in expressing an opinion.
3. Review their new words: “opponent” and “advocate.” An “opponent’ is someone who is against someone else or has the opposite opinion. You can also have an opponent in sports—your rival or the person you are playing against. “Advocate” can be both a verb and a noun. You can *advocate* for something or you can be *an advocate of* something. If you are a student, you might be an advocate of cheaper text books.
4. Start students off with some sets, for instance:

I’m an advocate of the separation of church and state, (but)

I still believe in school prayer.

I’m an opponent of capital punishment (but)

I think murderers should be punished.

1. Scale down the sentence starters to be just bare bones so that students can fill in their own ideas.

I’m an opponent of \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_, but I believe that…..

I’m an advocate of \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_, but I feel that…./think that….don’t agree that…..

1. Work with students to come up with some different ways to say “I think that…I believe that…I feel that…
2. Students should work in pairs to create 2 or 3 sentences, select their best, and put one on the board.

**Mini Lesson Five**: Combining sentences using “so” and “because”

Materials: Sentence combining worksheet, attached; Explanation of Dependent Clauses, attached.

Steps:

1. Tell students that when they looked at the relationship between the natural resources and climates of the three groups of colonies and how they affected those colonies’ economies they were looking at *cause and effect*. Cause and effect is something that historians look at, always. What caused a particular event to happen? One question that historians have asked themselves is why the American Revolution happened? What part did the economy play? But they are going to study that more a little later. Right now, they are going to apply this idea of cause and effect in writing sentences that show cause and effect.
2. Lead students through “Step One” of the Sentence Combining worksheet to remind them of how to use “so” to show cause and effect.
3. When students have had enough practice, tell them that there is another way to show cause and effect in sentences. Write “Because” and “Since” on the board. (If you have ESOL students in the class you may have to go over the fact that “since” has to do with cause and effect, not just time).
4. Write the following: Because the middle colonies had good soil…..Since the South had a year round growing season…..Ask students if these are sentences. Most native speakers will understand that they are not, although they may not be able to explain why.
5. Point out that in the phrases you wrote, there are subjects and verbs (“Middle colonies” “had”), but there is a *dependent clause word*. What’s a dependent clause? A dependent clause is a *group of words that has a subject and a verb but cannot stand alone.* There are a number of dependent clause words. You will supply them with a complete list soon. For now, they are going to look at just two of them: “Because” and “since.”
6. Ask students to help you complete the sentence “Because the middle colonies had good soil….”
7. Have them help you do the same for the second stem “Since the South had….” with “since.”
8. Show students that the dependent clause can come at the beginning of the sentence or the end of the sentence. Introduce the rule for comma use with dependent clauses: if the dependent clause comes at the beginning of the sentence, there needs to be a comma after it: Because the middle colonies had rich soil, they became the “breadbasket” of the colonies.
9. Have students work on Steps 2 and 3 of the worksheet.

**Sentence Combining with “so,” “since” and “because**

**Step One: Use “and” “but” and “so” to make compound sentences that show cause and effect.**

**Combine these sentences using the following stems:**

Set 1

The middle colonies had rich soil and a good growing climate.

The middle colonies became the “breadbasket” of the colonies.

Set 2

The southern colonies had a long growing season.

Colonists in the southern colonies grew cash crops like rice and tobacco.

Cash crops required a lot of land and cheap labor.

A plantation system grew up.

The economy was dependent on slave labor.

Set 3

The New England colonies did not have rich soil for growing crops.

The New England colonies did not have a long growing season.

There were plenty of harbors.

Many people fished for a living.

**Step Two: Use “because” and “since” to re-combine the sentences above so that they show cause and effect. The first is done for you as a model:**

Set 1

The middle colonies had rich soil and a good growing climate.

The middle colonies became the “breadbasket” of the colonies.

**Combined sentence using “so””**

The middle colonies had rich soil and a good growing climate, so they became the “breadbasket” of the colonies.

**Combined sentence using “because”**

Because the middle colonies had a rich soil and good growing climate, they became the “breadbasket” of the colonies.

**To notice:** the dependent clause comes first, so there is a comma between the dependent clause and the rest of the sentence.

The sentence can also be written like this:

The middle colonies became the breadbasket of the colonies because they had rich soil and a good growing season.

**To notice:** the dependent clause comes *after*, so you do not need a comma.

**Now you do:**

Set 2

The southern colonies had a long growing season.

Colonists in the southern colonies grew cash crops like rice and tobacco.

Cash crops required a lot of land and cheap labor.

A plantation system grew up.

The economy was dependent on slave labor.

Set 3

The New England colonies did not have rich soil for growing crops.

The New England colonies did not have a long growing season.

There were plenty of harbors.

Many people fished for a living.

**Step Three: Write your *own* set of sentences about the colonies showing cause and effect using “so,” then re-combine the sentences using “because” or “since”**

For Example:

* In the New England colonies, the soil was poor, so farmers just tried to grow enough to feed their families.
* Because the soil was poor in New England, farms were small and farmers just grew enough to feed their families.