

 **AUDIO**
3:33 min

[Full Details and Transcript](#)



Learning to Construct Effective Sentences

Newport Elementary School, California
May 2012

Topic TEACHING ELEMENTARY SCHOOL STUDENTS TO BE EFFECTIVE WRITERS

Practice FOUNDATIONAL SKILLS

- Highlights**
- » A fifth/sixth-grade teacher talks about the importance of teaching students how to construct effective sentences.
 - » She and her teaching partners select sentence patterns that are important to teach students.
 - » The teachers then select mentor texts that exemplify those patterns to provide well-written examples for students.
 - » Students first examine the sentences and determine the patterns so they can recognize the features of well-written sentences.
 - » Students practice using the patterns in the try-it section of their writer's notebook.
 - » They then practice writing sentences that are increasingly more complex.

About the Site **Newport Elementary School**
Newport Beach, California

Demographics

- » 81% White
- » 10% Hispanic

- » 4% Asian
- » 3% Black
- » 1% Native American
- » 17% Free or Reduced-Price Lunch
- » 6% English Language Learners
- » 17% Special Education

Newport Elementary School helps students become effective writers through a whole-school approach to writing instruction in which the principal is actively engaged. Teachers at Newport:

- » Hold Writer’s Workshop at the same time across the school;
- » Teach spelling using patterns and individualized word lists based on student writing;
- » Use mentor texts to illustrate the features of effective writing, including well-constructed sentences; and
- » Celebrate student writing in hallway displays and monthly assemblies.

Full Transcript





00:05 My name is Carol Lang. I’m a fifth/sixth-grade teacher at Newport Elementary in Newport Beach, California.


00:10 In my sixth-grade class, we always work from the premise that good writers make deliberate choices when they write. And that includes sentence construction, which is actually key because if you don’t have well-written sentences, the rest of it really doesn’t matter. And what I do is I sit down with my sixth-grade teaching partners and my fifth-grade teaching partners, and we select patterns and concepts that we want our students to know by the time they leave our classroom.

00:35 And then what we do is we look through mentor texts, which are just well-written sentences, sentences that are written effectively. And every day in my class, I’ll put one of these sentences


up on the board and I'll ask my students, "What do you notice about this sentence? Look at it as a writer." And then they talk to the partners and they share out what they notice. And I'll say, "What do you like about it? Anything about that sentence stick with you?" And we talk about that and, "Well, hmm, was it the way that that sentence was written? Did the author do something?" Oh, then they slowly start getting it. Then I'll be like, "What will happen if I took out this comma? Would that change it? What if I took these quote marks out, or what if I just shoved this comma here? How would that change it?" And over time, it really gets kids looking at the function of sentences, the meaning of sentences, and the marks that are required to make a well-written sentence.

 **01:25** When they start feeling more comfortable, then I'll say, "Okay, get out your writer's notebook." We have, in the back of our book we have a craft try-it section, so they'll turn to that section. I'll say, "Try to write a good sentence like this good model sentence. See if you can write a sentence like that." And then they do, and they share with each other. And as they're writing I walk around, and then that helps me see, are they getting it or are they not getting it, and I'll make a little note in my little notebook that I wander around with. And that'll tell me, "Hmm, that might be something that I need to address later," or they get it—I can go on.

 **01:55** Then over time, once they get more comfortable with it and the different kinds, I tell them we're adding, like, tools to our tool chest or our toolbox because we're constructing sentences. And once they have five or six different types of sentences that they can write, then when they're writing I'll say, "In your daily journals today, I want you to use at least one of these sentence types, or you must use this particular sentence type." And then I will check it, and that's part of how we assess them and can grade them. And it really does help them start varying their sentences.

 **02:25** Also, when working on a particular unit, like one big unit that we do every year is student memoirs. And I know in student memoirs there's going to be feelings, so we'll do mini lessons on different kinds

of sentence constructions that were pertinent to memoirs. And one of the things we do is, well, you can do it level one, which is just *tell*, then give a reason, which would be, “I was sad because he hurt my feelings.” Or you can go up to a level two, and you could use *so* and *that*: “I was so sad that I hit him because he hurt my feelings.” Or we go all the way to the top level, which was *showing*: “You were so sad, my heart sank and tears ran down my face.” We work our way up that ladder, and through the mini lessons and through all the daily looking at sentences, the kids really start to internalize that, and it does transfer.

 03:14 At the beginning of the year, they think I’m a nut when I say, “What do you think about this sentence?” By the end of the year, they’re bringing sentences to me from their books and saying, “Look at this sentence. This is just like.... Can I share it?” “Yes, you can.” So it’s real exciting. They become writers.

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