# SYNTAX MATTERS
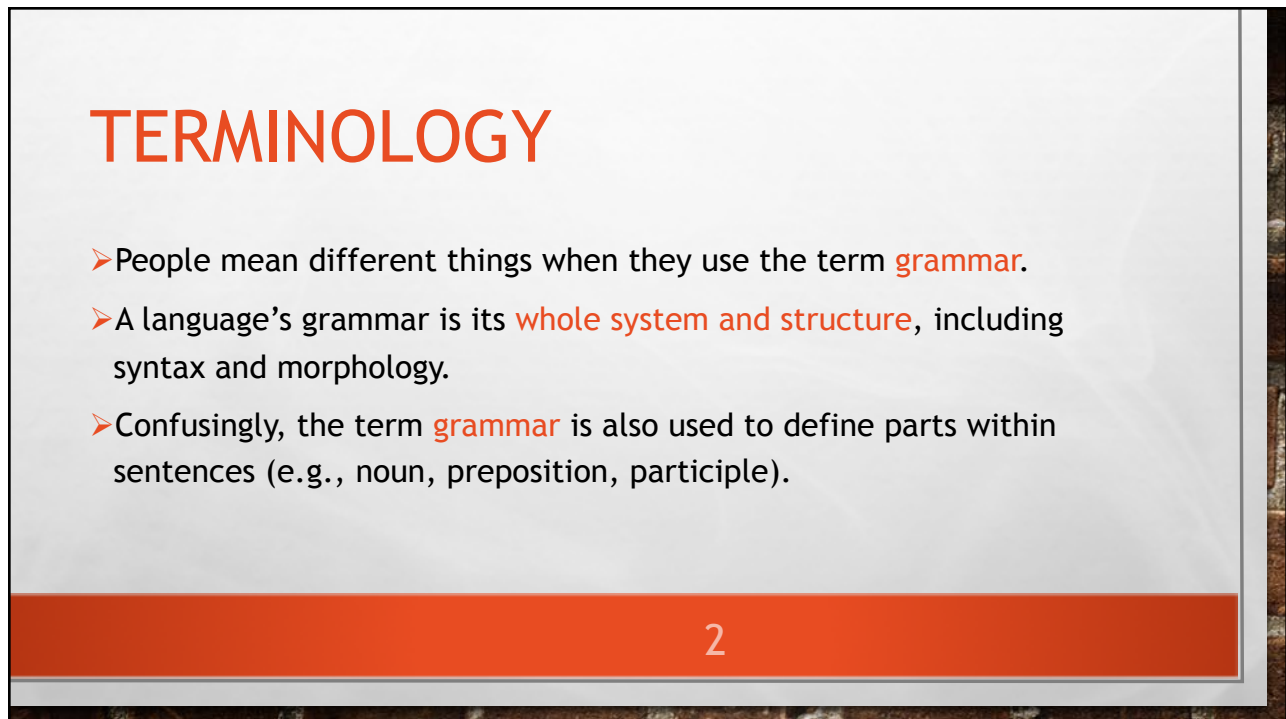
The Link Between Sentence Writing & Sentence Comprehending

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A Presentation for Kendore Learning @kendorelearning.com

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# TERMINOLOGY

➢People mean different things when they use the term grammar.

➢A language's grammar is its whole system and structure, including syntax and morphology.

➢Confusingly, the term grammar is also used to define parts within sentences (e.g., noun, preposition, participle).

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# TERMINOLOGY (CONTINUED)

➢ If the grammar of a language is its system and structure, it makes sense today to focus on syntax, a key component of that grammar.

➢ Syntax is the arrangement of words and phrases to create well-formed sentences.

➢ We need a vocabulary to discuss syntax. In other words, we use terminology to facilitate our work in writing and reading.

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# TERMINOLOGY (CONTINUED)

"The order and grouping of words within a language system allows us to understand relationships among the ideas, such as subject-verb-object relationships..." (Moats, 2020, 186).

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# PLAYING WITH SYNTAX – ONLY!

She told him she loved him only.

She told him she loved only him.

She told him she only loved him.

She told him only she loved him.

She told only him she loved him.

She only told him she loved him.

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# 2 GRAMMAR CAMPS

1 – Teachers say…

Learning terminology and identifying/ labeling parts of speech and sentence parts is a necessary component of E.L.A. and makes better writers.  Teach grammar in isolation.

2 – Teachers say…

Explicit grammar instruction is useless as an activity, wastes valuable time, and makes students hate writing.  Teach grammar incidentally as problems arise in student writing.

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# CAMP #1 PROBLEMS

1 – Teachers say...

Learning terminology and identifying/ labeling parts of speech and sentence parts is a necessary component of E.L.A. and makes better writers. Teach grammar in isolation.

Decades of research indicates that isolated grammar instruction does not improve writing.

Typically, when grammar is taught this way, students learn to fear or loathe it.

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# CAMP #2 PROBLEMS

No overarching framework when taught only as problems arise

Not enough practice to internalize concepts

No link made between writing and reading comprehension

No development of common vocabulary/language to talk about sentence structure

2 – Teachers say...

Explicit grammar instruction is useless as an activity, wastes valuable time, and makes students hate writing. Teach grammar incidentally as problems arise in student writing.

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# A NEW CAMP – CAMP #3

Syntax instruction can be both effective and engaging.

- ✓ Use the language of syntax to facilitate better writing and reading.
- ✓ Teach concepts using a logical, sequential approach.
- ✓ Avoid rote memorization and excessive labeling activities.
- ✓ Create reinforcement activities that engage students in genuine reading comprehension and writing practice.

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# KEEP IN MIND...

If a concept does not improve student reading and/or writing, don't teach it!

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## SOME INTERESTING FINDINGS (CONTINUED)

✓ Sentence combining has a strong, positive effect on writing.

(Graham & Perin 2007b as cited in Hudson 296; Graham, Harris, & Chambers 221; Sadler 2012, 2019)

✓ Recent research indicates that grammar taught as it applies to writing has a strong positive effect on writing. (Myhill et al 2013 as cited in Hudson 296)

✓ Syntax study can improve reading comprehension at the sentence level. (Scott & Balthazar 2003)

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## IN BRIEF…

It is not enough to teach the grammatical system; if this teaching is to affect writing, then it must be explicitly applied to writing.

(Hudson 297)

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# TWO MAJOR SYNTAX CONCEPTS

➢Parts of Speech – It's all about the job.

➢Sentence Parts – It's all about the clause.

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# PARTS OF SPEECH (POS)

Focus students' attention on the role a word plays or job a word has in a sentence. Using parts of speech this way builds student writing and comprehending because it builds in students the ability to understand the way words relate to one another to convey meaning.

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# WHAT PART OF SPEECH IS...

1. Man

2. Jump

3. Sock

4. Smooth

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# WHAT PART OF SPEECH IS...

1. Man
   a. That man eats tofu.  (noun)
   b. Man the harpoons! (verb)

2. Jump
   a. You should jump a little higher. (verb)
   b. That ski jump looks dangerous. (noun)

3. Sock
   a. I lost a sock this week.  (noun)
   b. You should sock away plenty of money for retirement.  (verb)

4. Smooth
   a. The milkshake tastes smooth. (adjective)
   b. I will smooth the wrinkles out of the sheets.  (verb)

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# POS – WHAT WORKS

✓ Keep introduction brief and straightforward.

✓ Keep identification of various elements to a minimum.

✓ Focus primary teaching time on generating and discussing good examples.

✓ Remember that as students get older, they have typically studied the basic parts of speech multiple times already. Be ready to review quickly and then expand the depth of their knowledge.

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# POS – WHAT WORKS

If your students haven't generated any examples or practiced the concept in their own speaking and/or writing by the end of the lesson, you've missed the boat!

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# POS – A QUICK OVERVIEW

noun

pronoun

adjective

verb

adverb

preposition

conjunction
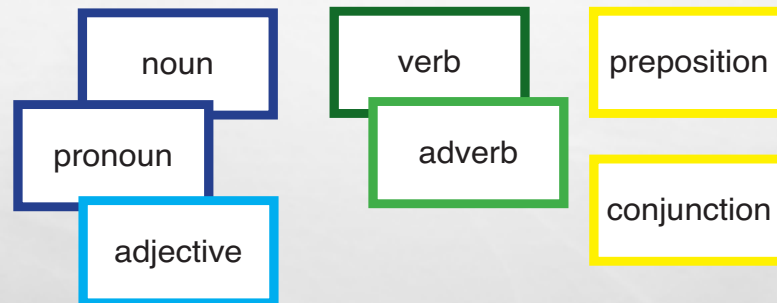
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# POS – I.E.C.C. MODEL

1. Identify – traditional labeling activity – helps students identify element in pre-existing sentences (small % of time)
2. Expand – sentence expansion – helps students expand basic sentences and ideas into more sophisticated ones
3. Combine – sentence combining – helps students combine basic sentences into more sophisticated ones
4. Create – sentence creating/writing – helps students apply studied element into the context of their own writing (most important activity)
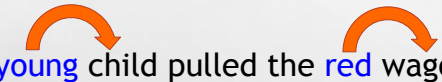
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# POS – ADJECTIVES

- Remember to focus on the job of the word.

- An adjective describes (modifies) a noun or pronoun.

The young child pulled the red wagon.

The brownie was rich and delicious.

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# POS – ADJECTIVES - EXPAND

**A few sentence expansion examples for adjective work:**

- 1. The children and their leaders took vans to a campground.

_____

- 2. Over a campfire, the children roasted hotdogs and sang songs.

_____

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# POS – ADJECTIVES - EXPAND

**A few sentence expansion examples for adjective work:**

- 1. The children and their leaders took vans to a campground.

The rambunctious children and their frazzled leaders took rented vans to a wooded campground.

- 2. Over a campfire, the children roasted hotdogs and sang songs.

Over a crackling campfire, the hungry children roasted all-beef hotdogs and sang hilarious songs.

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# POS – ADJECTIVES - COMBINE

**A few sentence combining examples for adjective work:**

- 1. My grandfather told jokes at the table.  He is friendly.  His jokes were funny.

_____

- 2. My sisters and I listened to the jokes and ate snacks.  My sisters were hungry.  The snacks were nutritious.  Our dad had prepared the snacks.

_____

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# POS – ADJECTIVES - COMBINE

**A few sentence combining examples for adjective work:**

- 1. My grandfather told jokes at the table.  He is friendly.  His jokes were funny.

My friendly grandfather told funny jokes at the table.

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# POS – ADJECTIVES - COMBINE

**A few sentence combining examples for adjective work:**

- 2. My sisters and I listened to the jokes and ate snacks.  My sisters were hungry.  The snacks were nutritious.  Our dad had prepared the snacks.

My hungry sisters and I listened to the jokes and ate nutritious snacks <u>prepared by our dad</u>.

     - that our dad had prepared.

     - our dad had prepared.

     - that were prepared by our dad.

Our dad had prepared nutritious snacks that my hungry sisters and I ate as we listened to the jokes.

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# POS – A WARNING

Memorizing lists of words and "tricks" to identify certain parts of speech defeats our purpose.  It focuses attention on labeling rather than understanding, and it often misleads rather than informs anyway.

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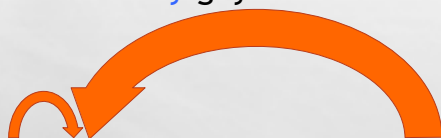# POS – ADVERBS – A WARNING

Be careful of the old fallback that adverbs end in –ly.  That's about *identifying* a word rather than *understanding* its function.  And it often doesn't work:

He is a friendly guy.         Friendly describes guy and is an *adjective*.

I never did my homework yesterday.

Never and yesterday are adverbs but do *not* end in –ly.

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# POS – CONJUNCTIONS – COORDINATING

➢ Coordinating conjunction – joins 2 words or groups of words of equal standing.

- Words:  Jane and Sue
- Phrases:  in the kitchen or on the porch
- Clauses:  John went to the store, but it was closed.

➢ co = with, together.  Neither side is more important than the other.  Coordinators share responsibility.  No one is in charge.

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# POS – CONJUNCTIONS – SUBORDINATING

➢ Subordinating conjunction – begins a dependent clause, making it dependent.

- while we were home
- if Shelby eats her vegetables
- because he wants a new bicycle

➢ sub = under.  The subordinating conjunction makes its clause *subordinate* to the independent or main clause.  A subordinate serves under the leader.

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# FROM PARTS OF SPEECH TO SENTENCE PARTS

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# SENTENCE PARTS & KINDS OF SENTENCES

Every sentence must have a subject and its predicate.

➢The subject is who or what is doing the action – "the doer."

- The hungry man ate quickly.
  - *Man is the simple subject.  The hungry man is the complete subject.*

➢The predicate is the action – "the do."

- The hungry man ate quickly.
  - *Ate is the simple predicate.  Ate quickly is the complete predicate.*

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## SP - SUBJECTS

subject – who or what is doing the action

1. The ferocious dog barked at my friend.
2. A storm in our town took down a lot of trees.
3. Several boys and girls played in the park on Saturday.
4. I ran and skipped down the street in the rain.

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## SP - PREDICATES

predicate – the action

1. The ferocious dog barked at my friend.
2. A storm in our town took down a lot of trees.
3. Several boys and girls played in the park on Saturday.
4. I ran and skipped down the street in the rain.

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# SENTENCE FRAMES

| Subject (the doer) | Predicate (the do) |
| --- | --- |
| | |

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# SENTENCE FRAMES

| Subject (the doer) | Predicate (the do) |
| --- | --- |
| The bear | roared. |

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# SENTENCE FRAMES

| Subject  (the doer) | Predicate  (the do) |
|---|---|
| The ferocious black bear with sharp claws<br><br><br>*What kind of bear?*<br>*Tell me something special about him.* | roared. |

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# SENTENCE FRAMES

| Subject  (the doer) | Predicate  (the do) |
|---|---|
| The ferocious black bear with sharp claws<br><br><br>*What kind of bear?*<br>*Tell me something special about him.* | roared loudly near the campsite this morning because he was hungry.<br><br><br>*When?  Where?  How?  Why?* |

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# SP – THE CLAUSE

Clauses are the building blocks of all sentences.

We combine clauses in different ways to show relationships between groups of words and to increase sentence variety.

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# SP – THE CLAUSE

clause = group of words with subject and its predicate

clause ≠ sentence

Some clauses can stand by themselves, and some cannot.

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## SP – INDEPENDENT & DEPENDENT CLAUSES

clause = group of words with subject and its predicate

| Independent clause | Dependent clause |
|---|---|
| I | D |
| clause that <u>can</u> stand by itself | clause that <u>cannot</u> stand by itself |

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## SP – INDEPENDENT CLAUSES

Independent clauses (I) can stand by alone.
*Here are some:*

• I painted a picture

• the teacher walked into the room

• my friends drank all the tea

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# SP – DEPENDENT CLAUSES

Dependent clauses (D) <u>cannot</u> stand alone.
*Here are some:*

- while I was napping

- if you finish your homework

- after we got home from school

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# SP – SIMPLE SENTENCE

Simple sentence = 1 independent clause = I

➢ It is not necessarily <u>simplistic</u>.  These sentences are <u>simple</u>.

➢ They have one subject-predicate relationship and can stand by themselves.

- I slept.
- In the virtual presentation William provided an overview of syntax to the eager participants.

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## SP – COMPOUND SENTENCE

**Compound sentence = 2 independent clauses (I)**

joined by a comma + coordinating conjunction (for, and, nor, but, or, yet, so).

$$I_{,fanboys}I$$

John went to the store, but it was closed.

*1ˢᵗ and 2ⁿᵈ graders use <u>and</u>, <u>but</u>, and <u>or</u>.  They don't use the term clause.*

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## SP – COMPOUND SENTENCE

1. It rained, and she jumped in the puddles.
2. I will take you to the store, but you need to bring your own wallet.
3. We could all wash the dishes, or you could do it alone.
4. I do not like mushrooms, nor do I like Lima beans.

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# SP – COMPLEX SENTENCE

Complex sentence = 1 independent clause and

1 (or more) dependent clauses.

➢Basic complex sentences follow a D,I or ID pattern.

➢The dependent clause (D) begins with a subordinating conjunction.

Whenever it rains, I forget my umbrella. (D,I)

I like ice cream because it tastes delicious. (ID)

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# SP – COMPLEX SENTENCE

Look at the impact of the subordinating conjunction!

➢ While I studied, my sister ran screaming through the house.

➢ After I studied, my sister ran screaming through the house.

➢ Before I studied, my sister ran screaming through the house.

➢ Because I studied, my sister ran screaming through the house.

➢ Although I studied, my sister ran screaming through the house.

➢ Whenever I studied, my sister ran screaming through the house.

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## SP – COMPLEX SENTENCE – WITH ADJECTIVE CLAUSE

1. Remember that a complex sentence has 1 independent clause and 1 (or more) dependent clauses.

2. While some dependent clauses (D) begin with a subordinating conjunction, others begin with a relative pronoun or adjective.

3. These special adjective (relative) clauses *always* follow the noun or pronoun they are describing.  Common relative pronouns include <u>who</u>, <u>which</u>, and <u>that</u>.

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## SP – COMPLEX SENTENCE – WITH ADJECTIVE CLAUSE

Here are some examples of complex sentences with adjective clauses.  Notice that the independent clause (I) is black while the dependent clause (D) is orange.

1. The doctor, <u>who</u> was nearing retirement, still had great skill with his patients.

2. That table, <u>which</u> is a million-dollar antique, will never leave our family.

This particular kind of complex sentence appears most frequently in expository text. Instruction should be centered around both writing *and* reading them.

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## SP – COMPLEX SENTENCE – WITH ADJECTIVE CLAUSE

Here are some more examples.  Notice that relative clauses can appear anywhere as long as they immediately follow the noun they describe.

1.  I spent hours preparing the chicken dish, which was delicious, nutritious, and well prepared.

2.  Mark watches any show that holds his interest.

3.  I handed the outfit to Sue, who looked at it with disdain.

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## SENTENCE SKILLS & COMPREHENSION

A growing body of research (Scott 2009; Brimo et al, 2015) indicates that comprehension is connected not just to vocabulary but also to syntax.

- A student must understand 90-95% of the words on a page to understand the content (Nagy & J. Scott, 2000).
- That said, a student can understand all the words in a text and, due to syntax, still find that text incomprehensible.

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# SENTENCE SKILLS & COMPREHENSION

Consider these two examples:

- Abraham Lincoln was the 16th president of the United States.  He was born in Kentucky and had three children.
- Abraham Lincoln, who was born in Kentucky and had three children, was the 16th president of the United States.

Clearly, the second option is more difficult to comprehend.  It is also more interesting and sophisticated.

Research says the further the main subject is from its predicate, the harder the sentence is to comprehend.

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# PULLING IT ALL TOGETHER:
# ELEMENTS OF A SENTENCE STRUCTURE LESSON

1. Instructor introduces the concept clearly and succinctly, using both a visual and a verbal description.

2. Students identify the element in pre-written sentences (a brief portion of the lesson).

3. Students conduct activities such as sentence expanding, combining, unscrambling, and imitating to practice their knowledge and application of the given element and to take the first steps towards enhancing their sentence-level writing.

(Van Cleave, *Writing Matters*, 2014)

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## PULLING IT ALL TOGETHER:
## ELEMENTS OF A SENTENCE STRUCTURE LESSON

4. Students create their own examples of the element.

5. Students share those examples with the class.

6. Instructor uses student examples to clarify and expand upon student knowledge.

(Van Cleave, *Writing Matters*, 2014)

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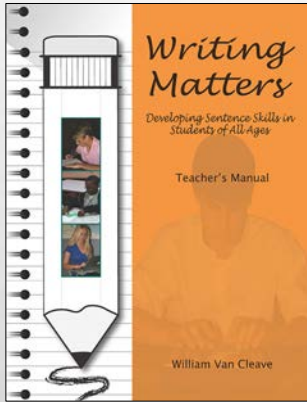## IN SHORT…THE *WRITING MATTERS* APPROACH

1. Introduce (briefly).

2. Identify (briefly).

3. Expand, combine, unscramble, imitate, etc.

4. Generate.

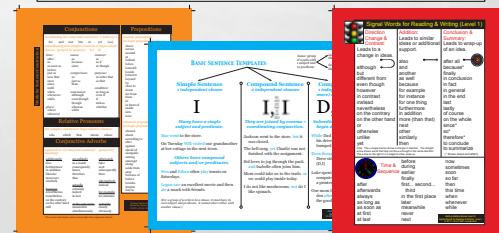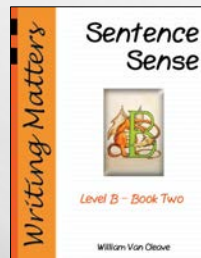5. Share.

6. Discuss.

(Van Cleave, *Writing Matters*, 2014)

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# SYNTAX INTENSIVES

1. Several weeks ago I launched online syntax intensives.

2. These five-part workshops limited to 25 participants each are hands-on, interactive, and reasonably priced.

3. I'll be emailing you additional information about these intensives in addition to a PDF of the PowerPoint in the next 24 hours.

4. Thank you for joining me and thank Jennifer Hasser and the folks at Kendore for hosting this event.

(Van Cleave, *Writing Matters*, 2014)

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