

Pie Corbett Sentence Games



Quick-fire daily sentence starters can have an impact on children's writing. I think that the ability to rapidly construct and vary sentences - almost without thinking about it - is one of the basic skills of writing. If children are labouring over sentence construction this must interfere with the flow of imaginative composition. The difference between a Level 3 and a Level 4 writer is the ability to construct and vary sentences.

When introducing new sentence patterns remember to start orally - so they hear the pattern and then say it. This can be followed by using cards or a washing line so that they see and move the words around and physically manipulating the sentences - good for all children but especially the kinaesthetic learners. Finally, they can begin to move into writing on mini white boards.

Keep the session speedy - the idea is to become automatic at writing, not something laboured. Push the more able to develop sentences. Be ruthless on full stops! One handy tip is to say to children, 'Don't show me until you have checked'. The idea is for the children to think, write and then re-read, checking for quality and accuracy.

Link the sentence types to a text type and to what will help children make progress. Immature writers should conquer the simple sentence, after this; ensure that the compound sentence has been accomplished. Then begin moving into the complex sentence.

Practise sentence games and use the same sorts of sentences in modelled and shared writing. Make sure children use the sentence types in their own writing. This is vital - try working on a sentence (or paragraph) that then has to be 'dropped' into a longer piece of writing. Store good sentences in writing journals for future use.

PIE CORBETT SENTENCE GAMES

Random words

Choose a book.

Ask for a number - this gives you a page to turn to.

Now ask for a number - this gives you the line.

Then ask for a small number - this will select a word.

The children then have 15 seconds to write a sentence using the selected word.

Then use the same sort of process to randomly select two or three words - can they make a sentence using the words.

Be ruthless on capital letter, sense and full stop.

PIE CORBETT SENTENCE GAMES

Noun and verb game

Ask for a list of nouns (engine, ruler, pencil, tree).

Then make a list of verbs (sipped, stole, rushed, wished).

The game is to invent sentences that include a noun and a verb from the lists. This can be fun if the nouns and verbs do not match in any sensible way - you will get some quite creative solutions!

The engine sipped...

The ruler stole...

The pencil rushed...

The tree wished...

Now complete the sentences preferably choosing unusual ideas, e.g.

The engine sipped from a cup of silences.

The ruler stole a tongue of ideas.

The pencil rushed down the stairs and into the garden.

The tree wished it could turn over a new leaf.

PIE CORBETT SENTENCE GAMES

Join

Provide two short, simple sentences.

*The camel ate the cake
The cake was full of dates.*

The aim of the game is for the children to join them to make one sentence. They will need to use some form of connective and it can be useful to suggest a way of joining them. For instance, you could ask the children to join the two sentences above using the word 'which':

The camel ate the cake, which was full of dates.

This game is vital for children who are Level 3 writers and need to begin using a variety of ways (beyond '...and then...') to link sentences, gaining flow in their writing. So, play this often!

PIE CORBETT SENTENCE GAMES

Animal games

Make a list of animals.

The children have to write a sentence about each one - as playful as possible.

Put in certain criteria, e.g. use a simile, use two adjectives, use an adverb, use 'after', use 'when', etc.

Use the animal list to create alliterative sentences - one per animal, e.g. the tiny tiger tickled the terrified terrapin's two toes with torn tinsel.

PIE CORBETT SENTENCE GAMES

Improve

Provide a list of dull sentences that have to be made more detailed or interesting or powerful, e.g.

- *The worm went.*
- *The man got the drink.*
- *The dog came along the road.*
- *The woman ate the stuff.*
- *The man looked at the stuff in the shop.*

PIE CORBETT SENTENCE GAMES

Check it

Write up some sentences or a paragraph with errors for the children to check. Build in the sorts of mistakes that the children often make so they get used to identifying and correcting their own errors.

These might include - spellings, use of articles, punctuation mistakes, irregular past tenses, incorrect use of tenses, incorrect collocations.

- *He runned down the lain.*
- *I ate a one apple.*
- *She was dead frightened.*
- *I just jumpt over the wall.*
- *I ran home, Lucy just walked.*
- *She hears a big yell.*

PIE CORBETT SENTENCE GAMES

Shorten

Write a poorly formed, clumsy sentence and ask the children to shorten the sentences or clarify them. eg:

The robbers who were being chased ran down the road till they could run no more and then they decided that they would go into the cave and then they would hide in there and wait.

PIE CORBETT SENTENCE GAMES

Change the ending

Provide a short sentence and ask the children to extend it by adding a chunk on at the end.

Provide a list of ways, e.g. use a connective, add on an 'ing' chunk, add on a chunk using 'who, which, that when, while, where, before, after', etc.

Teddy closed the curtains.

This might become:

Teddy closed the curtains when the fireworks started.

Teddy closed the curtains while everyone was juggling.

Teddy closed the curtains before the milkman came.

Teddy closed the curtains, hoping it would keep out the sunlight.

PIE CORBETT SENTENCE GAMES

Change the opening

Provide a simple sentence and ask the children to extend it by adding a chunk to the beginning.

Build up a repertoire of different ways to vary the opening to sentences,

e.g. use an adverb (how), a time connective (when), an 'ing ' or 'ed' chunk, one word, a simile, a prepositional phrase (at the end of the lane - where), an adjective, etc.

Bertie dug a deep hole

Might become:

After tea, Bertie dug a deep hole.

In the garden, Bertie dug a deep hole.

Carefully, Bertie dug a deep hole.

As fast as a ferret, Bertie dug a deep hole.

Hoping to reach Austrailia, Bertie dug a deep hole.

PIE CORBETT SENTENCE GAMES

Drop in

Provide a simple sentence and ask the children to 'drop in' a something extra, e.g. adjectives, adverb, a phrase or clause.

Be wary of children dropping in too much! Of course - you could add to a sentence by attaching a bit either end as well.

Bertie dug a hole.

Might become:

- *Bertie dug a deep hole.*
- *Bertie rapidly dug a hole.*
- *Bertie, the farmer's dog, dug a hole.*
- *Bertie, hoping he would soon see a kangaroo, dug a hole.*

PIE CORBETT SENTENCE GAMES

Copy

Look carefully at the text type you are teaching. Are there any particular sentence types that the children will need to be able to use in their writing? Look at the stage they are at and decide what sorts of sentences they need to be able to write, in order to make progress. Model several of one type on a board - then ask the children to imitate the pattern, substituting different words.

For instance, here are several 'adverb' starter sentences:

Carefully, Pie ate the doughnut.
Angrily, Jerry kicked the football.
Gently, Masha held the sandwich.

Create several more together and then use a bag of adverbs to help the children begin writing their own similar sentences, using the same underlying structure.