1. Focus

Explain Sentences That Start with But

Say: When we write, we all follow grammar and punctuation rules. If we don’t all follow the same rules, we won’t be able to understand each other. Some rules we have to follow all the time. For example, we always need to put punctuation at the end of a sentence. If we don’t do this all the time, readers will be very confused about where our sentences begin and end. But once in a while, we do break a rule. We break the rules in order to get readers’ attention. For example, you probably learned that you should never begin a sentence with the word but. Most of the time that’s true. But sometimes writers do break this rule in order to get readers’ attention. Today I’m going to show you when it can be useful to begin sentences with but in your persuasive letters.

Model Sentences That Start with But

Display the modeling text on chart paper or using the interactive whiteboard resources.

Ask students to listen as you read aloud the passage from “Stop Junk Food Ads for Kids” and to listen for a sentence that starts with but.

Many fast food chains give kids toys with their meals. The kids want the toys. The kids do not know any better. But the fast food chains know what they are doing. They know the junk food is not good for kids.

Modeling Text

Ask: Did you hear the word but at the beginning of a sentence? Why do you think the writer did that? Allow responses.

Say: The word but at the beginning of this sentence means “on the other hand” or “however,” but it’s much more direct. It’s a way for the writer to show the difference between the kids and the fast food chains. The kids are innocent. They don’t know any better. But the fast food chains are the bad guys. The fast food chains know exactly what they’re doing. As the author states in the last sentence, “They know the junk food is not good for kids.”
2. Rehearse

Practice Starting Sentences with But

Display the practice text (without the word But) on chart paper or using the interactive whiteboard resources. Read it aloud for students.

You have some trash, and there’s no garbage can. But you don’t throw it on the ground. You know that is wrong. You take it home instead.

Practice Text

Ask students to work with a partner to decide where they might add but at the beginning of a sentence to get readers’ attention. Each pair should write down their sentence and be prepared to share their ideas with the class.

Share Practice Sentences

Bring students together and invite partners to read aloud their sentences. Ask these questions to discuss the use of the word but:

- Did each pair of students begin the same sentence with the word but?
- Did it make a difference which sentence started with but?
- Did one sentence starting with but sound better than another sentence starting with but? Why or why not?

3. Independent Writing and Conferring

Say: We learned that sometimes writers do begin a sentence with the word but in order to get readers’ attention and emphasize a point. But, remember, don’t overdo it or the points you want to make will lose their power.

Encourage students to look for places in their own letters where beginning a sentence with the word but would help to make a point. Remind students not to overuse this strategy. During conferences, reinforce students’ use of this and other strategies using the prompts on your conferring flip chart.

4. Share

Bring students together. Invite volunteers to read aloud examples of sentences that begin with the word but for a legitimate and effective reason.

Strategies to Support ELs

Beginning

While other students complete the partner practice activity, work with beginning ELs to practice composing complete sentences about everyday activities. Ask students to tell through words or gestures what we do at school. Write their responses on chart paper; for example, We read books, We eat lunch, We write stories, etc. Read aloud the sentences and have students repeat. Then ask volunteers to pantomime one of the sentences while other students guess which sentence it is.

Intermediate and Advanced

Pair ELs with fluent English speakers during the partner activity.