Use Dependent Clauses to Vary Sentence Structure

1. Focus

Explain Using Dependent Clauses to Vary Sentence Structure

Say: To engage readers, writers must vary their sentence structures. You can vary sentence structures by starting with different words or writing sentences of different lengths. Another way to vary sentences is to write more complex sentences using dependent clauses. The simplest sentence includes a subject, a predicate, and a direct object. For example, “Lisa (subject) caught (predicate) the ball (direct object).” A sentence with a dependent clause includes the simple sentence (the main clause) plus a dependent clause. The dependent clause needs the main clause or it would be a sentence fragment. For example: “Lisa caught the ball after Ivy threw it to her.” The clause “after Ivy threw it to her” is the dependent clause. It makes no sense on its own (it’s a sentence fragment), but it adds interest to the sentence. Today I’m going to show you how to vary your sentences by using dependent clauses.

Objectives

In this mini-lesson, students will:

• Learn how to vary sentence structures by using dependent clauses.
• Practice varying sentence structures by using dependent clauses.
• Discuss how they can apply this strategy to their independent writing.

Preparation

Materials Needed

• Chart paper and markers
• Interactive whiteboard resources

Advanced Preparation

If you will not be using the interactive whiteboard resources, copy the modeling text and practice text onto chart paper prior to the mini-lesson.

Model Using Dependent Clauses to Vary Sentence Structure

Display the modeling text on chart paper or using the interactive whiteboard resources. Ask students to listen for the dependent clause as you read the sentence from “You—A Cartoon Character!” aloud.

After you have mastered several different looks, make up a story and add speech balloons.

Modeling Text

Say: Did you hear the dependent clause in the sentence? It’s the first clause, “After you have mastered several different looks, . . .” This phrase can’t stand alone. It is dependent on the second part of the sentence, “make up a story and add speech balloons.” Complex sentences with dependent clauses are an important part of writing procedural text. They allow a writer to use sequence words, such as after and then, to describe the order of the steps in the process.
2. Rehearse

Practice Using Dependent Clauses to Vary Sentence Structure

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

**Practice Text**

Pour some water in a jar. Put three drops of food coloring in the water. Put the flower in the water.

Ask students to work with a partner to revise the sentences by combining two of the sentences into one sentence using a dependent clause. Remind students that a dependent clause can’t stand on its own. Pairs should write down their sentences and be prepared to read them to the class and explain how using a sentence with a dependent clause improved the text.

Share Practice Sentences

Bring students together and invite partners to read aloud their sentences and explain their revisions. Record students’ sentences and post these as models for students to use as they draft or revise their procedural texts.

3. Independent Writing and Conferring

**Say:** We learned that we can vary sentence structure by using dependent clauses. Dependent clauses add interest to your writing and can help describe the steps in a procedure. As you draft and revise your procedural text, look for places where you use a series of simple sentences, and think about using a sentence with a dependent clause for variety.

Encourage students to vary their sentence structures by using dependent clauses in their procedural texts. During student 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 share examples of sentences with dependent clauses.

Strategies to Support ELs

**Beginning**

While other students complete the partner practice activity, work with beginning ELs to support their oral language development. Practice simple command verbs with them, or orally model and practice the steps of a simple procedure (for example, drawing a smiley face or watering a plant in your classroom). Encourage ELs to use command verbs and gestures to explain the procedure to you after you have modeled it. Provide support as needed and validate their efforts to use English.

**Intermediate and Advanced**

Pair ELs with fluent English speakers during the partner activity.

**All Levels**

If you have ELs whose first language is Spanish, share these English/Spanish cognates: *structure/lá estructura; vary/variar.*