Objectives

In this mini-lesson, students will:

- Learn how to vary sentence structure by starting sentences with different words.
- Practice varying sentence structure by starting sentences with different words.
- 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 and practice texts onto chart paper prior to the mini-lesson. If necessary, copy the sentence frames from “Strategies to Support ELs” onto chart paper.

1. Focus

Explain Starting Sentences with Different Words

Say: A biography tells about the life and times of a person who had an impact on the world. A biography writer tries to bring this person to life for readers, describing his or her personality and characteristics. To engage readers, you can’t write sentences that all sound the same. You want to vary your sentence structures. One way to vary sentence structure is to start sentences with different words. Today I’m going to show you how to start sentences with different words so that you can keep the readers’ interest and write an engaging biography.

Model Starting Sentences with Different Words

Display the modeling text on chart paper or using the interactive whiteboard resources. Ask students to listen for sentences that start with different words as you read the text aloud.

In 1870, the Fifteenth Amendment to the Constitution was passed, giving black men the right to vote. Douglass had fought hard for this day. He continued to fight for the right to vote for women, believing it was long overdue.

Modeling Text

Say: I would like you to pay particular attention to the second and third sentences. The second sentence begins with Douglass. The next sentence begins with he. Instead of using Douglass again, the writer used he to refer to Douglass. This varies the sentence structure and sounds much less repetitive. I’m going to underline these words and label them “start with different words.” Underline and label the identified words.
2. Rehearse

Practice Starting Sentences with Different Words

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

Lincoln was the sixteenth president of the United States. Lincoln led the country through the Civil War.

Practice Text

Ask students to work with partners to revise the sentences so they start with different words. Pairs should write down their sentences and be prepared to read them to the class and explain how starting the sentences with different words improved the text.

Share Practice Sentences

Bring students together and invite partners to read aloud their sentences and explain how they changed them. Record students’ sentences and post these as models for students to use as they draft or revise their biographies.

3. Independent Writing and Conferring

Say: We learned that we can start sentences with different words to vary the sentence structures and to keep readers’ interest. Remember, a biography writer strives to bring a subject to life for readers. As you draft and revise your biography, look for opportunities to start sentences with different words to make your writing as engaging as possible.

Encourage students to vary their sentence structures by starting sentences with different words as they draft their biographies. 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 they drafted with different beginnings.

Strategies to Support ELs

Beginning

While other students work with partners, or during independent writing time, work with beginning ELs to orally generate simple sentences about themselves. Model for students by talking about yourself. Say: My name is ______. I live in ______. Provide the following sentences frames to help students to share information about themselves:

My name is ______.
I live in ______.
I am ______ years old.

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: different/diferente; vary/variar; biography/la biografía.