Objects
In this mini-lesson, students will:
• Learn how to vary sentence structure by using sentences of different lengths.
• Practice varying sentence structure by using sentences of different lengths.
• 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.

1. Focus

Explain Using Sentences of Different Lengths
Say: When you write a biography, you want to engage the reader in your telling about a person’s life. One way to do that is by writing sentences that are different lengths. If you write sentences that are all about the same length, they aren’t very interesting to read. Instead, you want to vary your sentences by writing some that are shorter and some that are longer. Today I’m going to show you how to use different sentence lengths to make your writing read smoothly and to draw the reader into your biography.

Model Using Sentences of Different Lengths
Display the modeling text on chart paper or using the interactive whiteboard resources. Ask students to listen for different sentence lengths as you read the text aloud.

Modeling Text
Say: The different sentence lengths in this paragraph help make it read smoothly, and they reinforce the writer’s meaning. The first three sentences are short and to the point. I think they’re more powerful because they are short. The fourth sentence is a little longer. It tells how Bell felt at the time. The next sentence is the longest so far. It tells why Bell was so lonely, because in the North, slaves had a more difficult time making connections. This paragraph begins with short, declarative sentences and then builds on them with longer explanatory sentences. Each sentence flows smoothly from one to the next.

The Nealys were cruel to Bell. They whipped her. They gave her meager clothing. But, above all, Bell was terribly lonely. Northern slaves had few opportunities to make connections with one another.
2. Rehearse

Practice Writing Sentences of Different Lengths

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

Bell learned to speak English. She never lost her Dutch accent. Her voice was low and muted. It was pleasing to the ear.

Practice Text

Ask students to work with partners to revise the sentences into two or more sentences of different lengths. (For example, students might combine the last two sentences: “Her voice was low and muted and pleasing to the ear.”) Pairs should write down their sentences and be prepared to read them to the class and explain how varying sentence lengths improved the text.

Share Practice Sentences

Bring students together and invite partners to read aloud their revised sentences and explain what they changed. 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 just learned that it’s important to use sentences of different lengths when we write. Using sentences of different lengths helps keep the readers’ interest, and it helps our writing flow smoothly from sentence to sentence. As you draft and revise your biography, remember to vary your sentences by writing some that are short and some that are longer.

Encourage students to focus on using a variety of sentence lengths in 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 a section from their biographies that includes sentences of different lengths.

Strategies to Support ELs

Beginning
While the rest of the class works on the partner practice activity, work one on one with beginning ELs. Encourage them to draw a picture of a family member doing an activity at home. Then ask them to tell you about their pictures. Expand on their ideas with simple sentences.

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: biography/la biografía; different/diferente.