Use Complex Sentences

Objectives
In this mini-lesson, students will:
- Learn how complex sentences are formed.
- Practice drafting complex sentences.
- 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.

1. Focus

Explain Complex Sentences
Say: A sentence at its most basic includes a subject and a verb, and it often includes a direct object, too. But, just as it would get boring if you had to eat the same thing at every meal, it would get boring if all we wrote and read were simple sentences. A complex sentence adds variety to your writing. A complex sentence is made up of an independent clause and a dependent clause. The dependent clause needs the independent clause; without it, it would be a sentence fragment. But the dependent clause adds detail and interest to the sentence. For example, listen to this complex sentence: “After we got home from the vet, Spot hid under the desk.” The independent clause, “Spot hid under the desk,” is a complete thought and can stand on its own; the dependent clause, “After we got home from the vet,” would be a fragment without the independent clause. It does give us information, however, about why Spot hid under the desk. Complex sentences are often used in biographies to provide connected details about a person’s life in the same sentence. Today I’m going to show you how to use complex sentences in your writing.

Model Using Complex Sentences
Display the modeling text on chart paper or using the interactive whiteboard resources. Ask students to listen as you read the sentences aloud.

Although she was still living in her palace, Cleopatra was a virtual prisoner of Octavian.

Modeling Text
Say: In this sentence, the dependent clause is “although she was still living in her palace.” This is a sentence part that has a subject (she) and a verb phrase (was still living) but needs the rest of the sentence to be understood. The independent clause is “Cleopatra was a virtual prisoner of Octavian.” Note that this clause could stand on its own as a complete sentence. But adding the dependent clause allows the writer to make a complex sentence and put two connected pieces of information together. Using complex sentences allows writers to vary their sentence structures and make their writing more interesting.
2. Rehearse

Practice Writing Complex Sentences

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

Antony had lost the battle with Octavian. He believed Cleopatra was dead. He must have despaired of having anything to live for.

Ask students to work with partners to revise the sentences by combining two or more of the sentences into a complex sentence. (For example: “Once he believed Cleopatra was dead, he must have despaired of having anything to live for.”) Pairs should write down their sentences and be prepared to read them to the class and explain how using a complex sentence improved the text.

Share Practice Sentences

Bring students together and invite partners to read aloud their revised sentences and explain how they wrote their complex sentences. 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 using complex sentences is a good way to vary the sentence structures in your writing. Remember that a complex sentence is made up of a main, or independent, clause and a dependent clause. Unlike the main clause, the dependent clause cannot stand on its own. As you write your biographies, look for opportunities to use complex sentences.

Encourage students to find ways to use complex sentences 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 examples of complex sentences they’ve written in their biographies.

Strategies to Support ELs

Beginning

While the rest of the class works on the partner practice activity, work one on one with beginning ELs to practice writing complete simple sentences about a person they know. Use gestures to ensure comprehension. Model saying and writing sentences for students. Say: Sara is my friend. Sara is an artist. Ask students to say and act out their sentences. Help students write the sentences on chart paper.

Intermediate and Advanced

Pair ELs with fluent English speakers during the partner activity.