

## Sentence of the Week

The activities below are adapted from Jeff Anderson's  
*Mechanically Inclined*, Stenhouse Publishers, 2005

### Week 1: "The Two-Word Sentence" (Subjects, Verbs, and Fragments)

#### Day 1: Introduce the rule.

1. Write the three mentor sentences on the board. Ask students to tell what they notice about the three sentences.
  - a. "They race." -- Jerry Spinelli, *Loser*
  - b. "Maria flinched." -- Nancy Farmer, *House of the Scorpion*
  - c. "Louie snorted." -- Graham Salisbury, *Night of the Howling Dogs*
2. Explain the rule. It might sound something like this: "I am so glad that you noticed so quickly that all of these sentences only have 2 words. Did you know that a sentence could only have 2 words? It's true. In order for something to be a true sentence, it has to have two things: a subject and a verb. A subject tells us who or what did something. A verb tells us what they did or what they are. When we are writing or reading, if we want to know whether a group of words is a complete sentence, we ask ourselves: Who or what did something? What did they do or what are they? If we can't answer one or both of these questions, then it is not a complete sentence."
3. Reveal 1-2 more examples.
  - a. "Tad watched." -- Stephen King, *Cujo*
  - b. "Gerhard grins." -- Susan Bartoletti, *The Boy Who Dared*
4. Ask the students to write 1-2 examples of their own.
5. Explain the weekly assignment. This might sound something like, "Now that you have had some practice with looking at and writing two-word sentences, I want you to keep your eyes open for them this week in your reading. When you find a two-word sentence, ask yourself those 2 questions-- Who or what did something? What did they do or what are they?—to be sure it has a subject and a verb. Then, copy down the sentence onto one of these sticky notes. Be sure to write down the title of the book, magazine, or newspaper where you found it. Bring me the example. If it is correct, you can add it to our chart. I would like for each of you to find 3 examples this week. Now, of course, many sentences have more than 2 words. The reason we are looking for 2-word sentences is because it will get you in the habit of looking for subjects and verbs. Also, many times, when we find two-word sentences, the verbs are very descriptive and powerful."

#### Day 2: Pare down longer sentences to identify subjects and verbs.

During day 2, the board work will be quick. The idea here is to just be sure that students can identify a subject and verb in a sentence.

**Boardwork:** Can you find the subject and verb in these sentences?  
"Helmuth turns the dial." *The Boy Who Dared* (easy)

“In this manner he worked all of one day and much of the next until he achieved the desired effect.” *The Seer of Shadows* (a little more complex)

**Day 3-4: PASS-type practice items**

The following items may be used on days 3-4 for PASS-type practice and sentence-writing practice.

1. Three of the following items are fragments. One item is a sentence. Circle the sentence.
  - a. Over the hill beside the farm.
  - b. Before class began, Mark visited his locker.
  - c. The girl with the long, curly, blonde hair.
  - d. Went to the grocery store with Grandma, Grandpa, and Willie.
  
2. Three of the following items are sentences. One is a fragment. Circle the fragment.
  - a. Ashley whistled.
  - b. The girls jumped rope.
  - c. They all watched.
  - d. Too bad.
  
3. Read the fragment below. Then, on the lines provided, add to the fragment to turn it into a sentence.

Fragment: Watched t.v. all day.

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4. Making sure to include a subject and a verb, write a sentence about an accident.

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Also, on days 3-4, you may want to ask students to look at their own writing from writing workshop and try to decide if some of their sentences have subjects and verbs.

**Optional Activity: “Two-Word Sentence Smackdown”**  
**This activity is from *Mechanically Inclined* by Jeff Anderson, Stenhouse, 2005**

## Two-Word Sentence Smack Down

I ask students to write a sentence in their writer's notebooks—just one sentence. After a minute, I ask, "What'd you do?" After they share, I ask, "How did you know that was a sentence? What makes a sentence a sentence?" We discuss the fact that most of us know how to write a sentence, even if we can't explain why. I emphasize that the point of grammar is to help us write. Though we need not know every single definition, we should know a few. Competent, confident writers know that an underlying structure holds some thoughts together and separates others. So, students need to be able to break down a sentence. This knowledge is the foundation for taking writing from choppy to flowing, from run-on to controlled. Understanding this pattern is essential, for every craft move is built on it.

"You know sentences. Everyone wrote a sentence. Even those who said, *I don't know what to write* were saying a sentence. It's basic to our human nature to speak in sentences."

"So, why is it so difficult to figure them out on tests?" I ask. We discuss an oversimplified formula for the sentence: *subject + verb = a simple sentence*. It's easy to lose students' attention when we talk in abstractions, so I get their eyes on a sentence from a book as soon as possible. Using a sentence from Spinelli's *Loser*, I explain the sentence test, which will allow us to strip any sentence down to its core, subject and verb. I write *They race* on the board. "Is that a sentence? How do you know?" I explain that it's a sentence if it provides answers to the following two questions:

- Who or what did or is something? (The subject is *They*.)
- What did they do or what are they? (The verb is *race*.)

"The core of any sentence is a subject and a verb," I say. I preselect a few longer sentences from *Loser* that students can shave down to two words: a subject and a verb. We pare down a few together first, such as this one: *The lights cluster brilliantly up the*

*street at Claudia's house* (p. 174). Using the test, we determine that the subject is *lights* and the verb is *cluster*.

"Now we're ready to do a sentence smack down!" I say. Before class, I have made a wall mat like the one in the visual scaffold, with the categories "subject" and "verb." To make this activity more exciting, I play some snippets of music from a sports mix. The music adds a feeling of joy to the room, taking the dread out of grammar instruction. I play the music and yell, "Are you ready to grammar?" The music continues to play while students work with their sentences and during each transition. I put a kid in charge of the music, so I am free to emcee.

First, I divide students into groups of three and give each group a sentence (see the Appendix for the "Sentence Smack Down!" handout). Each group then follows the handout directions. After paring down their sentence, they use construction paper to record the subject on one sheet and the verb on the other. After the kids finish with the construction paper, I explain that one member of each group must assume the role of the reader, and the other two will play the parts of "subject" and "verb." Then I describe how each performance will go:

- The reader will read the whole sentence.
- The "subject" will "smack," or slap, the wall mat under the word "subject" and yell the subject of the group's sentence.
- The "verb" will follow, "smacking" the wall mat under the word "verb" and yelling the verb of the sentence.
- The reader will read the whole sentence again.

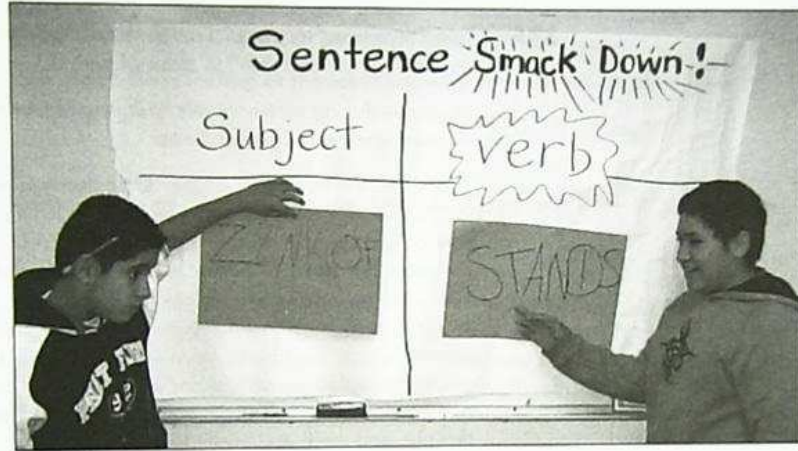
To illustrate, a group takes a sentence: *He reaches back to touch the door*. The group pares the sentence down to the subject (*He*) and verb (*reaches*). After choosing roles, the "subject" writes *He* large enough for the class to see on one piece of construction paper. The "verb" writes *reaches* and surrounds it with exploding marks to connote action.

When called to the front, the reader reads, "He reaches back to touch the door." Next, the "subject" runs and smacks the subject side of the wall mat, yelling out "he" as well as holding up the piece of construction paper. After that, the "verb" smacks the verb side of the wall mat, yelling out "reaches." These two hold their positions at the wall mat, while the reader reads the entire sentence again.

### Visual Scaffold

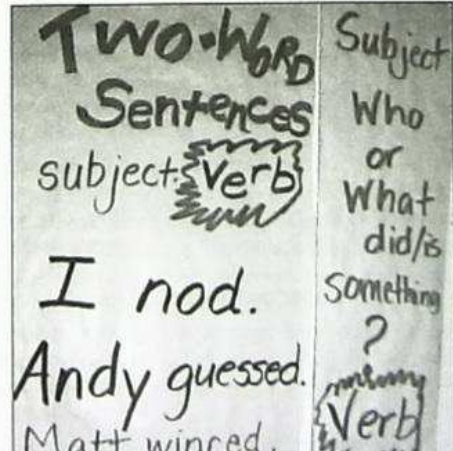
#### Simple Sentence Smack Down

Two students "smack" the subject and verb distilled from their *Loser* sentence. I developed this exercise by combining and modifying lessons from my colleague Alana Morris of Aldine ISD and Mina Shaughnessy (1977).



#### Two-Word Sentence Collection

The students and I keep a collection of two-word sentences we come across in our reading. I return to this wall chart again and again whenever I want to revisit what the "core" of a sentence is.



### Day 5: Quiz Day

The included quiz has 7 items. The items on the quiz are worth 10 points each. The remaining 30 points may be earned as students find examples of two-word sentences in their writing. If they find 3 examples, plus they get all 7 items correct, then they earn a 100. However, if you would like to add items to this quiz or make changes for your classroom, feel free to adjust. (Note: There are only 5 items, but item number 3 has three fragments that must be identified.)



Name \_\_\_\_\_

**Sentence of the Week Quiz: Week One**

**For items 1-2, circle the letter of the item that is a complete sentence.**

1. a. Fell into the gutter and scraped his knee.  
b. Beside the teacher's desk, in the cabinet.  
c. She told him to stop.  
d. The boy with the red hair and dark blue shirt.
  
2. a. Alice wrote.  
b. Two dogs.  
c. Before the bell rang.  
d. Andy and his friend Jim.

**3. Read the following paragraph, which contains fragments. Underline the fragments.**

Last week, my mom and I planned to go shopping. I was hoping that she would buy me a new pair of jeans, but that didn't happen. The security guard outside the mall. He told us that we couldn't go into the mall, because a robbery had taken place. I couldn't believe it! A robbery! We saw police cars all around the mall. All the red and blue lights. We didn't get to go shopping, but it sure was exciting!

**4. Convert the following fragment into a sentence.**

Fragment: The elderly teacher.

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**5. On the lines below, write a sentence about someone you know that includes a subject and a verb.**

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