

Transcript EDUC172 Part 3-02

So far in this third part of our course, looking at writing across the curriculum, we've broken language down into different components. We've said that there were brick words and they kind of occupy the main vocabulary that you use to teach your discipline, to teach the subject that you teach in school.

And how to introduce students to thinking about words, and what they mean in your subject, by doing exercises that help them to build vocabulary, to build visual schemas of understanding, helping them to read those words aloud, and say them so that they have better recall of the key terms that you use. And also ways that you can apply, even during the writing process, you can apply those same key words to assist students in their information literacies, in their ability to search for information in books or online, if they have access to the internet, or information sources, like that. And all these different things, ways of exploring the vocabulary in your subject area help students to become better readers and to become better writers.

So, we looked at vocabulary and words, sometimes word clusters and nouns and things, and we've also looked at some phrases, so we had a quick introduction to working with things like prepositional phrases, and what have you, so those units that orient the reader, that help to connect the different concepts, give orientation this fits within this and, this is related, or by this, this produces this, those kinds of relationships that are brought together in the language, through function words.

So, as we move up in the structures, we also have the idea of the complex sentence. So, complex sentences are also a typical part of most really formal and culturally infused writing practices and the genres that are part of them.

So, if one looks at legal documents, for example, one sees quite often elaborate, long sentences. They attempt to be constantly defining the terms that they are using, because that's the nature of the legal practice, is to debate the law, the written law.

In many other genres as well, of course, and many scholarly forms of writing also use a lot of complex sentences. Now, when students are first learning to write and learning to speak in a language, their writing tends to happen in a simple sentence.

We see three different kinds of sentences that are available if we want to break them into three categories. We have simple sentences, we have compound sentences, and compound sentences are two sentences, that are two simple sentences joined by a conjunction like "and," "but," sometimes even "then" is used like a conjunction. "So," is used as a conjunction, sometimes. And, in working with more complex sentences, when we introduce one new element, that is, the clause, we can start to build complex sentences.

So, those are the three different kinds. The simple sentence, which usually just contains a noun and a verb, and whatever other information attaches it, but it has a main noun and a main verb.

A compound sentence has two main nouns and two main verbs, so two main sentences, really joined by an "and".

When a complex sentence uses a clause, it subordinates part of the sentence. So, that there is a main verb and a main noun, and then a subordinate noun and verb or subject and verb. And, when we do that, we have more ability to arrange parts of the sentence, so where different parts of the sentence go in order to make the meaning more clear.

Does it begin? Already looking at certain kind of phrases, how you can do that with a prepositional phrase. And, now it is important to think of not only how we can help students to be able to read complex language but also to be able to write with complex sentences. And, this is something that we can do as a part of our practice of teaching a subject area. And, one of the keys to this is look at concept of sentence combining.

So, we'll take a quick little look now at this idea here.

Where we can start to think about sentence combining. This is a very useful technique. It is easily done and it is easily done within the context of the teaching subject matter. So, you can take any text that either you've written and, we will at the end of this short talk, you'll take your own text and break it down as I have and then we can see about rearranging it. And, we can also do this with the textbooks we teach so this can be a part of scaffolding, learner support around both reading and writing. So, that they are becoming more familiar and comfortable with reading more complex sentences in textbooks, and thus, also able to write complex sentences.

What I've done here is just take one of the sentences from part four of this section of the course and here, what I've done is break it down into a series of statements which are all combined within this one sentence. Now, remember, this sentence was written under a three-minute time constraint. So, it is what it is.

And we did a couple of changes, if you'll recall, using Gallagher's STAR techniques, so here, we've used the STAR. We've added some features, but essentially it is the same sentence that was originally written under time constraints and in a hurry.

But, this is just to look at how ideas and concepts get not just compounded but also complexified. You'll see that what I've done is to take this passage here and break it into a series of, oops! little error there, and break it into series of individual sentences. So, instead of the original which said "today there is a different medium operating within many educational paradigms, the internet has become a central focus of many new curriculum developments and student are as likely to have Google searches and maps, Facebook profiles, Twitter feeds, or weblogs be central to their information acquisition as they are to be carrying home large educational tomes."

So, that was a long and quite wieldy sentence. It doesn't entirely work. It's a positive phrase right here, which names the things that's being described before it, this "different medium". So, let's just try to break that down into some individual, more simple sentences. "There are different media." Okay, there is...

"A new media is operating within educational paradigms."

Okay, so there we have our simple subject, noun and here is our present continuous form of the verb, main verb of that sentence. In other words "media is operating".

And the next one,
"It is called the internet."

The next one,
"New curriculum developments place emphasis on using the Internet."

And you can see here, all I am doing is I'm taking apart the simple idea that's being expressed in the sentence above as a clause of the main sentence and here, as its own separate main noun and verb, or main subject and predicate.

So, as we take a look at the sentences that are demonstrated here, we've unpacked this somewhat lengthy and wieldy sentence. And, of course, if we look at the original sentence that's written there, it says "Today there is a different medium" and this is a funny way to pack the entire subject of the sentence into this placeholder, which is the word "there" or "there is" is just leaving a placeholder for you to announce what it is, and the rest of the sentence goes to announce it. So, the actual subject is just a placeholder of the predicate of this sentence.

But, you can see all the ideas that are being packed in as you go through.

This, of course, is an excellent process to do with one's writing. If you're writing long and complex sentences it allows you to pull apart some of the work that you're writing and take a look at it a little more closely and allow it to be a little bit easier to read.

It would be possible now to go and change parts of this sentence because, as we can see, we can change the meaning of this by taking the latter part of the sentence, here "students are as likely to have" and you can put it there. And because you can swap the sentence around like this where this word "and" that I just deleted, would join these two sentences. So, therefore, we know it is the, we know that that conjunction is making a compound sentence, because those are, are two individual simple sentences with main verb joined there.

And so, we see that we go "and today there is a different medium operating"... you go. It doesn't, of course, improve the sentence, but that's what you have.

What I'd like you to do is to take any sentence that you've written, which is a complex sentence, and to break it apart into as many parts as you can. This helps us to understand how to reverse engineer or to build them back up into more complex sentences.

Typically, what we would do is we would give students a list of simple sentences that they can combine. And you can direct this toward the kinds of genres you want them to write in.

So, if it's narrative, the sentences would look slightly different. "They go to the store" "store." "The store is a block away". "They like to run to the store". Oops! Sorry. "store". "They run even when it is very hot outside". "The air is so hot it burns the lungs". Here, I've given you a quick selection of five sentences and, the idea being I'm setting this up in a narrative context. And now you could go ahead and write that into a single complex sentence.

So, why don't we do that? Just take that example and write it into a single sentence that makes one grammatically correct statement, but uses clauses to put the ideas together. We'll do that

right now just as practice. And now, what I'd like to do is to think about how we can use this same technique to develop students' ability to work in, in more academic form of writing. The clause is often structured, at least in English, around question words.

So it can be relatively easy to identify clauses when they arrive. There are question words such as "when," "how," "why," "where," "who..." And, of course, we also use "which" and, in some cases, we use adjective clauses built around that. These words are very helpful to you as a teacher to be able to identify when students are using a complex language and able to deal with it. This is one of the assessment techniques that you can apply when reading students' work. When they are able to work with these so-called question words however, when these words appear, used in English, and there isn't a question mark at the end of the sentence, then that means that they are clausal subordinators.

They take another, another clause and they make it subordinate to the main clause to help elaborate on what is being said in the main clause. So, they elaborate on the object of the sentence. They give more detail.

And, when, when we see them used, they would be like "he goes outside when the weather is good".

Okay. Another very simple example where you see this here, a question word or clausal subordinator, between "he" as the main subject, and "goes" as the main verb, then having this subordinate verb, it's a subordinate idea to the main idea, you can see how in language it operates the same way as it does in thinking. That's how we have to think.

So we organize taxonomies or structures where there're hierarchies of knowledge so we have a, for example, a phylum and within a phylum, or a kingdom and within that many phyla, and within that species and genera, and so you can see the organization of the taxonomies of biology, for example, using some keywords from biology there. They are also structured in a similar way where we allow certain things to be subordinate in the ordering of concepts and ideas, knowledge, understanding and likewise language.

So, when we see this kind of use of it, we can see that when you have a clause, and in this case, you have your main subject and your subordinate subject here, you can also switch this around, so that the subordinate clause, which is this part of your sentence, goes before the main clause and it should make sense.

So, oops! There. And, it should make sense.

So, "when the weather is good, he goes outside". You can see that it can be quite easy, therefore, to provide students the opportunity to start working with clause structures in their writing, to allow them to qualify statements they're making and elaborate on them, so that they can write with more precision. And in doing so, they can more closely appreciate or more deeply appreciate the fine points, the subtle points that you are trying to make about the content that you are delivering.

In order to make those subtle points we need to structure the knowledge so that they understand how it's arranged and in language we'll do that using clauses. We also do that using

phrases, but they provide a kind of glue to hold the whole thing together. The clause allows you to move things around, so just as a very basic approach to the idea of a clause, those kinds of words alert you to this basic clause structure in language.

So, when you see things like that, you can really, you can really start to, to appreciate how to work with students and get them to answer questions about a topic, basically to write the questions out when they're trying to express their ideas, you're doing sentence combining, so you hand them these sort of things that answer a bunch of questions that are like:

How was this "there are different media", well, how is this affecting things? What is it called? Though we forgot "what" up there. Let's add that.

Oops! There we go. So we have that.

So you know: Where is it? What is it? How is it happening? When is it happening? Today, right? What is it? It's the Internet. You know, how are students learning or getting information? Through...you know, information acquisition. So, it's basically different sentences that go to express the different questions or ways that we might think about them.

Therefore, you could combine this group of sentences into a number of different patterns. They can move forward and the different clauses can be embedded differently than was in the original here, for sure. That wouldn't necessarily be the best, but it was one way, just as an example.

So, what I'd like you to do now is to take some of your own writing or take another little passage from a textbook with the complex sentence and break it apart into all the different statements that that sentence is putting together, and is embedding as clause structures within the complex sentence. And break them apart. Make them a series of simple statements. And then, you can recombine them into a new sentence, that is, your own.

And this practice is great to do, not only as practice for ourselves, but it's great to do with students. This is an important way that they can start to develop more complex writing abilities. And so from here on, we'll try that and then we'll move up to writings at the level other sentence and the paragraph.

So go ahead, and do that on your own work, now.