

TEACHERS' GUIDE TO THE COLLEGE WRITING GUIDE

This teacher guide will explain how to make the best use of John Maguire's College Writing Guide (CWG). It outlines the full 14-week readability course, which you may follow in whole or in part.



The CWG is structured differently from other textbooks--because it has a different notion—a behavioral notion--of what writing is and how it should be learned. I'm going to use the first-person here, on occasion, for the sake of directness.

While there are many ways to look at writing, it can be useful to consider writing as wheels within wheels. This means writing is composed of small activities that add up and become more complex. *Writing is like reading in that it is a skill that includes other skills.*

Just as the ability to read is built up from recognizing letter shapes and the connecting letters to sounds, so the ability to write is built up from smaller skills.

Final skill	Reading with comprehension and enjoyment				
Sub-skills learned individually (partial list)	Knowing letter shapes	Knowing capitals and lower-case letters	Eye movement from left to right and top to bottom	Connecting letter shapes to sounds	Sounding out syllables and words

When you put it that way, people say, "Sure, that makes sense." The next question should be *What's on the list of smaller skills?* There's a whole bunch of picky things you can study in English—but what's the most important? I've based my course on what I think are the five key sub-skills for good writing. These skills are not just ideas—they are practices, they are things that need to be done. Students must practice them a lot and practice combining them.

To use the book properly, recognize that each of the sub-skills is important enough to deserve detailed attention. But also understand that *the skill-combination is itself a skill* and must be practiced. As you go through the CWG, you will see all lessons presented in the same sequence.

First the new skill is defined and named, and then it's practiced, first in simple ways, then in harder, and finally in combination with other skills. Think of a juggler adding more and more objects to his mix. At the end of a semester—when everything goes well—students have learned ten behaviors and can do them all at once. The first five produce readable and interesting sentences. The second five produce orderly essays.

For example, the *concrete noun* is defined as *something you can drop on your foot*. Then you practice finding and circling concrete nouns in lists of words. Then you read paragraphs and circle the concrete nouns in them. More identification practice could involve the reading of full essays while circling the concrete nouns in them. Then you write sentences with concrete nouns in them, and then paragraphs, and then even short essays,

because the purpose of learning about concrete nouns is not to identify them from lists, but to write with them, to add them into your own paragraphs and essays.

This *writing with concrete nouns* phase usually has assignments where certain ratios of concrete nouns have to be achieved. For instance, the teacher might say, “Write a 300-word profile of someone you like or hate, and make sure that 5 per cent of the words are concrete nouns. That means 15 things you can drop on your foot. After you have finished your essay, print a second copy, and circle all the concrete nouns you put in. Write the concreteness as a fraction at the bottom of the profile. For example, if you have 17 objects in a 325-word essay, the fraction to write down is 17/325.”

Later in the course, combinations will be required. Here’s an example. After students have learned about both concrete nouns and active verbs, they will have to write meeting both constraints: (1) a certain percentage of concrete nouns (as just described), and (2) another percentage of active-verb sentences.

This method of learning a distinct skill, practicing it a lot, and then combining it—it’s just common sense. That’s how we learn sports. In baseball we learn to throw, catch, field a ball, swing the bat, hit the ball, run the bases, and so on. In basketball, we learn to dribble, pass and shoot in various ways while not going out of bounds. When we can combine those things, we are playing basketball.



Learning to ride a two-wheel bike is like that. If I ask you, “Do you know how to ride a two-wheeler?” you’ll say either yes or no, because riding a two-wheeler is a single skill. It’s now a single skill for you. But you learned it in steps: getting on the bike, steering it, balancing, braking, and getting off.

Final integrated skill	<u>Riding a bike and not falling off</u>				
Sub-skills learned individually	Getting on the bike	Steering straight	Steering left or right	Braking, slowing	Getting off the bike

This readable writing course is like that. We are going learn sub-skills one at a time, with the goal of later combining them into a single skill: being a good writer.

Final integrated skill	<u>Writing clear and interesting stuff</u>				
Sub-skills learned individually	Putting in concrete nouns	Putting in people words	Putting in active verbs	Controlling avg sentence length	Editing for conciseness

Students who master these categories write extremely well.

PLEASE NOTE: In the pages below, suggested teacher comments and questions are in boldface with a red bullet, like so. • **“This bold format tells you things you can say aloud in class.”**

PART ONE: THE READABLE AND INTERESTING SENTENCE

Sequence of sub-skills

1. Subskill: Writing with concrete nouns: 2 weeks.
 2. Subskill: Writing with people words: 1 week.
 3. Subskill: Writing with active verbs: 4 weeks.
 4. Subskill: Controlling average sentence length: 1 week.
 5. Subskill: Cutting out needless words: 1 week.
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Putting in concrete nouns (Subskill 1) Textbook p 4-6. Two weeks.

Day 1. PURPOSE: Introduce the idea of the concrete noun. Practice finding them on the page. Learn that they are important. Begin writing with them. **REASON:** Vague writing is not specific enough. Putting in objects counteracts vagueness.

IN CLASS: Page 4: Have a student read the headline and text on page 4. Discuss some of the ideas in the introduction, including • **“the world is something we feel with our skin.”** Key point: good writers pay attention to objects, and we are going to train ourselves to pay attention to objects.

IN CLASS: Circle the concrete nouns in the list. Best is to assign two columns at a time, and have students circle the words that can be dropped on the foot together. Ask them to identify which nouns are concrete, and highlight any differences, because there will be. Some will call “step” a concrete noun because they are thinking of a porch step, but others will be thinking of the action of stepping, so they won’t see it as an object. Point out the disagreements. Stress that context matters.

MORE IN CLASS: If there’s time, do the object-circling in Exercise 1 on p 4.

WRITTEN HOMEWORK: Either one of the three exercises on p 4, or else assign one-page paper on any topic you want with this constraint: at least five per cent of the words must be concrete nouns.

- Day 2. PRACTICE finding concrete nouns within paragraphs. Use the readings on page 5, or any reading you want that has physical detail in it, including student work. Students will read passages for meaning once, and then a second time to circle the concrete nouns. Hit the theme hard with statements and questions:
 - **“Readers like to see things in writing.”**
 - **“What was your favorite object in this passage.”**
 - **“Why are writers interested in objects?”**

Day 3. MORE PRACTICE. Goal is not only to see objects in writing, but to feel how interesting they are. You can have students read some of the student papers in the CWG. Or you can assign homework and have them bring

in magazine articles that are interesting--and make lists of the concrete nouns in them. The overall goal is to have the concrete nouns *pop out* in the students' awareness.

Day 4, 5, 6. CONCRETE VERSUS ABSTRACT NOUNS. Page 6. During this second week on concreteness, the student should learn about abstract nouns, which are defined as the opposite of concrete. Start by reading the introduction on page 6. Definition: a concrete noun names something you can drop on your foot. An abstract noun names something you cannot. They should play with the ladder of abstraction and learn that every abstract idea relates to a concrete. *Emancipation* (idea) relates to *slavery* (idea), which relates to *shackles* (thing).

The abstract word exercise on p 6 should be done carefully in class, perhaps even over two days. You can invent games—these work! —in which half the class comes up with lists of abstract words, and the other half has to name concrete nouns that relate to them. Then the sides can swap.

Assign writing exercises for homework that will further sensitize students to issues of abstraction and concreteness. There are five unnumbered exercises at the bottom of the page. If you pretend they're numbered, numbers 1, 4 and 5 are excellent and have worked well. Theme sentence for the teacher to repeat again and again: ● **"All abstract ideas are related to concrete nouns. Whenever you hear an abstract word, you can go looking for the objects that relate to it.** ● **Readers love to see objects."**

Games for practicing concrete nouns.

- A. "Size Warp" 10 minutes. Students in teams free associate the names of concrete objects at different sizes and scales. Described in Exercise 2 on page 2 CWG.
- B. "Bring that Thing!" 15 minute activity. Teacher writes list of 5-8 abstract nouns on the board (ideas, concepts, emotions). Each student in private writes down a concrete noun that relates to it in her own mind. Teacher can walk the room looking at the student lists as they are constructed. When each student has written the correct number of objects, teacher leads a discussion of what the objects are, recording them also on the board if there's space. Described in Exercise 1 on p 2 CWG. Typical objects dreamed up for "religion" might include Bible, crucifix, church, temple, Torah, Buddha statue, candle, hymnal, pew.
- C. "Stump the Chumps." 30 minutes. This is an elaboration of "Bring That Thing" in which the students pair up as partners. Half the partnerships work on the noun team, to make lists of odd objects. The other work on the idea team, to make lists of ideas. The noun teams read their nouns, and pick the most difficult. The idea teams have to come up with an abstract that might relate. For example: *ice cream* might call forth the abstraction *coldness* or *frigidity* or *entertainment*. And abstraction *entertainment*, conversely might *ice cream* as an object. Object of the game: to practice going back and forth from between the realm of ideas and the realm of things.

Putting in people words (Subskill 2)

Textbook pages 14-15. 1 week

Day 1. PURPOSE: Introduce the idea of “people words.” This is Unit I, Lesson 8, on pp 14-15. There are seven types of people words, and students need to know all of them. They must practice finding them on the page, learn that they are important, and begin writing with them. People words are analogous to concrete nouns. Concrete nouns name physical inanimate things, such as “coffee cup.” People words name or suggest physical animate human beings, such as “Thomas Jefferson.”

IN CLASS: Page 4: Have a student read the headline and text on page 14. Discuss the idea that we are all interested in people. Make the point that the reader likes to see people on the page. Perhaps ask students to name characters they enjoyed reading about in the past. ● **“The name Harry Potter tells you he’s a person and he’s interesting.”**

IN CLASS: ● **“Concrete nouns are easy to find because they name things you can drop on your foot. People words are more complicated. There are seven (7) types of people words. You need to know all seven types. You are required to memorize them.”**

Have seven students read each of the seven people words, listed from one to seven. The aim is recognition of people words in a piece of writing. ● “Just as you can decide to put objects into your writing, you can decide to put people into your writing. You use one of these seven types of words.”

IN CLASS PRACTICE. Direct attention to the passages labeled 1 and 2 on page 14. Ask students either alone or in teams of two, to circle the people words in Passage 1. Helpful hint: ● “Remember that some of the people words are very small: *he, she, we, they* and so on. Don’t forget to circle them.” Discuss what the students have found. Then go on and do the same recognition exercise for Passage 2.

HOMEWORK: Recognition practice. Continue the in-class activity at home. Circle the people words in Passages 1 and 2 on page 15.

Day 2 ELABORATION OF THE IDEA. Ask for volunteers to name all seven types people words. Write them on the board as the student calls them out. If the student can’t name all seven from memory, ask the rest of the class to chip in and name the missing types. ● “You will be using these seven categories from now on in the course, so you must have them memorized.”

- “Why are we as writers interested in people words? Because the reader wants to see people.”
- “With no people visible, how does the reader feel?”

PRACTICE. Read aloud the student paper “Admiration” on p 55, looking for the people words and the concrete nouns. Divide the class in half. Have one half read “Admiration” and circle the people words. Have the other half read it and circle the concrete nouns. (NB: the word *family* is not a people word.) Then discuss.

- “Why is this paper interesting to you as a reader? What kinds of people words are used? What is your favorite concrete noun here?”

Point out that different people find different concrete nouns interesting.

WRITING. CONSCIOUS INSERTION OF PEOPLE WORDS. Do this in the last 20 minutes of class. Use the “Doors Open Lowell” passage on p 15. ● **“This is a news article about a public artistic event that has absolutely no people in it. You will rewrite it and add people words. This is what we do when something we’ve written has**

no people in it.” Divide the class into teams of two and have each team produce its own rewritten passage. Emphasize both names and direct quotations. Last 5 minutes of class: Have several of the teams stand and read aloud their new versions with people added. Ask the listeners to listen for the people words.

WRITTEN HOMEWORK: Assign a one-page essay on any topic you like or have used in the past but add this constraint: ● “You’ve got to have lots of people words in it, including names of people, personal pronouns, and direct quotations.”

Day 3 SHARPENING THE IDEA. Again, ask the students to name the seven categories and write them on the board in a list to be used in the class.

Review the people-words homework. Purpose: sharpened perception of people words. Either ask for three volunteers or scan the student papers and decide for yourself—but have three students stand and read their people-focused papers aloud. Ask the students who are listening to make notes of the people words they hear, and which of the seven categories they fall into. After each paper has been heard, discuss the kinds of people words the writer used. “What did we hear? Is this mostly names, blood relative terms? What about direct quotations?”

IN CLASS. Sharpen awareness of people-words with a longer reading exercise. Reading: “A 2-Year Detour” by Student Elizabeth Copeland, on page 41. Students like this student paper because it’s about having a tough time as a freshman, and also because it’s vividly written. It’s a seven-paragraph essay. Pick seven students to stand and read each paragraph aloud, as the rest of the class follows along. Lead a discussion: ● *Is this interesting? Why? What’s the best part of it? What surprised you? Did you notice any people words?*

Sharpen the focus, if you have time, by dividing the class in half. Ask Half A to circle the people words in the first four paragraphs, and Half B to circle them in the last three. When they have done that, ● ask students to indicate what they noticed as they circled the words. ● *What is this student writer doing with people words that you don’t usually do?*

If there’s time, use the same Half A and Half B technique to have students circle the concrete nouns in the piece.

WRITING HOMEWORK: Conscious insertion of people words in a paragraph. Assign the second-last exercise on page 15, which requires that the same paragraph be done twice, first with less specific people words like “my brother” and then with names.

OPTIONAL WRITING HOMEWORK: A one-page analytical paper titled “How Elizabeth Copeland uses people words.”

PUZZLER FOR ADVANCED STUDENTS: ● “Is there a hierarchy among people words? In terms of reader impact, how would you rank them, from the most impactful to the least?”

Putting in active verbs (Subskill 3)
Textbook pages 7-13. Four weeks.
+ Writing three 1,000-word papers.

Note to teachers. This four-week intensive study of actives verbs is the core of this course. We keep the grammatical terms to a minimum, using only three grammar terms: *active verb*, *to-be verb*, and *passive verb*. We want students able to edit their own *to-be verbs* and *passive verbs* into *active verbs* at will.

Reviewing and practicing the earlier skills of concrete nouns and people words must continue as the new active-verb skill is learned. Awareness of nouns, people words and verbs will increase rapidly, because students will closely read: (1) their own work, (2) other student’s work, and (3) short professional essays.

By the middle of this section, in week 5, students will have three writing skills in their toolbox: concrete nouns, people language, and active verbs.

Students will now be writing longer assignments of about 900 to 1000 words. Preparation for and discussion of these longer assignments will take lots of class time. When the papers are handed in they will be discussed and critiqued in class. The three long assignments are, in order, “A Path Through the World” (the “walk” paper, 29), “A Setback or Failure in Life” (28), and “Contrary to Popular Opinion” (28).

Weeks 4, 5, 6 and 7.			
Syntax: Mastery of active-verb writing & editing. Continuing practice with concrete nouns & people.			
Composition: Production of three 1,000-word essays, while meeting numerical standards for active verbs, concrete nouns and people-language.			
	“Walk” paper, 1000 words	“Setback” paper, 1000 words	“Contrary” paper, 1000 words

Day-by-day breakdown of weeks 4, 5, 6 and 7.												
Summary of active verb section. 12 50-minute class meetings, half on verb topics, half on preparing for three 1,000-word assignments, Walk, Setback and Contrary. Blank boxes in the first line mean "continue active verb work."												
Day	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12
Verb Instruction	Active verbs p7	P 8	Editing p 9		Fixing <i>there-is</i> sentences P 10		Passive verb fix (10)	Passives (12)		One-syllable active verbs (13)		
Composition (Longer Writing assignments)			Read sample walk paper	Assign walk paper (p 29)	Discuss student progress on "walk"	Discuss student progress on walk	Walk paper due. Read sample setback paper. Assign setback. (p 28)	Discuss walk papers as handed in.	Read more sample setback papers. Discuss student planning for the assignment.	Setback paper due. Read sample contrary paper. Assign. (p 28).	Discuss setback papers as handed in.	Pre-pare for contrary paper.
Small assignments					Things as doers	Game				HW: Ex 1 (p 13)	HW: Ex 2 (p 13)	
Overall theme:	"The reader likes to read concrete, human, active-verb writing. You can learn to give it to him."											

VERBS DAY 1—NEW TOPIC ACTIVE VERBS. Introduction. Page 7. Read and close attention to all the examples. Theme sentence to repeat during every class: ● **“Your reader loves to see things happening on the page. Active verbs make things happen. We will write with active verbs to be interesting to the reader.”**

OVERVIEW ORIENTING STATEMENT: “During the next four weeks, you will be mastering the active verb and also doing three rather difficult 1,000-word papers. These papers will test your ability to write with active verbs. “

ACTIVITY: Students do items 1-9 on page 8.

OPTIONAL INCLASS READING: The paragraph at the bottom of page 8, “Small town.” Ellie Makumbi’s “Home” paragraph p 54. Have them notice the verbs, circling them, perhaps.

HOMEWORK: Items 9-16, page 8.

VERBS DAY 2. Active verbs. Correct student homework (items 9-16). Discuss the verbs in any passage the teacher admires for verbal energy, including “Small town” or “Home” (54) or “The small screen” (p39).

Discussion of active verbs from now on should stress that they are visual and please the reader. To encourage student confidence, ask students to identify verbs and to comment on them. For example:

● **“Susan, what’s your favorite verb in the first two paragraphs of Peter’s paper? Why do you like it, in your own words? What do the rest of you say? Anyone want to nominate a different verb as the best of the day?”**

The goal, today and for the rest of the course, is to get students to **see the verb** in the sentence and to **have an opinion about it**.

VERBS DAY 3 NEW TOPIC: MAKING “BE” VERBS ACTIVE. This is a crucial skill that students don’t know about it, but once they learn it their writing will get much better.

First step is to make them hyper-aware of the various forms of “be” in a sentence. Second step is to demand that they recast a “be” sentence into an active-verb sentence. The forms of “be” are of course *is, are, was, were, will be, has been, had been* and *will have been*. I often say, ● **“Track down *was* and *were* and get rid of them!”**

Page 9. Have a student read the opening explanation. Explain that they are going to learn to change “be” verbs to active verbs. IN CLASS, focus on Examples 1-10. Go slowly. Work through each change. Some of them can be done in discussion. Students can edit shorter sentences, like #7 and # 9, alone and their answers discussed. It’s worth an entire 50-minute class to get students on board with the idea of finding “to be” verbs and switching them. It’s a game they’ll get into.

HOMEWORK: Assign Examples 11-16 for homework.

PREPARATION FOR WRITING. Since the first assignment will be “A Path Through the World,” tell them about it. Point out the assignment on p 29. AS AN EXAMPLE OF THE PAPER THEY WILL BE WRITING, READ ALOUD IN CLASS Jason Patera’s “Going Home,” page 46. ● **“This is what an A grade looks like on this assignment. This is what you will be aiming for.”**

VERBS DAY 4 Review the previous material, stressing the fact that *be* verbs can be made into active verbs in all cases. ● **“We are learning to write with all active verbs.” “The reader can’t see anything happening with *was* or *were* or *is*. There’s no action in the *be* verb. That’s why we change everything we can to active. The reader likes to see things.”**

OPTIONAL: In-class reading of student work on pp 54 and 55, asking them to find the verbs and circle them.

PURPOSE: Training students to see the verbs in the sentences and to notice how they make a sentence interesting.

● **“Part of being readable is being interesting, and verbs make things interesting. Let’s read a student paper from someone just like you (“Admiration,” p 55) and notice how the verbs hold it together. What’s the most surprising verb you see there?”**

Day 4: ASSIGN FIRST 1000 WORD PAPER: A Path Through the World, page 29. Read the assignment description aloud to the students. Students may think writing about a walk is a snap. Correct them. ● **“The walk itself will probably take an hour, because you are taking notes, and writing the paper will take probably three hours. So this is a four-hour project at least. Budget your time for it.”**

VERBS DAY 5 NEW TOPIC: FIXING “THERE” SENTENCES. Fixing there-are and there-is sentences, page 10. The page is self-explanatory. Present this as a special case of changing the “be” verb. Basic idea: any *there-are* or *there-is* or *there-was* sentence can be changed to an active-verb sentence. Students find this simple idea fascinating. Stress the notion that “there are” sentences must undergo two fixes: they need both an actor and an action. Do the example exercises in class; discuss how students correct them.

● **“From now on, plan to change all your there-are sentences. I will accept very few of them, maybe one per page. You are responsible for getting rid of them.”**

OPTIONAL PREPARATION FOR WRITING. The current assignment, the walk, requires students to use active verbs to describe things they see on a walk. So this is a good time to point out that ● **“Things can do actions; it’s not just people that do actions. Rain drops fall, trash cans roll in the wind, tree tops sway, and shingles lift off roofs.”**

In all these cases inanimate things are the doers. Jason Patera’s model piece has many examples of non-humans doing actions: *chaos reigns, sidewalk allows, Massachusetts Avenue passes over*, etc. You could ask students to find those examples in Patera, or you could send them on a mini-walk in teams of two for 20 minutes and ask each team to come back with 20 word-pairs in which things move or act.

VERBS DAY 6. Put active verbs on hold. Review the definition of a concrete noun; also review in detail the 7-part definition of people words. Read short papers aloud in class and go looking for those nouns and people words. Any of the student papers will do; pick one that is close to your students’ abilities. A simple one is “Jesus Wants Me for a Sunbeam.” More difficult: “A Walk Through Boston,” p 59a.

PREPARATION FOR WRITING: The Walk paper will be due at the next class, Day 7, so it’s a good time to discuss what students have done, where they have walked, and what kind of problems they are having.

- **“Where’d you do your walk, Greg? Okay—did you take notes? Good. What’s the most interesting thing you saw? Are you blocked or stuck in writing your paper? Tell us where you are stuck.”**

Twenty to 30 minutes is not too much for this discussion, which will serve to convince students that the paper is a serious project and not, as some will assume, an easy-A goof. This discussion will improve student papers a good deal.

OPTIONAL PANTOMINE GAME. (REVERSE CHARADES)

Do this on Day 4, or on any day in the semester when interest in verbs is flagging. The class as a whole, or in teams, makes a written list of interesting verbs. Once the lists are ready, two expressive students—this works best if it’s a male and a female—go to the front of the class. At a reasonable pace, class members call out the verbs. The pantomimists act them out silently. This is a lot of fun, with the serious point that active verbs, generally, suggest motion. Full description of game on page 3, CWG.

REVIEW THE ASSIGNMENT’S CONSTRAINTS from page 29. They are listed as Goal 1, 2 and 3. The style constraints are objects, people, and active verbs in the present tense. The structural constraint is that the student must “make clear your starting point...and where you are going.” Patera’s piece does this well. “I burst from the front doors” marks the start of the walk, and “following my carefully planned route back home” announces the endpoint.

CHALLENGE FOR ADVANCED STUDENTS: Read “A Walk Through Boston” for homework, noticing the objects and the verbs, and be prepared to tell the class at the next meeting about the most powerful sentence you found.

VERBS DAY 7 NEW TOPIC: FLIPPING PASSIVE VERBS. P 11. Identifying passive verbs and fixing them. Read the opening of the unit carefully aloud, perhaps even twice, once yourself and once by a student. Stress the idea that flipping a passive active is harder when the doer of the action has been left out. Students often misunderstand this. ● **“When the sentence is passive, but no doer of the action is available, you must invent one.”**

Common student misperception: Some students will confuse “past” (tense) with “passive.” Distinguish these two carefully and fully. ● **“A verb in the past tense is about something that happened *in the past*. A passive verb is about an action that is being received. It doesn’t have to do with time, but with who is doing the action and who is receiving it.”**

Go through the four step-recipe for fixing passives carefully. Enlist students to read the passive sentences and then the active sentences that result.

EXERCISE. Do a few of the sentences at the bottom of the page in class. (1, 2, and 7). ● **“We are turning these passive sentences active. We are recasting the sentence. We now have a doer and an action.”**

HOMEWORK: The remainder of the exercises on p 10.

Day 7: ASSIGN SECOND 1000-WORD PAPER: A SETBACK OR FAILURE.

P 28. Have a student carefully read the assignment aloud. Although the length is not mentioned in the written assignment, make it 900-100 words. Strongly emphasize the “quality standards.” This paper requires more than the Walk paper, because many people words must be included, if not all seven types, then at least names, quotations, and personal pronouns.

If there’s time, the class then reads aloud Elizabeth Copeland’s “A Two Year Detour,” on page 41. This is a perfect “setback paper”—it’s what A work looks like. This is their model paper for this assignment.

VERBS DAY 8. More work fixing passives. Page 12. These sentences are more difficult to flip than the previous bunch because many more sentences are lacking actors. Almost all these sentences require the addition of an actor. ● **“You can invent whatever actor you want—anyone you think can do the action, you can use.”** Do about half the sentences in class and assign the other half as homework.

CRITIQUE OF LAST PAPER. You will have picked 3-4 of the best papers from the Walk assignment, Xeroxed them into a packet. Pass them around and critique one or two of them, in discussion with the class. Focus of the critique is: concrete nouns, active verbs and clarity. Do not permit students to say whether they liked a paper or not. They are to comment about the writing and give their opinions about nouns, verbs and readability. Purpose: practice seeing objects and verbs in a piece of writing and evaluating their contribution to the paper as a whole. ● **“This kind of comment is off-base: “I liked this paper a lot.” But you can say, “I liked the cluster of concrete nouns in the second paragraph, especially the chain saw and the tea cup.”**

PREPARATION FOR WRITING NEXT PAPER: Ask students about their progress on the setback paper, what they are going to write about, what their difficulties are. This is a narrative paper, so ask where the story starts and where it ends. ● **“What interesting people and objects will be in your paper?”** I let students write about any event—the more painful the better—except rape or sexual abuse. Most of the time, all setback papers are available to be read. Do not set up a situation where half the class is writing private papers that cannot be read in class; this will ruin the exercise. ● **“All your papers are going to be read by the class, so if you have any problems with your topic, see me and we’ll choose a different topic.”**

VERBS DAY 9. Continuations of verb practice, critiquing of the Walk paper and brain-storming of work on the setback paper, which is due at the next class. Suggestion: remind writers that the narrative is to be at least 90 per cent reporting of facts. Opinions are to be kept to 10 per cent of the paper, and delivered at the end of the paper, as a lesson learned or not learned.

Students will be highly aware of verbs at this point and should be able to find and critique the verbs in all kinds of mediocre and good writing. You may have time to try any of the games listed below.

If some students report not being well-prepared, send them out of the classroom with a teammate and have them talk the story out as a way to loosen up and get started. Coach the listener to ask for names, actions and objects.

VERBS DAY 10. NEW TOPIC. THE ONE-SYLLABLE ACTIVE VERB.

Collect setback papers.

The one-syllable active verb. This is the last new information in the verb unit, and it introduces students to the idea that the best active verb is a one-syllable active verb, because all the energy is concentrated in a single sound. As before, begin the lesson by reading the opening material at the top of the page.

They should notice that combining these short Anglo-Saxon verbs with certain adverbs produces easy-to-say high-energy sentences. **Student often overlook these short verbs and therefore undervalue them. We want to reverse that.** Do Exercise 1 in class, focusing on just ten of the verbs. If your students are not as fluent as you’d like, they can do this in pairs. The result should be a set of word pairs. Ask students to pick three of the words pairs they have and to create a new sentence from it.

Homework: The second part of Exercise 1, in which the goal is 30 sentences built on the verb-adverb combinations. Students will be bringing in 30 sentences at the next class.

Day 10 ASSIGN THIRD 1000-WORD PAPER: CONTRARY TO COMMON OPINION. Follow the standard procedure in which the assignment is carefully read aloud. Notice the constraints on this paper are even tougher than on previous papers. Students must explain their thinking on a topic and contrast it with the beliefs of others in their circle. This paper must have people words, concrete nouns and mostly active verbs. The people the student disagrees with should be named, if possible. This paper moves the student from writing about the outside world (Walk) to writing a narrative (Setback) to writing about his ideas and setting them off from people around him.

If there's time READ ALOUD sample contrary paper: "Freedom" by E.B. White, page 66. Ask students to notice who E.B. White is disagreeing with, and how he names them. Also ask students to circle the concrete nouns. Otherwise, assign it as a model to be read at home. Ask students to notice how White doesn't just state what he believes in, but explains the development of his ideas.

VERBS DAY 11. Critique of setback papers and continue with one-syllable verbs.

REVIEW ONE SYLLABLE ACTIVE VERB. Discuss previous nights homework. Have students read aloud some of the thirty sentences they had to write. Collect the papers.

DETAILED OPEN CRITIQUE OF SETBACK PAPERS. You will have selected 3-4 of the best papers and Xeroxed them into stapled packets. Pass the packets around. Using the categories of concrete noun, active verb and people-language, discuss the papers and evaluate them for readability and interest. This can be done in different ways, including: (1) read each paper all the way through, then discuss its high points and low points; (2) read the first paragraph of each paper, making notes, and then compare the openings; (3) read the last paragraph of each paper, and compare them. Stress this is a critique of craft, and personal opinions about "liking" or "not liking" the paper are not welcome. ● **"Each paper is something one of your fellows put together. How well did they do it? Where is it good, and where not good. If you don't like something because it doesn't work, point out the exact sentence by page and line, and comment on that."** Prompt their attention to details. Ask for comments on specific concrete nouns, verbs, and people words. Possibly: ● **"What's the most interesting object in the first paragraphs of these three papers? Why do you think that?"**

NB: Students love this exercise. Each of these essays about a personal setback is a window into the life of a struggling human being, and students are fascinated by each other (as they should be).

Short Homework: Third exercise, page 13. GOAL: To produce a 10-12 sentence persuasive letter to a local newspaper or a campus newspaper in which every sentence is active. Preparation: class discussion about the topics different students are going to complain about. If they seem vague, set aside ten minutes for students to discuss, in pairs, what they will write about. The listener takes notes about the objects and verbs the writer might use. If there's not enough time, this can be put off to the next class meeting.

VERBS DAY 12. Continuation of critiques + preview of Contrary paper.

You have a wide range of choices here. You may continue the in-depth discussion of the four papers in the packet. Or you may put together a new packet of 3-4 papers, hand it out and do the same kind of critique as in Day 11. This second packet will have papers not as good as the first packet, and you can note that, and then proceed with a full-class discussion. The students whose work was not chosen for the first critique will enjoy being the focus of attention on this second day. ● **“These papers aren’t quite as good as yesterday’s, but they are interesting and we can learn from them.”**

Be upfront about the fact that not all papers will be critiqued by the group. The top papers and the next level papers will be discussed. ● **“We are studying these papers to see what our colleagues did and how they did it. ● Imagine we are in carpentry class and our project is building a bookcase. ● We are discussing how well the bookcase works, if it’s crooked in certain places, and so on. ● We are all craftsmen, we are learning the same craft, and we can evaluate what we’ve done.”**

AT this point, seven weeks into the course, the critical vocabulary is established. Insist that all discussions be within the word-set we have been using. It’s quite fair to ask students for their likes and dislikes within a given paper, but make sure that comments are pegged to specific sentences. This discussion is a great confidence builder. If you like dispute, ask students to disagree with each other and say why: ● **“Susan thinks Pablo’s third sentence is too long. How many of you agree, how many disagree? What’s your thinking?”**

Invite students to help each other. ● **“If Vikram’s third paragraph is too vague, what should he do about it? What would you do about it? What would you put in or take out?”**

Wrap the verb sequence up with a little speech, reminding them what they have learned about verbs while continuing to practice with concrete nouns and people-language.

No written homework because students should be working hard on their Contrary to Common Opinion papers, which are due in the next class. It’s useful to take the last 10 minutes of this class to discuss what they are doing, and to help them out. Key questions that generate good discussion. ● **“What opinion are you writing about? Who disagrees with you? Did you name them or say who they are? Did you give their ideas some space in your paper? Where are you stuck?”**

Controlling average sentence length. (Subskill 4)

Textbook p 16. 2-3 days

This is a much simpler skill than active verbs, and students enjoy it. It's a breather. The skill is well defined on page 15: students must consciously control their sentence length and should aim for an average sentence of 15-17 words.

Why this is important. Most students have never been told to consciously control their sentence lengths. It's news to them. Until they learn this skill and accept the responsibility for it, they tend to leave their sentences on the page exactly as they fell from consciousness. Now they are learning they must hit a certain average. Stress it's the average that must be controlled. Long sentences that make sense are fine, but short sentences are needed to bring the average down.

DAY 1. Introduce Sentence Length Control by reading the top matter on page 15. Introduce the standard of average 15-17-word sentences. Awareness of short sentences. Discuss how they help the reader. Search for them in any reading you like, though these will work:

The first three paragraphs on page 43: "Keep Your Hat On..."
The first three paragraphs on page 45: "The Artistic Career..."
The first three paragraphs on page 39: "The Small Screen..."

Discuss why short sentences are important in the light of this requirement.

Overlong sentences raise the average sentence length. The solution is to split them into halves or thirds. IN CLASS: Do the three examples on page 15. Have students work alone on each sentence, then review their results. Stress: When breaking up sentences, you get fragments and they must be must into sentences.

COLLECT THE CONTRARY TO COMMON OPINION PAPERS.

Possible homework: read carefully in toto any of the three readings mentioned above. Find the longest sentence and the shortest sentence in each piece. Calculate the average sentence length. Write a one paragraph report on what was found and hand it in. The aim is to sharpen student awareness of sentence length.

DAY 2. Review and Sentence-Length Game. Review the standard for this skill: that student papers *from now on* will meet a 15-17 word average sentence length. Papers will have a mix of sentences, longish, medium, and quite short. If the assignments have slipped and students have not handed in their Contrary papers yet, you can insist that this standard be met in the Contrary paper. This is a new skill, and students need to adjust to it. In past training, the long sentence was always desirable. With this standard, short sentences are not only permissible, they are necessary. Students enjoy being given permission to write short pithy sentences. You can and should discuss how the short sentence can perfectly cap an argument or a paper.

GAME for sentence length control. 30 minutes.

Divide the class into teams of two. They will be writing a made-up story taking place in one of the following public locations: convenience store, gas station, hardware store, laundromat. Assignment: each two-person

team must pick a setting, and then write a silly story about Bill, Yolanda and Spot the dog doing something there. Each team is given a number (perhaps 5, 8, 10, 11, 14 and 17). Each team must write its story only in sentences of exactly that many words. In short, one team will write a story about Bill, Yolanda and Spot in five-word sentences. Another will write its story in 8-word sentences. Another will write its story in 17-word sentences. Each story must be eight to ten sentences. (Those handling long sentences will probably not complete ten sentences, however.)

Every verb must be active. Give the teams 15-20 minutes to work. When all the stories done, each team reads its version aloud. "Okay, Team 5, give us your story in five-word sentences." OBJECTIVE: To pay close attention to sentence length and to play with it. This is a lot of fun, and the goofier the stories the better.

Optional homework: Edit the opening two paragraphs of the Declaration of Independence so the average sentence length drops from 42 to 24. Though it will defile a classic document, and lower its lofty tone, break the sentences in half and restart them. PURPOSE: To practice rewriting long sentences and to know viscerally that average sentence length is completely under one's control.

Day 3. Optional or catch up day.

Teacher uses his or her judgment to continue with sentence length control. You can discuss the game and ask what students learned from it or review the edited versions of the Declaration. Or you can schedule a full-class in-class critique of the setback papers. This should be done the same way the earlier critiques were. If you are discussing student papers, this is a good day to focus on the length of sentences, the long, the short and the patterns.

Editing for conciseness (Subskill 5)

Textbook p 17-18. 2-3 days

This is the fifth and final prose skill. Introduce the skill by reading the top matter on page 17. Discuss what conciseness means with students. Students often say, “Conciseness is when you are short and to the point,” and they are correct. Explain that they are going to learn how to take a first draft and cut words from it, so that it’s shorter and more to the point. ● **“You are going to learn to trim words from your writing. ● This is an important skill and all the best writers do it. ● Not only will we cut words, we will even cut syllables. ● We are doing this for the reader.”**

Pages 17, 18 and 20 cover conciseness of two sorts: (1) cutting unneeded words and (2) trimming the weight of individual words by replacing long words with short ones.

DAY 1 Introduction. Read the top matter aloud. Ask if students have ever read an article or book that was so wordy it put them to sleep. ● **“We will learn to reduce wordiness by cutting words out. There’s a skill to it.”** Read the left-hand column on p 17. Emphasize: ● **“If you can cut a 30-word sentence to 24, you have taken six rocks from the reader’s backpack.”**

Do both one or both editing exercises on p 17. Because there’s a numerical goal—to cut 25 per cent of the words—having students do this in competition energizes them. How to: Have a student read Exercise 1 aloud. “Is this concise or something else? What is the word for this style?” They should offer: *wordy, fluffy, puffy, too many words*. ● **“Okay, right now edit this. You have to capture all the meaning in the paragraph but take out 30 words. Your version should have no more than 90 words.”** They can work alone or in pairs. Insist that the new version be written out so that it can easily be read. Have the new versions read aloud and discuss them. Point out that the shorter paragraphs are actually clearer than the long ones. ● **“With fewer words, the reader understands more. Isn’t that interesting?”**

Homework: Exercise 2. The paragraph must be cut from 100 to 75 words. The new paragraph must be written out and turned in at the next class.

DAY 2: Cutting heavy phrases. (1) Review written homework by having students read their new paragraphs aloud. Some students may have gone well below 75 words, and if they did well, encourage with applause. Remind them: ● **“You have to cut but also keep all the key ideas.”**

Today’s lesson presents two lists of common phrases in English, a list of heavy phrases and lighter phrases that mean the same thing. The heavy phrases are longer, with more syllables. Have students read through the list aloud, slowly. ● **“Always replace the heavier with the lighter. From now on, when you see the phrase on the left, use the version on the right.”**

Do exercises 1-6 in class, either in a group or individually. Ask for the answers and critique. To enhance the learning, call attention to the number of words and syllables saved. ● **“Sarah, how many syllables in the first version? ● In your version? ● So how many syllables did you cut? ● Remember, every syllable is a brick the reader has to carry up the stairs of your dormitory to the sixth floor.”** (Encourage students to count syllables by going slow and using their fingers.)

Day 3: Using shorter words. Although there’s no full treatment of this idea in the text, a lesson on using short words makes sense there. According to Rudolf Flesch, the shorter the average word length in a passage, the easier writing is to read. Give examples. ● **“English has many long words and short words for the same thing. If**

you can, use the short one.” Use *talk*, *walk* or *tool* instead of *conversation*, *ambulation* or *technology*. ● **“Prefer one syllable words.”** Ask for objections. Students may believe short words will make their writing too simple. Give examples of famous writing. “To be or not to be.” The Gettysburg address (online) is 74 per cent one-syllable words. No one calls it simple-minded. You could assign students to find a copy of it, print it out, read it aloud, and calculate the percentage. Return to p 17 and read about the “famous ratio” of one-syllable words in good writing.

For homework or in class: Short-word recognition practice. Look for and underline one-syllable words in any of these texts: “Freedom” (p 66) first three paragraphs; “A Walk Through Boston” (p 59a) first two paragraphs; “A Secret Place” p 36; “A Room of One’s Own” p 65, first 17 lines.

For homework: Page 20. Rewrite either the YZA passage or the City of Edinburgh letter, type it up, hand it in. The YZA passage should be cut to 100 words; the Edinburgh passage should be cut to 40 words. (Best prep for this assignment is a read-aloud in class to fully appreciate the absurdity of these wordy monstrosities.)

Game: “Verb Race”

This game needs only paper and pencil, though masking tape or scotch tape can be useful. It builds camaraderie among students who already like each other. This can take from 30 minutes to a whole period. If you are willing to do silly things in class, this is it.

Teacher says • **“This is a game where you will form teams and write down as many different verbs as you can in a short time.”** But there’s a constraint: the verbs must begin with the letters of the first name and last name of each student, and students will work in teams.

Divide the class into Teams A and B by last name, with A – M on one team and N-Z on the other. If the teams are not equal, change the dividing line so they are. (A-K and L-Z). Adjust the teams so the teams are equal; in a class of 20 students, that will be ten-person teams. Each student writes his first and last initials at the top of two pieces of paper. Student “Kelly Sanchez” will write K and S. Student “Andy Maguire” will write A and M.

The game is a race to see which team can create a list of active verbs first.

The teams separate to different sides of the room and each team picks a captain. Then, against the clock, each student writes ten verbs that begin with each initial. For Kelly Sanchez, that’s ten K verbs (kick, kiss, kill, knuckle under, etc) and ten S verbs (snow, seem, stumble). Team mates help each other think of verbs and complete their lists. This can get a little noisy.

When each student has 10 verbs on each sheet of paper, the captain arranges them alphabetically, with the A verbs on top and the Y or Z verbs on the bottom.

The first team with all its pages together wins. Time is given for the second team to complete its list. Then the lists are read and talked about. Typical student response: “I never know there were so many active verbs.” Teacher response: “You don’t need to rely on *is, was, or has any more, do you?*” When the two rolls of verbs are produced, each team can read down its list aloud. The class may applaud for especially inventive or satisfying verbs. When challenged, a team may have to produce a sentence that uses the verb. (“Sarah finally knuckled under to the pressure the board chairman was inflicting.”)

A different ending: When each team has all its verbs together, they tape or staple them together into a long roll alphabetically, and run them to the front of the room where the first page of the scroll is taped or tacked to the front wall. The first team with its verbs tacked to the wall wins.

Note: Students with an odd name (Xerxes) can use a nearby letter more likely to work. Teacher must approve it. If students with the same initial are clustered on the same team, it’s your choice whether to insist on, say, 40 different verbs that begin with M, or to allow duplicates.

PART TWO: THE ORGANIZED ESSAY

This is the climax of the course, the purpose of a freshman comp course. We want students to be able to say what they have to say on paper, clearly and in a fully organized way. The teacher and the students at this point have spent eight to nine weeks learning to write vivid, active and interesting prose. Student sentences now are short, built on active verbs, and full of things and people. Students also can revise their own work. They know how to change verbs, put in objects, put in people, change sentence length, and cut wordiness. They have read a lot of vivid writing and they have a taste for it.

They have mastery over sentences. Now they are ready to learn organization. Now we can teach organization because sentences are no longer a problem.

The second part of the course is both like and unlike the first part. As in Part One, we learn a series of skills, one at a time, and combine them. And as in Part One, service to the reader is topmost. The “readability” theme continues but moves to a higher level. Now in Part Two, we are concerned about the reader *moving through an essay from the first word to the last, and we organize that movement so the reader is never confused.*

Basic idea: Part One was about clear and specific sentences the reader would enjoy. Part Two is about putting those sentences into an essay that the reader can move through and never get lost in. Part Two considers the reader in motion. It serves the reader in motion. ● **“The reader is taking a trip through your paper, from the title to the last word. ● You will arrange it so that it’s an easy trip and he never gets lost or confused.”**

Sequence of 5 essay sub-skills

Subskill 6: Writing a title	1 day
Subskill 7: Writing a beginning paragraph:	2 days
Subskill 8: Writing a forecast or thesis sentence	3 days
Subskill 9: Writing tags to organize the body	2 to 3 days
Subskill 10: Writing an ending	2 days

This is 11 or 12 class sessions, three to four weeks. Notice how much quicker this is than Part One. We can move faster now because sentence mastery is pretty much a fact. Students feel excited at the quicker pace; they have shifted to a higher skill, the skill of organization. If this were bike riding, the students would now be learning competitive bike racing. It’s inherently engaging to integrate earlier skills into a higher-order performance.

Writing the title (Subskill 6)

Textbook p 21. 1 day

Day 1. Page 21 contains instruction on writing titles and beginnings. Read the top material aloud and then jump down to the right-hand column and talk about titles.

● **“The title is a specific kind of writing. You have to do it right. It’s different from the other parts of the paper. You must not slap just anything on the top of an essay. The title has to be good.”**

The lesson declares that the title should have three qualities: unexpected, accurate and brief. You can improvise on these ideas. It’s obvious no reader is served with a title that is totally obvious, or off the subject of the essay, or too long.

Have students read aloud the three Newsweek titles bulleted in the right-hand column. Discuss. Point out that the civil-rights article doesn’t have the word “civil rights” in the title but does focus on the marching. (Note: this article is unfortunately not including in the CWG.)

Exercises in class or for homework:

1. Write new titles for the student papers on p 54 and 55.
2. Compare and discuss the titles on page 56 and 58, talking about brevity, unexpectedness and accuracy. Write some better titles for the “Two Sisters” essay.
3. The student paper on p 72 has no title. It’s well written. Have the class read it aloud, and then come up with a title for it. This can be done in teams of two if you want.

General note 1: By this point in the semester each student has written short items and three longish papers. It makes sense to turn back to these papers from time to time. In the title context, you can ask students to talk about the titles of earlier papers, or you can ask them to reprint the first page of one of the papers and invent a new title for it. They could hand in that one page and write a few sentences about why the new title is better than the old. (Surprise, accuracy, and brevity.)

General note 2. Because this is a skill course whose point is performance, I actively encourage students to rewrite graded papers for higher grades. (I do not grade papers before the three big ones.)

● **“If you got a B- minus on your walk paper, and you want to fix it up, maybe improving the verbs and adjusting sentence lengths—whatever—go ahead. I’ll regrade it. Maybe you’ll get a B+, maybe even an A-.”** It might be useful to ask for a few sentences from that student explaining what she changed and why.

Writing a beginning paragraph (Subskill 7)

Textbook p 21. 2 days

Day 1. Begin by reading the explanation in the left-hand column. Stress that the standard for a beginning is speed.

● **“The beginning is a specific kind of writing. The main quality a good beginning has is speed. It does something right away. Slow beginnings are a no-no.”**

This will be news to many students who have, in high school, been rewarded for slow and deliberate “introductions.” ● **“You are not introducing a subject, whatever that means. You are making something happen in the reader’s head right away.”**

Have students read aloud all the examples in the left-hand column. Discuss. Have them notice that they are quick and don’t beat around the bush. They should also see, easily, the effect of short sentences and active verbs.

Possible-in class or homework exercises:

1. Write a bad beginning to an opinion paper. Perhaps in teams of two, ask them to write the kind of high-school beginning that relies on a dictionary definition. “According to Merriam Webster’s Seventh Collegiate Dictionary, page 145, a phobia is defined as ____.” Encourage them to write in long sentences with lots of excess words. They can pretend they are writing about their own phobia about heights. The goal is a slow, murky and super-detailed introduction, perhaps four sentences averaging 30+ words each.
2. Read and discuss Virginia Woolf’s opening to “A Room of One’s Own.” It seems to be too slow moving—but perhaps not. Discuss. Notice the concrete nouns and names. One could argue that it moves reasonably well because something new is happening in every sentence. Note also that it’s a speech. What do students make of the fact that this essay begins with the word *But*.

Setup for tomorrow: (1) Ask students to bring their Contrary to Common Opinion papers to class next time, or at least the first page. Or, (2) ask students to xerox the beginning of a favorite book or article they think really works, and bring it in.

Day 2. Continuation of Titles and Beginnings.

Review the two sets of standards covered so far: the surprise-accuracy-brief standard for titles, and the speed standard for beginnings.

Option1: Have students read aloud the beginnings they brought in and discuss them. If you hear a really good opening sentence, like “It was the best of times, it was the worst of times,” write it on the white board for reference and discuss how well it works and why it works.

Option 2: If students brought in their own pages, have them read the opening sentences, and discuss them in terms of speed.

Option 3: Here are two versions of the same opening sentence. Pass them out and read them aloud. What changes did the student make between version 1 and version 2, and why? Is Version 2 better than 1?

<p>The short stories “The Necklace” by Guy de Maupassant and “A Good Man is Hard to Find” by Flannery O’Connor are good examples of writing that uses vibrant color and crisp details. The stories have subtle flashes of color that are good examples of imagery. (Version 1)</p>	<p>The short stories “The Necklace” by Guy de Maupassant and “A Good Man is Hard to Find” by Flannery O’Connor prove that a few words on paper can create an elaborate painting full of vibrant color and crisp details. The authors’ attention to subtle flashes of color allows them to evoke specific ideas, images and emotions in their reader’s mind throughout the stories. (Version 2)</p>
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Possible in class assignment. [I have not done this, but it might be possible.] If students brought in the first page of the Contrary Paper, ask them to imagine they are giving a speech to someone who invited them to talk about their topics. Have them rewrite the title and the first few sentences of the paper in imitation of Woolf, beginning with the word *But*. (Explain that for the *But* to work, the title must be slightly off the assigned topic of the speech.) For example, in an essay about the dangers of tanning beds, titled “Vanity,” the opening sentence might be: *But, you may say, we asked you to speak about the dangers of tanning salons—what has that got to do with vanity?”*

Compare the beginnings of the articles on p 35, 36 37 and 39. What do they have in common? Why did the writers do that?

Writing a forecast sentence (Subskill 8)

Textbook p 22. 3 days

This is the most crucial topic in the whole second part of the course. It's as central to organization as the active verb is to sentence clarity. As page 22 explains, we use "forecast sentence" instead of thesis sentence because it's more reader focused. The forecast gives the reader a preview of what's coming up in the paper. "Thesis," however, is a word from the Greek and to many incoming students it means only *Yeah, my teachers keep saying I have trouble with the thesis sentence.* The top matter on page 22 explains this. It should be read aloud and studied.

Day 1 First read the top matter on page 22. Then go to the road-trip game on the next page, adapting it for your own location, picking a town some distance from where you are teaching.

Role-play game about a road trip with a forecast

I begin the forecast sentence unit with this goofy sketch about two friends going on a road trip together. It's engaging, fun and right on point, especially if you pick a couple of comical hams to play the friends. Equipment needed: two chairs at the front of the class, and a white board. It takes about 30 minutes. Here's what I say.

● **"As you know the reader is taking a trip through your paper. But before we start talking about going through your paper, let's play a silly game. We will pretend to take a trip not through a paper, but from this Lowell classroom across Massachusetts to the City of Albany, NY."**

I draw a rough map of our state. I ask students to tell me how to get to Albany, without a GPS or a map.

● **"Imagine there's \$100,000 in cash available to the first team of students who can reach Albany today. You must get in the car and leave in five minutes. Your cell phones are dead and you don't have time to stop for a map. Class, can we have a set of directions to Albany? We're going to write the directions on an index card and give it to our student travelers to guide them to Albany."**

Students then describe the trip to Albany. I ask for crude landmarks. ● **"So we take the Boulevard west to 290? Okay. What then?"** I write the trip to Albany on the whiteboard as a series of milestones, four or five. I then ask the students if those landmarks will do the job. They agree. Then we write them on an index card, invite two students up to the front, set up the chairs as if they were the front seats in a car, either facing the class or facing left, and two play out the race to Albany. ● **"George will drive, and Anthony will be the navigator. Anthony, here's your list of landmarks. He'll drive, you navigate."**

The list of landmarks might look like this:

- Boulevard to 290 West
- Get on Turnpike West
- Cross NY State line
- See Albany in distance
- Collect \$100,000

The students improvise a sketch of a drive, with steering wheel and braking motions—this is usually comic if you've picked the right people. Conversation between George and Anthony goes like this.

"What do I do?" "Take the Boulevard to 290 West." "Okay—there's 290. Now what?" "Go West on the Turnpike." "Okay." "How you holding up?" "The steering wheel is loose and I have to go to the bathroom, but otherwise fine." "The next landmark is going to be the NY State line." "Right." "There's Albany." "I can see it." "We're there!" "Great, let's go collect our hundred grand and buy a better car for the trip home." "Right!"

I wrap it up with: ● **"Notice they used very short list of landmarks, but it got them 200 miles away to Albany. The whole trip was condensed into a single index card—and it worked!—they've got 100,000 bucks and are going to buy us all steak dinners. They had a forecast of their trip that kept them from getting lost. They knew they were on track because when they passed one landmark, they had a prediction of the next landmark coming up. They could tell they weren't lost because the landmarks came up in the right order. Once they crossed the NY State line, they knew the next thing was to see Albany in the distance, and it proved to be so.**

● **"Because Anthony and George had a forecast of their trip ahead of time, written on a small card, they could use the list of landmarks to guide them. It gave them confidence, made them feel good.**

● **"George and Anthony are standing in for your reader, who really needs a good forecast sentence. The forecast sentence in a paper is exactly like the trip forecast we gave these two comedians. And it serves the same purpose. It's a preview and it makes the traveler or reader feel safe, secure and on track."**

Having done all that, have the students read the five different types of forecast sentence in the left-hand column on p 22. These should be read carefully aloud. It's not crucial that students memorize these five (not as crucial as memorizing the 7 types of people language) but they should realize that different kinds of forecast sentences are possible. Have five students carefully examples 1 through 5, with the identifying tag. After each forecast is read, ask others students what the paper is going to be about. ● **“What is this predicting? What is the reader going to find in the paper?”** Point out that the “point-by-point forecast” (#3) is most similar to the forecast used on the road-trip to Albany.

Homework: Find the forecast sentences in Emmy Lou Vollmer's paper on p 46 and EB White's essay on page 66.

Final emphatic statement for the class: ● **“From this point forward, anything you write that's more than one paragraph must have a forecast sentence. That's the new standard.”**

Day 2 The standards of a forecast sentence.

The forecast sentence must do specific things if it is going to work. ● **“Remember the forecast sentence is serving the reader. It has to job to do, and if it doesn't do the job properly your paper will get a lower grade.**

On p 22 in the right-hand column you'll read an important line that should have been bolded but was not: “How can you mess up a forecast sentence?” This is the main topic today. Students have to learn the five ways they can screw up a forecast. Read the five ways carefully and discuss them as you go.

The five bulleted items are pretty self-explanatory, but they are worth discussing with the students. Stress that *position* of the forecast is crucial. It comes after the beginning and before the body of the paper. ● **“The forecast must be read before the reader's trip starts. ● If it's in the wrong place, that can't happen. ● The key part of the forecast is its position. ● It's got to be right before the first point you are making in the body.”**

Most of the time in a short paper, the forecast sentence is the last sentence in paragraph 1 or paragraph 2. Right after the forecast, the body of the paper starts. Sometimes you can sense the main part of the paper starting, and you look for the preceding sentence and find it's a forecast. That's the case with EB White's “Freedom” (p 66).

In-class exercise (20 minutes). Writing stand-alone forecast sentences. There are five topics given on p 22. Have students pick either the first or the third topics, and then write a forecast sentence for the imaginary paper they might write. They can consult the left-hand column for reminders of the way a forecast can appear. Hover and inspect as they work, giving suggestions. After all the students have written, the forecasts for each topic should be read aloud and compared. There should be time for a second go around. Have them all write two more forecasts, one about colds and one about the first job. Again, their results should be read, compared and discussed. Lesson objective: to understand thoroughly that the forecast sentence is a specific thing—a crucial part of an essay—whose quality can be evaluated.

Written Homework: Return to the Contrary Paper, where you explained how your opinions differ from those around you, and write a new beginning to it that has a GOOD TITLE, a FAST BEGINNING and a FORECAST. Staple this new material to the first page of the original paper and turn in at the next class meeting.

Day 3. Continuation of forecast sentence.

Practice finding it in various essays. If you are using a book of essays, pick a few short ones and assign students read the essay until they come to what they think is the forecast. Discuss what they find.

Return to P 22, right-hand column and focus on the third bullet under “mess up a forecast.” Stress the point that the forecast has to match the paper. When the paper and the forecast don’t match closely, the forecast fails. ●
● **“The forecast has to predict the trip accurately, so what comes after the forecast has to match the forecast closely. We’ll cover this more when we get to Body Tags.”**

Have students look for forecasts in three student papers, on pages 41, 45 and 46. (See Answer Key.) ● **“Where is the sentence that predicts what coming up?”** Point out that these are three quite distinct papers: about a walk, an opinion, and a personal narrative. Yet all are organized by forecast sentences. You might say ● **“It’s not the paper that’s organized by the forecast as much as the reader’s mind. It’s the reader who gets the preview that matters. Readers expect it.”**

The forecast sentence is so basic that it’s found almost everywhere. You can do “scavenger hunt” assignments where the job is to find the forecast sentence—the instructor must know what it is, of course.

Even the Declaration of Independence has a two-sentence forecast, which you can send them to find. (“The history of the present King of Great Britain is a history of repeated injuries and usurpations, all having in direct object the establishment of an absolute Tyranny over these States. To prove this, let Facts be submitted to a candid world.” The forecast predicts that the document will present facts about the King’s behavior, and that list begins immediately.)

Writing tags to organize the body (Subskill 9)

Textbook p 23-4. 3 days

Day 1 Standard Tags. Read aloud the top material on Page 23. Tags are different than transitions, and they are much more useful in organizing a paper than transitions are. Transitions have a local effect inside a paper, bridging two paragraphs perhaps, but tags are global: they organize the whole paper. If you enjoy contrasting college with high school, you can say, ● **“They taught you about transitional phrases in high school, which is well and good, but the really powerful thing you need to know about is tags.”**

The key idea with tags—and it may be new to you—is that tags can be used as a set to organize an entire paper. They work best when they repeat verbatim the language used in the forecast sentence. If a forecast sentence predicts *This paper will cover A, B, C and D*, the simplest way to organize the subsequent body of the paper is to use A, B, C and D as tags. If the forecast says *Justice Sandra Day O’Connor listed four arguments for her dissenting opinion*, the tags should be *First, Second, Third, and Fourth* or *Finally*. Readers notice such connectives in the background, but freshmen writers need to see them clearly as a set.

Read loud and review all three sets of “standard tags” on p 23: (1) order of importance, (2) order of time, and (3) actual time-references. Time references are often called “time tags.”

IN CLASS RECOGNITION PRACTICE. Read the student papers “Growing a Wallflower” p 62-64 and “Currier Gallery of Art,” p 70-71 and underline the tags. (Most are easy to find time tags.)

HOMEWORK RECOGNITION PRACTICE: Find the tags in “A Two-Year Detour” (41) or “Going Home” (p 46). These are both narrative papers, the first using time-tags and the second place-tags.

Day 2 Custom Tags. Students grasp the idea of number tags and time-tags pretty quickly, but the idea of a custom tag-set, in which the forecast sentence closely matches the tags is a bit harder.

Read “Custom Tags Can Organize Anything” at the bottom of p 23. I say, ● **“How many of you have gotten papers back with a negative teacher comment like *disorganized* or *needs organization*? It’s hard to know what to do then. Even if you know the paper is sort of disorganized, how the heck do you get it organized? Well now you’ve got the answer. ● You write a forecast that predicts what’s in the body of paper, and then you put tags at the beginnings of the paragraphs that match the forecast. You’re organized!”**

Read the example about moving with a rental truck. Stress two points: (1) the tag language has to match the forecast closely, actually repeating exact words; and (2) the tag word has to show up within eight words of the paragraph’s start.

Forecast sentence for directions on moving furniture	“You can count on a real nightmare unless you recruit enough muscle, nail down your reservation, present a valid credit card, and pick a driver who can back up a truck without hitting trees.”	
	Below: good tag sentences that repeat some words in forecast	Below: bad tag sentences, too loosely related to the forecast.
Tag sentence 1	“Recruiting friends with enough muscle to do the job should not be a problem unless it’s school break and everyone is home. “	“Remember those three guys you were smoking a joint with last Friday in someone’s apartment in Altoona?”
Tag sentence 2	“Reserving a truck should be a no-brainer, but you’d be amazed at how many students arrive at U-Haul and learn no trucks can be had.”	“One time I showed up at U-Hall and this amazing thing happened. “
Tag sentence 3	“Paying with a credit card is best, though cash is also possible. “	“Benny didn’t have his wallet with him when he got to the counter, which really caused some confusion all around.”
Tag sentence 4	“Whoever is your truck driver should be calm and experienced if possible, because the expense of hitting a tree or a bridge overpass will ruin your budget for a full semester.”	“One time when we were moving my friend Justin’s sofa from Centralville over to Altoona, boy was that a mess.”

- “We put the tag near the front of the paragraph, within 8 words of the sentence start. The tag is a street sign. When you are driving, you want to see what street you are turning into *as you turn* and when reading, you want to see what paragraph you are entering *as you start it.*”

In Class Writing: Exercise 1, page 24. 10-15 minutes. FORECAST SENTENCE WITH MATCHING TAG SENTENCES. This writing can be done alone or in two-person teams. Aim: to sketch a short paper about doing some practical project, and to produce five sentences, including a forecast sentence naming four sub-topics, and four sentences for the body of the paper that relate tightly to the forecast. The grid above, about moving with a truck, is one example. (Note: teachers could let students pick their own topics freely or provide a short list of suggested topics, which might promote a more coherent discussion afterwards.) Have students do the work as you circulate and advise; read the results aloud and discuss.

HOMEWORK: Write a 500-600 word paper based on the day’s in-class work. Due next class.

Day 3: Can We Write the Forecast After the Body?

On the whiteboard, in large letters: Can We Write the Forecast Sentence Last? Discuss.

DISCUSSION: This should generate discussion, because by this point students will be well aware that the forecast and the tags are symmetrical. They work together to organize the reader’s movement through the paper. The forecast predicts what will come up; the tags work because they have been predicted in the forecast. A forecast is good if it matches the paper; a set of tags is good if it matches the forecast. Logically, one can write the forecast last, because all it needs to do is predict for the reader what is coming up. One could write the body of a paper, organize it slightly into topics (maybe A, B and C) and then write a forecast sentence that predicts that A, B and C are coming up.

- “It’s possible to reverse-engineer a forecast sentence. ● You can write the forecast sentence after you know what the paper is going to be about, because you have written it. Often you get a better forecast that way. The reader doesn’t know you wrote the forecast last—all he or she cares about is whether it gives a good prediction of the paper.”

IN-CLASS WRITING: “Jesus Wants Me for a Sunbeam” is a student set-back paper written without a forecast. It covers a number of topics, and therefore it can support a point-by-point forecast. Divide the students into teams of two. Tell them they are going to insert a forecast sentence at the end of the first paragraph. Give them five minutes to read the paper and get a sense of it—the time pressure is important. Then ask a few teams to say aloud what the paper is about and what it covers. ● **“Okay—you have five minutes to come up with a forecast sentence that goes at the end of paragraph one. It can be any kind of forecast you want, point-by-point or general topic.”** Afterwards the group should evaluate the forecasts and decide which are best and which don’t work.

OPPTIONAL IN CLASS WORK. If you have 500-600 word papers in hand from yesterday’s assignment, there won’t be time to xerox them, but they can be read aloud and discussed anyway. The goal remains to sharpen awareness of the *tag* and the *tag position*. I would recommend asking students to hold the papers up while you make a quick pass around the room, glance at the papers, and decide which three or papers are most interesting. Then have each student read his opening up to the forecast. ● **“So, we have heard four openings, four papers that go from title to forecast. Whose is best, whose worst, and why?”** Then you can pick one or two to read all the way through, while students make notes.

Writing an ending (Subskill 10)

Textbook p 25-26. 2 days

Day 1. Introducing the ending. Have the class read the top material on page 25.

This is the final organization topic in Part II. Like the other parts we have identified, endings have certain performance standards. The ending has a different job from the title, beginning, forecast, or tag-structured body. The beginning gets the reader going quickly, and the ending must slow him to a stop.

KEY IDEA: The ending itself has a structure. Stress the four actions of an ending (left column of p 25) and tell students their endings will be graded on them from now on.

MAJOR NOVELTY IN THIS TOPIC: The “echo.” Structurally the echo is the easiest part of an ending to arrange. In the echo part of the ending, an idea or phrase from earlier in the paper, or even the beginning, is repeated. For example, if an essay that began with an image of apples in a tree ends with the mention of either apples or trees, the reader will feel he or she has come full circle. A sense of rest and closure obtains.

LIKELY MISUNDERSTANDING: Earlier teachers will have told students they need to “conclude” their papers by summarizing everything. But the ending need not be a summary, and in a short paper is usually should not be.

● “You do not need to write a conclusion that sums everything up. ● You are just slowing the reader down, letting him know the paper is ending (he can see the white space coming), and giving an echo of the beginning. If possible add a little bounce—a small hint of novelty. ● The ending has to maintain reader interest right to the last word.”

In a small paper, the ending is no more than one paragraph of perhaps six to eight lines maximum, and it can easily be shorter.

MUSICAL ACTIVITY: A SONG. *The ending happens with the return to the starting note.*

It’s almost a law of endings that they must remind one of the beginning and that law holds for music as well as writing. For example, folk songs usually begin on one note, become elaborated through the tune, and then return to that note. We hear it in “Frere Jacques” “Twinkle Twinkle” “Row Row Row Your Boat” and “On Top of Old Smokey.” These facts give us a chance to sing in class. For fun I sometimes sing one of these songs myself; at other times, I have the class sing a song together. I recommend it!

Row, Row, Row your Boat



www.abcnotation.com/tunes

● “This song begins and ends on the same note. Can you hear it? *Row* and *dream* are the same note, middle C. At the end of the song, we are back at the starting note. ● Same thing goes with writing essays. We use an

echo of the start, some word, so the reader will have a sense of closure when he hears it again in the ending. It's just like a song."

IN CLASS EXERCISE: Search for the echo words in both professional and student endings. To do this, students must read the ending carefully and then go back to the beginning and circle the words there that have been repeated in the ending. These are the echo words.

(1) Professional work: "The Price of Arrogance" on p 35. Matching words between beginning and ending: *responsibility* and *Bush*. Also useful: comparison of the first and last sentences of "A Secret Place" on p 36.
(2) Student work: "A Walk Through Boston" (59a) "The Use of Color" (p 60) "A Two-Year Detour" (p 41). In "Detour" you may consider the first two paragraphs the beginning, because there's a great echo between paragraph 2 and the ending. OBJECT: Awareness of the verbal links between the beginning and the ending.

WRITTEN HOMEWORK: Write a short paper comparing the endings of three of the four student papers found in the same section of the book between pages 58 and 64. "Two Sisters: A Comparison," "A Walk Through Boston," "The Uses of Color," and "Growing a Wallflower." Compare in terms of the four actions of an ending: slow the reader down, give an echo, give a bounce, and stop.

Day 2 Practice seeing endings and performing them

Remind them that the ending is an experience for the reader, not just the closing of an argument. The ending must not just wrap up the essay, it must *feel* like a good wrap-up to the reader. The key behavior is to pick up some actual words from the beginning and repeat them at the ending. Just a few words will do.

● **"If you get to the end of your body and you don't know what to put in the ending. Stop for a minute. Say *I'm going to go find something in the beginning that I can mention in the ending*. Then go up to the start of the paper, pick up a phrase or an image and use it as you bring the paper to a close. That's the echo, and it gives the reader a nice satisfying sense of closure."**

IN CLASS: What's wrong or lacking with this one-sentence last paragraph? "That's what I have to say, and that's that."

The bounce: Standard doctrine is "no new topics in the ending," but a bounce is different because it's tiny—a tiny mention of something new but related, and it adds energy. TV reporters use the ending-bounce so often it's a cliché: "Film at eleven." "Time will tell." "The jury's verdict will probably come tomorrow."

A new image can work as well. Have students look for (1) the comic bounce (and echo) at the end of Patera's walk piece, p 45; and (2) the bounce of a new image at the end of "Orwell's Politics and the English Language," p 52.

HOMEWORK: Page 26. Exercise 4.

ALTERNATE HOMEWORK: REDO THE ENDINGS OF PRIOR PAPERS. Have students return to one of their three big papers, print out the first paragraph again, skip down a couple of lines and write a new ending with an echo and a bounce. Variation: Have students write that same new ending but make sure the last sentence ends on a one-syllable word.

PART THREE: DEMONSTRATING ALL 10 SKILLS AT ONCE

Weeks 13 and 14. There are several ways to wrap up this course, but it's mandatory to get students to practice and demonstrate all ten skills at once. The point of the course is the integration of these skills and the teacher must emphasize that. This is no time for coasting to the end of the course.

Teacher and students now possess a complete 10-point framework for clear communication. They know that sentences are to be: ●concrete ●human ●active ●short on average ●concise. They know that, once that standard is met, an essay is constructed from properly executed: ●title ●beginning ●forecast ●body with tags ●ending.

<i>sentences</i>	<i>essays</i>
●concrete	●title
●human	●beginning
●active	●forecast
●short sentences on average	●body with tags
●concise writing	●ending

In my experience, at this point we have either one or two weeks left. If it's two, I ask for two papers. If one, a single capstone paper. Two papers in two weeks is best, because it forces students to produce clear and interesting essays quickly. Because I allow revision *ad infinitum* for higher grades, often I make one assignment a revision and the other a new topic.

When we're lucky enough to hold six class meetings in the last two weeks, the course shifts gears and becomes a seminar. The mood changes: *Now that everyone knows the rules of the game, we can freely invent and critique.* Students hand in papers, and we discuss them freely.

Final Option A: Two essays in two weeks.

The purpose is to demonstrate the mastery of readable writing. Therefore, all the standards in the course must be on display. Most crucial are the forecast, matching tags, and proper ending—these skills will be the weakest, having been learned most recently. The teacher will have his or her own favorite list of productive essay topics. Here are some I have used.

- Comparison and contrast. Distinguish between two people, two cities, two neighborhoods, two whatevers. Use proper forecast, tags and ending.
- "Report on 2018," [or any year] written in the terse style of E.B. White. Report." Write as if for an intelligent but far-away friend. Use numbers or estimates of quantity. Stick to facts. Use proper forecast, tags and ending.
- "Art Review." A review of an art show or museum exhibition in a nearby city. It should cover the physical visit to the exhibit, the works seen, background on the artist and his times, your opinion of the work and its significance. See p 29 in the CWG. Use proper forecast, tags and ending.
- "Winter and the Sense of Self." Essay on the physical realities of winter here and elsewhere; use anecdotes or stories showing how winter affects your sense of self or others' sense of self. (E.G., does wearing bundled-up clothes make you feel armored and safe? Or vulnerable? Or what?); some background on yourself; some background on what others have said about winter or the holiday season; --your opinion or theory. Use proper forecast, tags and ending.
- "You have to read this book!" An essay to persuade.
- "A habit I plan to change, and why, and how." An essay to explain.

- “How a well-organized essay works.” (Meta-assignment. Student explains the five parts of an essay, making the explanation interesting.)

Final Option B Longer Capstone Paper.

Ideally students should produce two papers in two weeks, but when there’s not enough time, a single capstone demonstration is assigned and due on the last day of class.

“This is a chance to write about anything you want. This is a demonstration paper in which you demonstrate that you have mastered all the skills taught in this course, and that you can produce a well-written and organized simple paper *fast*. You can pick your own topic, with my approval. If you are not sure what you want to write about, you may choose a topic from this list. Requirements: 1,200 to 1,500 words.

● **“You will get extra credit, or be graded more charitably, for attempting one of the asterisked topics, which are more difficult. No matter what your topic, or how abstract, your paper must of course must be active, concrete and personal.”**

1. I have changed my mind about X, and I think it’s going to make a big difference.
2. How my daily life has changed since X.
3. How the internet impacts me and others.
4. The news coverage on topic X is all wrong, and here’s why.
5. Three fascinating new friends
6. An in-depth profile of one new friend
7. How I came to believe X, despite the fact that most people disagree.
8. How my daily life has changed this year.
9. I think my peers ought to pay more attention to X.
10. How my family looks now.
11. “All my friends are going to be strangers.”
12. How Islamic terrorism has impacted my world and world view.
13. Publicly observable virtues or vices in Boston [your town]. Include: the physical settings in Boston where these vices or virtues can be observed; the vice or virtue defined, described and depicted; some background; your opinion or judgment on the situation. Use proper forecast, tags and ending; display all skills.
14. * A summary and discussion of the arguments in “Politics and the English Language.” (This is in the CWG.)
15. * Three or more heroes from history, and what I have learned or am learning from them.
16. * A defining essay in which you warn against oversimplification by describing the types of categories of one of the following ideas (as you have observed or experienced it): *intelligence, freedom, truth, love, beauty, loyalty, charity, courage, religion*. Your forecast will be something like: “I see three basic types of X.”