6+1 Traits of Writing

5. SENTENCE FLUENCY
What is sentence fluency?

- **Fluency:**
  - The smoothness or flow with which sounds, syllables, words or phrases are joined together when speaking quickly.
  - This also applies to writing – creating an overall flow to your writing.

In what other contexts have you heard the word “fluency” or “fluent” being used?
Which sounds better? Why?

1. We came home. We ate cookies. We played games. We ate supper. We went to bed.

2. After school, we rode our bikes home and shared a plate of homemade chocolate chip cookies. Then we decided to play a quick game of Chinese Checkers followed by our favourite, Monopoly.
How can you make sentences flow better?

- Brainstorm a list of ways.
Sentence Fluency

- Sentence fluency is about the sound and rhythm of language

- The way in which sentences are woven together affects not only the overall tone and voice of a piece, but also the clarity and meaning.

- Different depending on the purpose (business – may rely on short, direct, succinct sentences, narrative – may have a poetic, almost musical sound to it)
Sentence Fluency

- Rhythmic patterns
- Natural
- Easy-on-the-ear flow
- Easy to read aloud
- Poetic, musical
- Variety
- Effective use of fragments

Sentence fluency is the rhythm and flow of language, the sound of word patterns, the way in which writing plays to the ear – not just to the eye.
Read what you write aloud and listen to the flow of the language. Do you like what you hear? Does it make you sit up and take notice, or are you lulled to sleep by the sing-song sameness of each sentence pattern?

Your sentences should be clear and make sense. Cut out the deadwood. Don’t say, “At this point in time, we feel we are ready to begin a fight.” Say, “Now we’re ready to fight.” Make every word work hard, and your sentences will be powerful, full of punch.
More on Sentence Fluency

Notice how your sentences begin. These beginnings are repetitive and boring:

“We went to the beach. We had fun. We saw seagulls. We went home.”

Yawn! Vary the openings and combine very short sentences:

“Despite being overrun with pesky seagulls, we had fun at the beach.”

Don’t let sentences drift on too long either. If a sentence feels wildly out of control, slice it in half and make two sentences.

Read your work aloud and listen to the rhythm and flow of the words. Does the fluency match the mood and content? -- Think long and flowing where the piece is descriptive and thoughtful, and short and snappy where you need to make a point.
The Sentence Fluency Check

- Take a short excerpt of a piece of your writing (about a 6 sentence chunk)
- Number each sentence (1-6) on a blank sheet of paper
- Write the first four words of each sentence next to its number
- Count the total number of words in the sentence and write that number down as well
- When you finish these steps, ask yourself:
  - Is there a variety of different sentence beginnings?
  - Are the sentences of varying lengths?

What that might look like:
1. Today was a beautiful (12)
2. Due to the fact that (8)
3. We went skiing and (22)
4. It was awesome to (7)
5. Next time we will (18)
6. I am now going (5)
Sentence Fluency Activity 1

- Take turns rolling a set of dice, 8-10 times.
- The number that is rolled each time will be the number of words that must be in that sentence.
- You will write a paragraph, using these varying word sentences. You may write about a topic of your choice. (If you are stuck, use a topic from one of your brainstormed lists, found in your writing folder 😊)
- The catch – You must use a different word at the beginning of each sentence.
Types of Sentences

- View separate slide show on types of sentences.
Sentence Combining

- Being able to combine shorter sentences into longer, more mature sentences is a great writing skill to learn.

- Longer sentences can help you establish relationships that are hard to express in shorter sentences.

- To effectively combine short sentences, you need to recognize what the shorter sentences have in common – what series of words, phrases or ideas can be pulled together into one longer sentence.
Sentence Combining – Examples

- **Shorter sentences:**
  - Aaron skies on snow.
  - He skies on water.
  - He skies on ice.

- **Combined sentence using a series of words:**
  - Aaron skies on snow, water and ice.

- **Shorter sentences:**
  - Aaron sprained his ankle.
  - Aaron bruised his hip.
  - He wrenched his neck.

- **Combined sentences using a series of phrases:**
  - Aaron sprained his ankle, bruised his hip, and wrenched his back.
Sentence Combining: Activity 1

- Combine the following sets of shorter sentence into longer ones:
  - John tore down the hill.
  - He cut in front of Aaron.
  - He caused him to fall.
  - As Aaron tried to get out of John’s way, he tumbled.
  - Then he slid and spun.
  - As John skied past Aaron, he whistled.
  - He shouted and laughed.
More on Sentence Combining

- **Shorter sentences:**
  - The writer is working on a new book.
  - She has already published one book.

- **Combined with a relative pronoun:**
  - The writer, *who* has already published a book, is working on a new one.

- **Shorter sentences:**
  - Carlos has started doing homework.
  - He is getting better grades.

- **Combined with a subordinate conjunction:**
  - *Since* Carlos has started doing homework, he is getting better grades.
Combine the following sets of shorter sentence into longer ones:

- She thought the new book would be easy to write.
- It was on a topic that was familiar to her.
- Elly has been working hard on her new book.
- She has had no trouble gathering ideas to write about.
- Summer is a wonderful season.
- During the summer, there are many wonderful activities to do.
Sentence Combining: Activity 3

- Separate the following longer sentences into short, simple sentences. (The number of sentences each should be broken into is indicated in the brackets.)

  - Today has been a really long day because I had to get up early, I had a lot of work to do in school, and I had practice afterwards. (4)

  - Although the teacher was impressed with her students’ work, she still punished them because they would not stop talking during class lessons. (3)

  - Beverly, who attends class regularly and studies frequently, has earned high grades in all of her classes and therefore had an impressive report card. (4)
Sentence Combining: Activity 4

- The following sentences have been taken from popular works of fiction. See if you can combine the sentences in the same way the authors have.
Her hair was bleaching from the sun.
It was tied back in a simple naught at the nape of her neck.

From Mary Higgin’s Clark
*Remember Me*  p. 156
Her hair, bleaching from the sun, was tied back in a simple naught at the nape of her neck.
They said death came to take you.
It had come to take his father one night.
His heart had attacked him.
If it came to take you, then it had to take you some place.

from Dean Koontz
*The Bad Place*, p.140
They said death came to take you, and it had come to take his father one night, his heart had attacked him, but if it came to take you, then it had to take you some place.
He took not the slightest notice of Wormtail.
Wormtail lay twitching and bleeding on the ground.
He didn’t notice the great snake either.
It had slithered back into sight.
It was circling Harry again.
It was hissing.

From J.K. Rowling
Harry Potter and the Goblet of Fire p.559
He took not the slightest notice of Wormtail, who lay twitching and bleeding on the ground, nor of the great snake, which had slithered back into sight, and was circling Harry again, hissing.
A good writer should (in regard to sentence fluency):

- Use different sentence lengths, structures, and beginnings
- Use language that sounds natural
- Give the writing an easy flow and rhythm
- Invite expressive oral language of the text
- Use complete sentences – fragments must add to the meaning of the text
He Drifted off into sleep and Janie looked down on him and felt a self-crushing love. So her soul crawled out from its hiding place.

-ZORA NEALE HURSTON (p.128)

"I can still see the hole like it was yesterday, and it was. Life is a perpetual yesterday for us"  

The Lovely Bones  by: Alice Sebold