

Helping Students Build on Simple Sentences

Students often need help in making their sentences more sophisticated. Below are **various methods of elaborating, using one sentence as an example.**

1. Specific Details

I wore a sweater today.

Teacher: Constantly ask for more details by perhaps first concentrating on the noun. What kind of sweater?

I wore a red sweater today.

Teacher: Raise the bar. Ask students how it feels, what it's made of, and other details about it.

I wore a red, pull-over, itchy, wool sweater today.

Teacher: Depending on the ability and grade-level of the students, you could extend your question. Where did you get it?

I wore a red, pull-over, itchy sweater that Grandma gave me for Christmas.

2. Magic Three

I wore a red sweater today.

Teacher: Now you might want to concentrate on the verb. If a student is describing his / her appearance (or a narrator's appearance for a story), you could ask the student to create a Magic Three by adding two more verbs and details.

I searched my closet for something warm, found something I had completely forgotten about, and finally wore my red, itchy sweater today.

Teacher: Instead of three short sentences, students are expanding using verbs: searched, found, and wore.

© Remind students that the subject ("I") does not have to be repeated and that there will be two commas and the final "and."

© A Magic Three provides built-in elaboration within one sentence.

3. Figurative Language

I wore a red sweater today.

Simile

Teacher: Ask students what the sweater could be compared to that would make sense and not sound forced.

Today I wore a red sweater **that is as red as my daddy's face when he gets mad.**

Teacher: Remind students that similes use "like" or "as."

Hyperbole

Teacher: Now ask students what exaggeration could be made about the sweater.

Today I wore a red sweater **that was so big that it could stretch from here to Timbuktu.**

Personification

Teacher: Challenge students with brainstorming human traits that could be applied to the sweater.

Today I wore a red sweater because it **screamed from my closet, "Wear me! Wear me! Wear me!"**

Metaphor

Teacher: An even greater challenge is to ask the class what the sweater can be compared to without using "like" or "as."

Today, almost Christmas, in my red sweater **I am the brightest ornament in the class.**

Hyphenated Modifier

I wore a red sweater today.

Teachers: Remind students that hyphenated modifiers work as one adjective strung together with hyphens (except there is no hyphen between the last adjective and the noun). Tell them also that this is a sophisticated structure but one that they will not want to overdo.

Today I wore a red, **look-at-me sweater.**

When I was getting dressed for school, my mom had this **you'd-better-wear-that-red-sweater-your-grandma-knitted-you-or-else look.**

© Notice that all the hyphenated adjectives modify the noun "look."

4. Repetition for Effect

Teachers: Tell students that **Repetition for Effect** puts emphasis on words that the author thinks are important.

Today I wore a **red sweater**, not just **any red sweater**, the **red sweater** from a **girl**, not just **any girl**, the **girl**.

Teachers: In this sentence the author wants the reader to realize that the sweater and the girl are special.

Today I wore a sweater, **red**, **red** as the breast of a robin, **red** as Christmas **red**, **red** as the blush on my face when I see her.

☺ Here the author wants to emphasize the color.

5. Humor

☺ Everyone likes humor, and it is one method of elaboration.

Today I wore a red sweater my mom knitted, but the **arms hung down to the floor**, the **neck had me in a headlock all day**, and the color got me nicknamed "**Fire Engine.**" I can't wait for my mother's next project.

Teachers: Point out to students that the last sentence is an example of **sarcasm**, the highest form of humor. Also discuss how this passage is a **Magic Three**.

6. Expanded Moment & Full-Circle Ending

Today I wore a red sweater.

Teachers: Ask students to expand on the moment, tell details about it, to give the readers a picture of this **slice of life**.

I wanted to wear something special to school, the hey-it's-almost-Christmas-and-boy-I-can't-wait something. Aunt Bertha's hat made me look like a dunce, an accident about to happen—or worse, one that already had happened on my head, or an elf or maybe a bunny without ears. I nixed Mama's coat and tie idea, gave my sister an aren't-you-the-Einstein-of-the-family stare when she suggested my Christmas pajamas with built-in feet, attached mittens, and a hood, and finally decided on the red sweater. After all, **I wanted to wear something special to school.**