**Reviewed with the Personal Essay**

**The following skills and techniques were reviewed with the entire class to address patterns seen in a number of papers. Individual papers have suggestions or corrections that pertain to that paper only. Two excellent sources for grammar, usage, and mechanics questions are the JBHS Writing Tools (WritingTools.pdf) and Reference Handbook of Grammar & Usage edited by Porter G. Perrin (William Morrow & Company, Inc., New York, 1972). Proofread all future papers for the following.**

* **Be concise:** Concision alone can make your writing more vivid. Cut "final" drafts by 15% by eliminating repetitions and wordiness to keep the focus on your content. Many "There is..." sentences can be improved by simply cutting the "There is..." and the "that" later in the sentence ("There is a tree in my yard that resembles an old bent woman," becomes "A tree in my yard resembles an old bent woman.) Or trim "to be" word sentences by changing "He was racing" to "He raced."
* **Vary Your Sentences:** Revise your papers for sentence variety.  Vary sentences by length and by type for rhythm and effect. Try to avoid too many Subject/verb/object beginnings ("Dave ran fast." or "The mailman went home.") in particular the Subject/"to be" construction. ("There is..." or "Edna and Vincent are..." or  "The Bartletts were...")  These are often wasted words that tend to create dead space in your writing and flatten the rhythm.
* **Colons and Semicolons:** I'm glad to see that many of you are using colons and semi-colons. Others seem to be using commas rather than periods for sentences that seem too close to separate with a period. (We couldn't sneak a few people into a location for a few hours anymore, we needed a few days) You need a semicolon there instead to avoid a run-on sentence.
  + Colons are emphatic marks that direct attention to what follows. As a "go ahead" sign it can be used to introduce a list that the writer wants to emphasize;
  + Semicolons are most commonly used (instead of a comma) between items in a series if the items contain commas;
  + Semicolons are also used to replace conjunctions such as and, but, or, yet, and so.
* **Spell Out Numbers Under Ten and Spell Out Numbers at the Beginning of Sentences**.
* **Demand More From Your Proofreading Groups:** And use their advice.
* **Capitalize Proper Nouns**: Capitalize words like *mom, grandmother, uncle, high school* only when they are used to refer to a particular person by name or with a person's name (Hi, Mom! Let's eat, Grandmother. I go to Joel Barlow High School), but not when used generically or preceded by a word like *my, the, an,* etc. (I have to call my mom. All grandmothers bake cookies, I love high school)

**These are the rules of Mr. Peha’s Stunningly Simple Sentence Structure System:**

(1) Sentences are made of parts. (2) Those can parts have names. (3) We can describe the structure of a sentence by describing the number and types of parts it contains, and the order in which those parts occur.

Take a look at this sentence: *“On a bitter cold winter morning, Malcolm Maxwell, a young man of simple means but good intentions, left the quiet country town in which he’d been raised, and set off on the bold errand he’d been preparing for all his life.”*

You can see that it is made up of several different parts. There are four kinds of sentence parts to watch for:

1) **Main Parts.** These parts usually contain the main action of the sentence: “Malcolm Maxwell,… left the quiet country town in which he’d been raised,….”

(2) **Lead-In Parts.** These parts lead into other parts, often main parts: “On a bitter cold winter morning,…”

(3) **In-Between Parts.** As the name implies, these parts go in between other parts. They feel like a slight interruption: “…a young man of simple means but good intentions,…”

(4) **Add-On Parts.** These are extra parts that convey additional information about any of the other parts and are usually used to make things more specific: “…and set off on the bold errand he’d been preparing for all his life.”

We could describe the structure of this sentence like this:

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
| Part 1 | On a bitter cold winter morning, | Lead-In |
| Part 2 | Malcolm Maxwell, | Main |
| Part 3 | a young man of simple means but good intentions, | In-Between |
| Part 4 | left the quiet country town in which he’d been raised, | Main |
| Part 5 | and set off on the bold errand he’d been preparing for all his life. | Add-On |

Or, more efficiently: Lead-In, Main, In-Between, Main, Add-On.

**To help the reader see this structure, separate these parts with commas.**

"Looking for Quality in Student Writing: Learning to See the Things Kids Can Do So We Can Teach Them to Do the Things They Can't" by Steve Peha at

**TThe Guidelines of Commas:** Remember LIES:

**L: Lists.** The comma before the final item in a series is optional.

**I:** **Introductions.** Place a comma before elements that precede the subject.

**E: Extra Information.** Divide extra (non essential) information of all kinds with a comma on each side.

**S:** **Side-by-Side Sentences.** Separate independent clauses (sentences) with a comma and a conjunction.

**(Note:** Also, observe the comma rules that apply to quotations and in conventions such as letters or addresses.)