As students revise their drafts, some of the strategies for sentence-level revision presented in Chapter 8 should prove helpful. The chapter explains and offers practice in expanding, combining, and revising sentences. You may want to spend some time discussing Richard Selzer’s comments about his two stages of writing sentences, which are really drafting and revising, and make sure that your students do not think they have to get their sentences “right” on the first try. The emphasis here is on “tinkering,” or taking control of sentences that students have already drafted using the no-fault fashion recommended in Chapters 1 through 3. This chapter offers options to students through the use of exercises, which you may want to recast so students can revise sentences from their own essays.

As a way of expanding students’ repertoire of options, the exercises can be assigned as in-class work or as homework; for example, give the first expansion exercise (p. 201) in class and assign the second (pp. 203–204) as homework. Many of the exercises work well as small-group collaborative activities. You may want to concentrate on the readings and use the chapter to increase students’ awareness of how sentence structure affects their responses to what they read. Still another approach is to have students choose the exercises that would be the most beneficial and then discuss them. Whichever approach you take, help students understand how sentence-level revision fits into the hierarchy of needs for writers.

**EXPANDING AND COMBINING SENTENCES**

**Exercise (p. 201)**

This apparently simple exercise can be treacherous if you insist on grammatical accuracy in identifying the boundaries of modifying words, phrases, and clauses,
because modifiers are sometimes tucked one inside another like Oriental boxes. In discussing the exercise, you might insist on an exact identification of the subject and verb but allow some latitude in the identification of modifiers. Your discussion need not touch on terms such as adverb, subordinate clause, and participial phrase. The exercise allows students to get an overview of the sentence without an intervening cloud of technicalities. In the “answer” that follows, *a, and, and the* are not treated as modifiers, and modifiers have been enclosed in parentheses. So as not to confuse matters, modifiers within modifiers have not been segmented.

1. (Part of) (my) (surgical) training was spent (in a rural hospital) (in eastern Connecticut).
2. The building was situated (on the slope) (of a modest hill).
3. (Behind it), cows grazed (in a pasture).
4. The (operating) theater occupied the fourth, (the ultimate floor), (wherefrom high windows looked down) (upon the scene).
5. To glance up (from our work) and see (lovely) cattle (about theirs), calmed the frenzy (of the most temperamental of prima donnas).
6. Intuition tells me that (our) patients had fewer (wound) infections and made speedier recoveries (than those operated upon in the airless sealed boxes where we now strive). [The structure of this sentence makes a simple division between base sentence and modifiers difficult. Some modifiers (“fewer” and “speedier”) seem necessary to convey the comparative sense of the base sentence, and in strictly grammatical terms “than those” is probably part of the base sentence.]
7. (Certainly) the surgeons were of gentler stripe.

**Exercises (p. 203): Expanding Sentences by Modification**

Each student will expand the sentences differently. Students might work in groups to collaborate on the expansions, or you might want to involve the entire class together. You might also ask students to look at their own essays and choose five sentences that can be expanded by modification. Students might share the “before and after” versions of their expanded sentences in groups. Here is a possible expansion for “My doctor always seems impatient”: “Whenever I go for a checkup, my doctor always seems impatient, glancing frequently at her watch, asking me questions as she reads my chart, sometimes even interrupting my exam to take a phone call.”
Exercises (pp. 203–204): Combining Sentences by Coordination

Sentence-combining exercises allow for many different answers. You might want to remind students of this and demonstrate the range of possibilities by asking various students to put their sentences on the board.

1. Two major causes of death in this country are coronary heart disease and cancer. [The subjects of the two sentences are combined as a compound predicate nominative.]

2. Warned by my mother, doctor, and coach of the dangers of rapid weight loss, I am now quite cautious about dieting. [The three subjects are combined to form a series within the modifying phrase. The three nouns are objects of the preposition by.]

3. Although the number of newspaper and magazine articles on AIDS has declined in the last few years, the AIDS crisis has continued to grow since the first case was documented within the United States in 1977. [The subject of the last sentence has become an introductory clause. The two remaining subjects have been combined as a main clause and a modifier.]

4. Because breakfast cereals such as oat bran contain fiber and may reduce cholesterol, advertisers stress the health benefits of these products. [The subjects have been combined to modify and introduce the subject of the third sentence.]

5. Most people are very selective about the kind of running shoes they buy, which may explain why the cost of these shoes is escalating. [The subject of the first sentence modifies the object in the second.]

Exercises (p. 206): Using Parallel Structure

| 1.a. We hold these truths to be self-evident: | that all men are created equal, that they are endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable Rights. . . . |
| 1.b. Berton Rouche’s narratives of “medical detection” are full | of patients with unusual symptoms of laboratory technicians with specialized knowledge of doctors with extraordinary diagnostic |
2. The wording of some of the items has been changed slightly to make the items fit the parallel list and to maintain the original sense of the descriptive phrase; for example, “conversations dominated by numbers” becomes “talks frequently about numbers.”

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Type A Behavior</th>
<th>Type B Behavior</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Obsesses about deadlines</td>
<td>Rarely wears a watch</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Needs intensely to win at all costs</td>
<td>Possesses enough self-esteem not to need to win all the time</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Talks frequently about numbers</td>
<td>Talks frequently in images and metaphors</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Often criticizes others harshly</td>
<td>Seldom criticizes others</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Parallel sentence: Type A people obsess about deadlines, need to win at all costs, talk frequently about numbers, and often criticize others harshly; type B people rarely wear a watch, possess enough self-esteem not to need to win all the time, talk frequently in images and metaphors, and seldom criticize others.

3. **Computer**
   - Circuits
   - Blank disks
   - Storage
   - Program

**Parallel sentence:** A powerful thinking tool with complex circuits, a capacity to receive and store information, and multiple programs, the computer is no match for the brain with its self-repairing neurotransmitters, its capacity to receive, sort, and store unlimited information, and its master programmer, the cerebrum, which can create and interpret information as well as receive and store it.

**H. G. Wells Example Paragraph (p. 206)**

In the first sentence, the two predicate nominatives—“a biographer’s dream” and “book reviewer’s waltz”—are parallel in form. In the second sentence, there is another series of parallel predicate nominatives: “one of the world’s greatest storytellers” and “lover of numerous and intelligent women.”
Exercises (pp. 207–208): Combining Sentences by Subordination

As in all sentence-combining exercises, there are many possible answers. You may want to illustrate the range of options by eliciting various versions of each answer from class members. Such examples provide an opportunity to discuss how sentences differ in style and emphasis.

1. By injecting guinea pigs with a disease, observing their behavior, and then dissecting them, scientists use them in laboratory experiments to examine the effect of the disease on their organs.
2. From Michelangelo’s gruesome dissection of cadavers came his understanding of human bones and muscles and his ability to celebrate the human body in his sculptures.
3. X-rays can penetrate the human body, producing light on photographic film and revealing shadows that indicate changes in body tissue.
4. Because early doctors did not understand what caused disease, they developed cures by guesswork and trial and error, attributing their correct guesses to magic, their incorrect guesses to fate.
5. Located in beautiful settings, spas were vacation spots as well as health resorts where people went to restore themselves in the special mineral waters that were supposed to purge the body of disease.

Exercise (pp. 209–210): Combining for a Purpose

One way of using the exercise as a springboard for class discussion is to duplicate some students’ answers without indicating what purposes they serve. Ask the class to vote on which of the two purposes each sentence seems to serve, then discuss the reasons for the votes.

Cluster A

Purpose 1: Because the color and style of clothes reveal an individual’s personality and attitudes, people should be free to dress as they choose. They should not be forced to wear the required “appropriate attire” of formal situations: a dress or a suit and tie.

Purpose 2: Although clothes such as blue jeans and a T-shirt can reveal an individual’s personality by their color and style, they are not appropriate in professional situations in which people judge others by the appropriateness of their appearance.
Cluster B

Purpose 1: Soap opera characters routinely develop various illnesses, but these illnesses are vaguely defined by the doctors and tend conveniently to advance the plot.

Purpose 2: Although soap opera scenes are often set in hospitals and soap opera plots often involve doctors and nurses, the treatment of hospital life is far from realistic: doctors and nurses discuss personal problems rather than professional matters as they go about their duties, and they rarely perform medical procedures beyond making rounds and keeping charts.

Cluster C

Purpose 1: Sports injuries that would have required major surgery in the past are now treated with arthroscopic surgery, in which surgeons puncture, rather than cut, the muscle using two catheters, one carrying a microscopic television camera to locate the injury and another carrying surgical tools to repair it.

Purpose 2: Although arthroscopic surgery allows athletes to correct injuries and return to play within a few weeks, this quick return is not always wise; any injury requires sufficient recuperation, and reinjury can result in disability.

TYPES OF SENTENCES AND THEIR EFFECTS

Exercises (p. 211): The Balanced Sentence

Students will produce varied responses to these prompts. Because this is a two-step process, a typical response might look like this:

1. a. Joggers breathe in the fumes of passing cars.
   b. Swimmers bathe in the germs of a hundred strangers.

2. When you jog, you breathe in the fumes of passing cars, and when you swim, you bathe in the germs of a hundred strangers.

Exercise (p. 212): Periodic and Cumulative Sentences

This exercise is a quick, in-class exercise to give students practice developing writing through pacing and tension. You might want to ask students to write something relevant to a longer essay on which they are working and to read each other’s revisions in groups.
REVISING SENTENCES

Exercises (pp. 214–215): Revising for Clarity

1. **Minor revision:** For centuries, artists have known that their paints contained poisonous lead. Nevertheless, they continued to use these paints, allowing the paint to collect on their clothing, touch their skin, and contaminate the air they breathed. This contact meant that the paint and its fumes often penetrated their skin and entered their bloodstream, causing convulsive cramps, fatigue, and general ill health. No wonder so many painters looked sickly compared to the healthy subjects whose portraits they painted.

   **Major revision:** For many centuries, painters continued to use paints that they knew contained lead and made them ill.

2. **Minor revision:** Movies often portray artists as tormented, poor, or ill with strange diseases. This suffering supposedly makes them more sensitive than normal people and therefore contributes to their creativity. Ultimately, they die for their art and become famous only after death.

   **Major revision:** In movies, the stereotypical artist is impoverished, ill, and tormented, fame coming only after death.

3. **Minor revision:** An unfounded misconception about abstract painters is that they lack skill in drawing. In fact, most abstract painters are highly skilled and able to render objects photographically, although instead they concentrate on texture and symbol to express the human experience. Called “biomorphic” symbols, they suggest organic forms or fragments of human anatomy wedged into dense landscapes and are interpreted as the fragmentation of modern society.

   **Major revision:** Contrary to popular belief, abstract artists are highly skilled at drawing but prefer to concentrate on thick texture and “biomorphic” symbols to represent the fragmentation of modern society.

Exercises (p. 215): Revising for Emphasis

1. Longevity may depend on the luck of your genes.
2. Insurance for catastrophic illness is now under debate in Congress.
3. Believing that a sense of purpose and creativity were the best medicine, Dr. Albert Schweitzer, at ninety, worked all day in his clinic and played the piano at night.
4. The painting *The Gross Clinic* reveals Thomas Eakins’s extensive knowledge of anatomy by portraying the famous surgeon, Samuel Gross, next to the operating table holding a scalpel and lecturing as his assistant probes the patient’s open wound.

5. From the stories he heard from patients as he went on rounds with poet and physician William Carlos Williams, Robert Coles, a leading author and child psychiatrist, learned about sickness as a medical student.

**Exercises (p. 218): Changing Passive Verbs to the Active Voice**

1. Critics have proposed that the goal of much modern art should be to change the criteria for what people consider ugly.

2. The American Hospital Association must recognize that many families cannot afford such costs.

3. The critic said she would announce the winners in the photography competition within three days.

4. We abandoned our careful observation of safety procedures once the danger was gone.

**Exercises (p. 220): Eliminating Wordiness**

1. Most people are unconcerned with critical reaction to new trends in the art world.

2. When we studied the human face in art class, I knew most of its parts.

3. Whether men are more gifted artists than women depends on how one interprets the word *gifted*.

4. When hospital administrators decided to build a rehabilitation center, a completely new staff had to be hired.

5. Many doctors discovered that hobbies such as painting reduce the amount of stress in their lives.

**Exercise (pp. 221–222): Revising for Variety**

*Revision 1:* Nathaniel Hawthorne’s “The Birthmark” is essentially a story about the limits of science and human perfectibility.

*Revision 2:* Aylmer, whose previous attempts to improve nature have failed, decides to perfect his wife Georgiana’s beauty by removing a tiny birthmark on her cheek.
**Revision 3:** [Leave sentence 5 as it is.]

**Revision 4:** He secludes Georgiana in a private chamber and doctors her with strange medicines concocted in his laboratory, but he soon discovers that the birthmark is stronger than he thought.

**Revision 5:** To avoid another failure, he decides to risk giving Georgiana an extremely powerful potion.

**Revision 6:** At the climax of the story, Aylmer sees his experiment succeed—at a price.

**Revision 7:** Georgiana loses her birthmark and her life.

**Revised paragraph:** Nathaniel Hawthorne’s “The Birthmark” is essentially a story about the limits of science and human perfectibility. Aylmer, a scientist whose previous attempts to improve nature have failed, decides to perfect his wife Georgiana’s beauty by removing a tiny birthmark on her cheek. Initially confident of his success, Aylmer secludes Georgiana in a private chamber and doctors her with strange medicines concocted in his laboratory. Soon, however, he discovers the birthmark is stronger than he thought. To avoid another failure, he decides to give Georgiana an extremely powerful potion. The potion works. Aylmer’s experiment succeeds, but at a price: Georgiana loses her birthmark and her life.

**COMPOSING SENTENCES ON YOUR COMPUTER**

- Create “lesson files” for sentence-combining exercises, which students can copy into their own files and work on individually or in pairs. To create such a file, type in the directions and the sentences to be combined. A single file might contain several progressively more challenging exercises. You might include from student papers sentences that are in need of combination. Students can print out their answers and turn them in or study them as a group exercise in class.

- Develop a sentence-effectiveness coding scheme, using symbols (brackets for sentences that could be effectively combined, asterisks for unclear sentences, plus signs for sentences that could be expanded, etc.). Peer editors can make these annotations on screen, and the writer can use the “find” function to locate the different symbols as needed.

- If you have access to a text-feedback program, ask students to run their drafts through the program for feedback on the number of words in each sentence, readability level, and so on. You might review this with each student, or as a
class, interpreting the data in terms of each writer’s subject, audience, and purpose for that particular essay. For example, a sixth-grade readability level may be appropriate for a narrative topic or a piece written for a general audience, but it is inappropriate for a paper analyzing a piece of literature written for an academic audience. You can help students make choices about how to adapt their writing appropriately through the use of expanded sentences and additional sentences. The danger of feedback from computer programs is that it reinforces the mistaken notion that good writing is formulaic.

READINGS
The three readings work well to illustrate viewpoint and process analysis as well as the power sentences have in controlling the pace and drama of a story. After students have read the three essays, you might want to discuss how point of view affects the telling of events: Pam Smith and Richard Selzer are themselves directly involved in the processes they describe, whereas Diane Ackerman is an outsider viewing someone else’s work after the process has concluded. Do students prefer one piece over another? Why?

Audience is also a controlling factor in what events are recorded and in how they are explained. Students might work in groups to analyze the audience for each piece and discuss how audience affects the final product and the type of sentences used. You could conclude with a class discussion of these issues.

“Excerpts from a Painter’s Studio Notes,” Pam Smith
Pam Smith’s journal is a glimpse into how an artist thinks when involved in the creative process. Students might want to compare their own journals with Smith’s to see if there are any interesting similarities and differences. What happens to students when ideas hit them and they record these ideas in their journals?

Discussion questions (p. 224). What kind of sentences does Smith use to describe different stages of her process? How might her sentences be compared to brush strokes?

Smith’s journal contains a mixture of sentence types, which gives the reading a sense of force and liveliness. Sometimes ideas come quickly and are written in short, staccato sentences; sometimes they are slower and come in longer, more fluid, cumulative sentences. We read and respond to the rise and fall of the sentences, pulled by the momentum created by the variation. At times she uses a series of repeating, short, noun-verb constructions, such as in the last paragraph for
July 1981: “I had a dream last night. I kept saying in this dream, ‘I am in love with a green painting.’ Then I would paint it. This happened over and over, each time the painting was different and beautiful.” The repetition of the short, simple sentence patterns and of the “I-verb” reflects the recurrence of the dream. The form and the meaning are intertwined.

Structural repetition and word repetition create cohesion in the first paragraph for October 1981: “The point of a painting . . . the point of a painting . . . .” Later, in November, she says, “Sometimes I enhance the boundaries by painting them as lines. Sometimes I let the boundaries be where two areas bump into each other.” The repetition (“Sometimes I enhance” and “Sometimes I let”) creates a boundary in our heads, and the two sentences become boundaries on the page, again weaving the meaning and the structure.

Students might want to examine not only the short sentences but the brevity of the paragraphs, or entries, which contributes to the feeling of something in the process of being created. Smith zeroes in from boundary to section as she describes how she paints: “When I paint, my colors are a shape and a placement. I paint their boundaries. Just this much I paint. Here. And how.” The final two “sentences,” of course, lack all the features we expect to find in Standard English sentences. She has employed fragments, but they are appropriately placed and reflect the process of dabbing the paint onto the canvas. We do not question her for information here but simply watch as she paints.

The February 1983 entry finally flowers into a series of longer sentences that describe the painting she has settled on, just as writers finally settle on a topic and know it’s the right one. The sentences here contain extended modification. She describes the experience itself as having texture, with “possibilities” that “flash by, and each one of them dictates a different painting . . . . I simultaneously curse myself for not having planned the whole painting out beforehand, and feel exhilarated by the discoveries that are made.” The images are strong for her, and her sentences reflect that strength in their detail.

Students will pick up the obvious relationship between painting and writing as discovery. Just as Smith tells us, “I believe the motion of my right hand, drawing or painting, is another form of thought,” her sentences, with their variations of texture, color, and tone, become the brush strokes of her verbal portrait of the process, filling the journal pages with her descriptions and assessments. Some sentences, like brush strokes, may be accidental, but they contribute to the overall composition.

“The Painter’s Eye,” Diane Ackerman
Diane Ackerman analyzes the relationship between Cézanne’s defective vision and his innovative painting style, as the textbook points out. Students might be interested in researching the lives of other artists whose specific circumstances also contributed to the uniqueness of their artistic expression. Little-known facts about the personal lives of artists, musicians, and writers can help students interpret the work in the context of the life, rather than in isolation.

Discussion questions (p. 225). What kinds of sentences appear in the passages Ackerman quotes from Maurice Merleau-Ponty? What kinds of sentences appear in the passages she quotes from Patrick Trevor-Roper? How would you compare Ackerman’s sentences to those of the art critics she quotes?

The first sentence of the excerpt from Merleau-Ponty is compound, two independent clauses joined by a semicolon. The sentence is periodic, revealing its climactic statement in its final clause (“Cézanne even claimed that we see their odor”). The second sentence begins with the introductory sentence modifier If, which modifies the whole main clause. The sentence is expanded by the use of detail, which carries the effect of the sentence. The third sentence (“That is why each brush stroke must satisfy an infinite number of conditions”) is the least expanded sentence, but it too employs modification by detail: the stroke must satisfy not just a condition, but “an infinite number of” conditions. The next-to-last sentence combines two sentences with the connector for (in this case, meaning “because”). The embedded structure of the sentences reflects the meaning being conveyed: the search for the “real” is a search to reach through the layers of meaning. Merleau-Ponty’s complex sentence structures mirror this search in a kind of verbal metaphor.

At first glance, sentences in the passage from Trevor-Roper appear to be somewhat less complex than those of Merleau-Ponty. However, these sentences are also expanded. The first sentence is expanded through the use of modifying phrases. The core sentence is “He often paint[ed] in pastel.” This is modified through the placement of the opening phrase, “As time passed.” Pastels are compared to oils through the modifying phrase “as being an easier medium.” The reason for his need of ease is explained through the modifying phrase “for his failing sight.” The sentence expands outward in both ways, embedding the basic sentence. The structure of the second sentence mirrors the structure of the first, beginning with a modifier concerned with time (Later). The sentence is balanced through the constructions of cause-and-effect modifiers: “by using photographs . . . he was able.” The basic sentence (“he discovered”) consists only of a noun and a verb. The modifying expansions are phrases that carry the weight of the meaning. The third and final sentence is cumulative and follows a climactic order, ending in Cézanne’s
own words (“I must learn a blind man’s trade now”) as well as Trevor-Roper’s observation that Cézanne “had always in fact had an interest in modelling.”

Ackerman’s own sentences, in contrast to those of Merleau-Ponty and Trevor-Roper, are generally less cumulative, though not always. However, what students should notice is the variety of sentences that all these writers use. Short sentences can slow down a piece, providing a pause in between a series of longer sentences. On the other hand, a series of shorter sentences might speed up a piece that has dragged. Sentences need to be considered within their environment. In addition, the selection from Merleau-Ponty is translated from the French; a characteristic of formal written French is its long sentences. Ackerman’s own sentences are often so intertwined with her quotations from both art critics that they are expanded not only through her own modifying phrases but also through the inclusion of a quotation (see the sentence directly following the Merleau-Ponty extract). Other sentences are expanded through the inclusion of detail (see page 226, “Though he was known for cutting off his ear . . .”). This sentence presents a series of noun-predicate constructions that expands the base sentence (“he was known”). The entire sentence is modified through the introductory “though.” You might ask students to choose from Ackerman’s piece one sentence that they find particularly interesting and to study its structure. One exercise might be to ask them to construct a sentence parallel in structure to the one they have chosen, but on their own topic. They then discuss the suitability of the sentence in terms of their essay.

“The Knife,” Richard Selzer

This is a very powerful piece of writing to which many students might have a strongly negative reaction. You might begin by asking for student reactions (see the collaborative exercise at the end of this chapter). In particular, after students have shared their responses, you might note the differences between male and female reactions to this essay. It could provoke a number of different discussions, including gender and reading, the use of detail and analogy, and audience analysis and purpose. Encourage students to separate their feelings toward the subject from their reactions to the quality of the writing and the construction of individual sentences.

**Discussion questions (p. 228).** What kind of sentences does Selzer use to create a “distinctive rhythm and resonance”? When does he use short sentences? When does he build long sentences? How do such sentences contribute to his purpose?

A superb prose stylist, Selzer’s sentences, like his surgery, bear his signature. In “The Knife,” Selzer uses a number of techniques to enable the reader to experience surgery from the surgeon’s point of view. Chiefly, Selzer uses the cumulative sentence to advance the action. This allows him to announce the activity
in the main clause and then “open up” the scene with the details that follow. The first sentence in the third paragraph illustrates this technique: “There is sound, the tight click of clamps fixing teeth into severed blood vessels, the snuffle and gargle of the suction machine clearing the field of blood for the next stroke, the litany of monosyllables with which one prays his way down and in: clamp, sponge, suture, tie, cut.”

Following many of these long, cumulative sentences are short sentences or phrases clipped off the end of the preceding sentence. Thus Selzer slows down the pace of his narrative, allowing readers to pause with the surgeon to look more closely or reflect more deeply on the event they are witnessing. For example, on the heels of the long, cumulative sentence just quoted comes the brief “And there is color,” followed by a fragment: “The green of the cloth, the white of the sponges, the red and yellow of the body.” The reader pauses, taking in the colors. Later, in paragraph 4, Selzer captures his sense of wonder with a variation of the same pattern: a short sentence followed by a stylistic fragment (“English minor sentence” according to some) and a sentence that expands the idea in the fragment: “For the first time we can see into the cavity of the abdomen. Such a primitive place. One expects to find drawings of buffalo on the walls.”

Additionally, Selzer uses parallel structure to re-create the ongoing action, repeating key words to add momentum: “A stillness settles in my heart and is carried to my hand. It is the quietude of resolve layered over fear. And it is this resolve that lowers us, my knife and me, deeper and deeper into the person beneath.” In paragraph 6, Selzer uses balanced and parallel sentences in presenting analogies to convey his belief that surgery is a sacred art: “Not surplice and cassock but mask and gown are your regalia. You hold no chalice, but a knife. There is no wine, no wafer. There are only the facts of blood and flesh.”

Still another technique that lends a sense of immediacy to the narrative is Selzer’s use of dialogue, both external and internal. In paragraph 8, the reader is privy to the surgeon’s internal monologue: “Oh, there is risk everywhere. One goes lightly. The spleen. No! No! Do not touch the spleen that lurks below the left leaf of the diaphragm, a manta ray in a coral cave, its bloody tongue protruding.” Finally, in paragraphs 10 through 16, as the narrative reaches its climax, Selzer slows the pace by interspersing paragraphs of dialogue with narrative paragraphs. At the end of this sequence, at the moment the surgeon discovers the source of the cancer, the momentum slows to a near halt: “Here it is. The voice goes flat, all business now.” In the face of this terrible discovery, the narrative, like the surgery, ends quickly, in businesslike fashion, the passion and wonder gone.
WRITING ASSIGNMENTS

1. Narrate: Students might interpret this assignment loosely to include experiences with the illness of parents or grandparents. You might want to let them know that the illness they describe does not need to be life threatening—everyone has had the flu or a bad cold and has remained at home. The point is to find a clear focus, which means they should do some preliminary “memory research” to help them remember a particular event or a composite of several events.

2. Observe: Stress to students that they find a painting that “speaks to them.” For some students, this assignment might be intimidating because many nonartists claim, “I don’t know anything about art, but I know what I like.” This assignment would work well as a collaborative exercise in which group members together research the oversized books and come to an agreement about the painting they will describe. To help them do this, you might set up some guidelines: How will you decide? Are you more interested in certain kinds of paintings (Mannerist, Impressionist, Fauvist)? Or are you more interested in certain colors? Do you like paintings that seem to tell a story? Describe the process by which your group selected the painting. Did anyone change her or his mind about which paintings to choose? The group will then supply an analysis of its decision and outline the criteria used as well as compose a letter to a friend. What is important is that students come to some understanding of why they responded as they did. This is, of course, more challenging in a group than alone.

3. Investigate: If the artist agrees, students might take photographs of the paintings in various stages to help document the paintings’ development. This assignment could turn into a feature article for a student newspaper. Some students might explore the more technical aspects of painting: the types of brushes; the kinds of paint; whether the artist paints on wood, canvas, or some other backing; how the artist decides which brush or paint to use; how the artist stretches and prepares a canvas. Others might be more interested in how the images evolve: Where does the initial idea come from? What role does accident play in the development of a painting? Encouraging students to view the essay as a “biography” underscores the notion of living art and helps students interpret the making of art as an ongoing process. They might investigate how the painting they observed being developed contributes to the overall body of work done by the artist. What is the relationship of the particular painting to other paintings by the same artist?
4. Collaborate: Another way to approach this assignment is to ask students to study the sentences of different types of programs—playbills, movie and concert reviews, programs for painting exhibits—and then to form a hypothesis about writing for the arts. Do they see any relationships among the different kinds of art writing? Each person in the group might research a different art document and then report findings to the group. Each group would then catalogue these findings, write a report, and share it with the rest of the class. Students might want to “become” art critics, write in the style of one of the documents they have examined, and then create a similar document as a group. If the class has access to a graphics program for a word processor, this document could become an attractive and professional-quality sample of a brochure.

5. Read: Students should first concentrate on writing their responses and then study how they constructed their sentences; otherwise, they might become too blocked to be able to write anything. After they have quickly written a number of responses to the prompts, they might reconstruct them for variety. Students could work in groups to compare responses and ways of formulating sentences before working to subordinate the responses.

Students might also compare the different ways to approach the subject by reading an article from the *Journal of the American Medical Association*. How do different sources treat the topic of surgery? How do audience and purpose dictate changes in how the writer presents the information about the topic?

6. Respond: If your school is near an art gallery that has a good collection of Cézanne paintings, this assignment could occasion a class trip to view the paintings. Otherwise, students can work collaboratively to outline their responses to the paintings (they can find reproductions in library art books). Students might want to do further research on Ackerman’s essay, finding out more about the properties of pigments and what the health issues are surrounding them. (An essay on recent attention to lead paint could be a spinoff from this and attract some students to research on public policy regarding safe levels of dangerous substances in common household products.) Attention to the question of defective vision, which Cézanne apparently suffered, can help students realize the importance of researching the conditions under which art is produced. The historical moments and specific life stories of artists and writers can lend valuable insight into art, literature, and the creative process. The relationship between the “inner eye” and the outer conditions of the artist lends itself to a discussion of the nature of perception and the complexities of visual (and verbal) expression.
7. Analyze: You might tie this in with a discussion of voice. What differences in sentence structure contribute to a distinct personality speaking in each essay? What patterns do students see in each piece that might be viewed as idiosyncratic? Furthermore, students might examine their own writing. In what ways are their sentences, as Selzer puts it, like their “signatures”?

8. Evaluate: The most obvious difference between surgeons and writers, which students will readily recognize, is that writers aren’t burdened with knowing that if they craft the wrong sentence, someone could die. Surgeons must know exactly what is under the knife; a fraction of an inch could be the difference between life and death for their patients. Although surgery and writing work as an analogy, in reality the two practices are radically different. Students might want to focus on the difference in the nature and uses of tools: knives and scalpels might be “like” pens and pencils, but they produce very different results. The settings are also different: surgery occurs in a hospital with medical staff and sophisticated machinery, whereas writing can occur in so simple a place as beneath a tree. The discussion could focus on the usefulness of metaphor as a way of knowing. Although metaphors help foster understanding, in what ways do metaphors not prepare us for reality?

9. Argue: To do this assignment, students must decide exactly who is purchasing the painting and where it will be hung, and then they must be able to visualize the place in their minds. If they decide a friend is buying it, they should visit their friend’s house and actually discuss with the friend his or her preferences in painting and the placement of the work. What are the friend’s preferences in paintings? Likewise, if they are purchasing the painting for an employer, they should visit the site where the painting would hang: a bank lobby? a school office? a computer firm? A certain amount of “play” can enter this assignment, but whatever students make up, they must envision a “real” place so that they can write convincingly about it.

10. Argue: You might want to stress to students that the decisions about how to change the sentences are completely up to them. They can make mistakes only if they choose illogical sequences or combine the sentences in a way that does not match expectations for Standard Written English sentences. The emphasis is on choice, not on getting the one right answer. Some suggestions might be as follows: “Surgeons are revered as medical priests because they have acquired a secret knowledge and are given absolute authority over life and
death.” “They are cloaked and masked in green vestments and cut the human body with special tools, eliminating disease.” This exercise could be used as a quick group exercise or in a whole-class discussion.

You might want to take this further and ask students to choose eight to ten sentences from their own essays and practice expanding, modifying, and combining them. They might work in pairs or groups to share their results and discuss their choices.

USING THE WRITING CENTER

Students should worry about individual sentences only after the entire essay has been constructed and they are satisfied that their presentation of the subject is appropriate for their audience and purpose. If students try to revise sentences too soon, the entire essay will suffer because students will feel invested in the sentences and unable to let go of them where necessary. Nevertheless, once the central argument of the essay is clearly established and the student is satisfied with the overall rhetorical plan, a Writing Center tutor can help the student examine sentences for clarity, readability, and variation. In the hierarchy of concerns, sentence-level issues are lower-order concerns to be addressed only after the holistic concerns of the essay have been satisfied.

Tutors can help students revise sentences by asking them to read the essay aloud. Studies reveal that as students read aloud, they self-correct. Tutors will stop students at various points throughout the essay. Prompts such as “What you just said is not what you have written” help students reread and make corrections. You might want to ask a tutor to come into the classroom to work with individual students. You can also ask all students to make a list of those sentences they sometimes have difficulty with and then concentrate on those particular types of sentences (parallel constructions, balanced sentences, cumulative sentences) when reading their essays. Tutors can also help students revise sentences by asking such questions as “Is there another way to say this?” and “How can you combine these two sentences?”

If you want students to work with tutors on particular types of problems, let the Writing Center know how it can help. In response, tutors can focus students on the particular issues that concern their writing. As Mina Shaughnessy points out in Errors and Expectations, students can gain control over their own writing by learning to identify their own patterns of error.

ADDITIONAL SUGGESTIONS FOR THE COLLABORATIVE CLASSROOM
• Ask students to reread Richard Selzer’s “The Knife,” on pages 228–230. As they read individually, have them note their emotional reactions in the margins and underline the sentences that produced such reactions. When they have done so, ask them to share their reactions in groups. Later, the groups will report back to the class, listing the sentences that produced the greatest reactions. As a class, you might want to discuss why such sentences are so powerful. This will include a discussion of placement in the paragraph, the construction of the individual sentences, the modifiers used, and the purpose for the entire essay.

• Following the model just described, ask students to read either Pam Smith’s journal or Diane Ackerman’s essay, “The Painter’s Eye,” and record their responses to the readings, underlining the sentences and phrases that evoked their responses. They might note when they feel calm or excited or tense. In groups, have them discuss how the construction of the sentences contributed to their feelings as they were reading. You might ask them to write a brief statement about how the sentences create both an intellectual and an emotional response to the reading and how the ordering of the sentences creates a mood in the essay. In what ways do their feelings change when the sentences become shorter or longer?

• You might also ask students to evaluate their next-to-final drafts in groups for sentence effectiveness. A sample guide follows:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Peer Evaluation</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Peer respondent:</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1. Do the writer’s sentences have any particular rhythm, or do they seem flat and monotonous? Point to some specific examples.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Underline the sentences that are the most memorable, and explain why you think so.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Circle sentences that are unclear, and put a question mark next to them.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. Examine several paragraphs to see if the sentences vary in length. (You might count the words or chart the length graphically with lines to indicate varying lengths.) Indicate in the margin whether you think the paragraphs need more variation.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
| 5. Examine several more paragraphs to see if the sentences vary in construction. Are there any balanced, periodic, or cumulative sentences? Does a modifying
phrase sometimes introduce the sentence? Are any sentences structured in parallel fashion?
6. Put brackets around any sentences that you think should be combined for greater effectiveness.
7. In front of any sentences that you think need expansion, write “Expand.”
8. Place parentheses around any wordy phrases or sentences.

SOURCES AND ADDITIONAL REFERENCES

In *Errors and Expectations* (New York: Oxford UP, 1977), Mina Shaughnessy analyzes how helping students find patterns of error can change their writing.


For discussions on how to approach grammar in the writing classroom, see Constance Weaver, *Grammar for Teachers: Perspectives and Definitions* (Urbana, IL: NCTE, 1979).

For an amusing commentary on change in the English language and common misconceptions about how language works, see Dennis Baron, *Declining Grammar* (Urbana, IL: NCTE, 1989).
