

Literacy Tips



Tips for middle school educators on various topics such as grammar, writing, reading, spelling, vocabulary, cooperative learning and more.

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Tip #17: "Fourteener" Poems

"Fourteener" poems will help your students write free verse poetry. At the same time, you will be teaching sentence variety. Sentence fluency is one of the six traits of good writing, and this poetry exercise allows students time to play with various forms of sentence structure.

Ask students to write a sentence, any sentence. Then ask them to restate it in thirteen different ways. Of course, the restating can go in many different directions. The whole idea here is to allow students time to play with sentence structure. A student might experiment with repetition and rhythm, or a student might expand upon images from the original sentence using more sensory images (Collom, 1994, p.58). This will begin as an exercise in restating a sentence and then should take on the voice of the writer. During this playing with language, model your own attempt at a "Fourteener" Poem on the overhead projector. Use the think-aloud approach, which will help students understand better where writers' ideas come from.

Example

Here is an example from a 10th grade student:

Summer is gold
Is summer gold?
Golden is the summertime.
Hazy waves of molten gold.
Heated by the summer sunshine.
The golden summer sunshine heat.
The lazy vague seductive heat.
The golden forgetful don't-care haze.
The laughing gold.
The golden laughter.
The seductive molten golden heat.
The gold that reaches out and wraps
around you.
The golden heat that turns your body
gold.
Enticing summer gold.

-Katrina Dalrymple/10th grade

Source for "Fourteener" Poems:

Collom, Jack and Sheryl Noethe. Poetry Everywhere. New York: Teachers' & Writers Collaborative, 1994.

Extension

This would also be a good time to introduce different sentence patterns. Step Up to Writing teaches several excellent ways to write a thesis statement for an essay (or a topic sentence for a paragraph). Most of us rely on simple, compound, or complex sentences. Here is an attachment that showcases a few more sentence models. (This was included in



your new teacher packet, but everyone is on overwhelm status at the beginning of the year. Here it is again.) Also attached is a student worksheet that has been used in the summer school writing curriculum, which should be modified on a theme of your own choice.

[Topic Sentence Models](#)

[Winter Sports Topic Sentences](#)





THE HEART OF YOUR PAPER

11 Methods for Writing a Topic Sentence (or a Thesis Statement)



1. COMPLEX SENTENCE - A complex sentence begins with a subordinate conjunction. An occasion is the first part of the topic sentence and your reason for writing. It starts with a subordinate conjunction and is the dependent clause in the complex statement. The position is the second part of the topic sentence and states what you plan to prove or explain. It is the independent clause in the complex sentence. Remember to place a comma after the dependent clause. Example: *Before you make the decision to light up a cigarette, consider the problems caused by smoking.*

2. POWER (NUMBER) STATEMENTS - Power (number) statements can be short or long; in fact, they can be any grammatical structure you need or want. A power (number) statement is a sentence that contains a number word. The number word is the focus of the sentence and tells the reader that a list of information will follow. Examples: *Tourists traveling to Rome will want to visit three spectacular sights. The architect presented several options to the committee. The new recruits learned four important procedures.*

3. HOWEVER STATEMENTS - *However* is one of several conjunctive adverbs that will help you organize your thoughts into a topic sentence. Use *however* in the middle of the sentence. You will need a semicolon before the word *however* and a comma after the word *however*. This will cause you to create a compound sentence. The first part will be the occasion and the second part will state your position. Example: *The new rules for the school cafeteria seemed unfair to the students; however, the rules have made the cafeteria a better place to eat lunch.*

4. COMPOUND SENTENCE - Use a coordinating conjunction to create a compound sentence. Think of the memory trick BOY FANS to help you remember these conjunctions. (b=but o=or y=yet f=for a=and n=not s=so) Remember to use a comma before the conjunction. Examples: *Some people find it difficult to program a VCR, but most will succeed if they remember to follow these guidelines. My grandmother likes to help others, or she volunteers at church, at the hospital, and at my school. I enjoy music, but jazz is my favorite.*

5. INFINITIVE - Try using an infinitive ("to" plus a verb) to start your paper. An infinitive is a main verb preceded by the word to. Some example of infinitives are to succeed, to accomplish, to finish, to win, and to teach. Examples: *To win at chess, players need to master three skills. To attract customers, the ice cream parlor hired a clown who did magic tricks. To succeed takes more than just a good idea and a dream. To prepare for college, high school students should take several math, science, and English classes.*

6. THE LIST STATEMENT - A common method for writing a topic sentence is to list the categories you wish to address in your paper. Use a list of words: *All college students need money, courage, and friends.* Use a list of phrases: *Problems with the new school include: poor ventilation, small classrooms, inadequate lighting, limited parking.* Use a list of dependent clauses: *When I found my lost puppy, when I won the trip to Florida, and when I met a group of teachers from Russia, I realized that life is great and full of surprises.* Or use a list of independent clauses: *Run for office; join a club; march in the band. Activities like these will make high school more rewarding.*

7. GET THEIR ATTENTION - A declarative statement uses a strong verb or action word. Examples: *Children will love the new flavored cereals.* *Aunt Susan's foolproof holiday recipes saved me and impressed my family.* *Clay's gas station offers the best service.* *Fourth grade test scores at Lincoln Elementary soared.* *The restaurant on Main Street serves the best lunch in town.* *Teachers' salaries must be increased.*

8. A RHETORICAL QUESTION - This is the kind of question you ask when you want to get someone's attention, but you don't really expect an answer. However, it can be difficult to know what to write after the rhetorical question. This does take a lot practice. Examples: *What is your school doing to improve test scores?* *Why can't college graduates find the jobs they want?* *How will future generations solve the ozone problem?*

9. SIDE BY SIDE (SEMICOLON) STATEMENTS - Sometimes using two simple sentences - one for the occasion and one for the position - is the right way to go. It is especially powerful if your goal is to put emphasis on your position. Examples: *Young children belong in car seats; the car seat belongs in the back, not in the front.* *Throwing a party is a challenge; planning ahead can prevent stress.* *A little exercise may be good; too much exercise can be harmful.*

10. APPOSITIVES - When we set off a noun or a noun phrase with commas, we call this an appositive. An appositive does not have a verb; it is simply a noun followed by a description that tells more about the first noun. Examples: *Girdwood, a small town nestled in the Chugach Mountains, is a haven for serious downhill skiers.* *The medulla, an important part of the brain, controls your breathing.* *Ben Franklin, a colonist from Pennsylvania, helped Thomas Jefferson write the Declaration of Independence.*

11. USING A QUOTATION - Using a quotation in the topic sentence is an easy yet powerful way to start your paper. Begin with a topic sentence from earlier in this handout and add on the quotation for effectiveness. Examples: *Although I usually appreciate the advice I receive from my grandmother, I wish that she would follow the advice of Horace: "Whatever advice you give, be short."* *If you are tempted to give your best friend advice, at least be aware of the Arab proverb that says, "Never give advice in a crowd."*

(Search for quotes at www.quoteland.com or www.brainyquote.com!)

Name: _____

Period: _____

TOPIC SENTENCES 11 Different Ways of Starting...

1. COMPLEX SENTENCE

Since Anchorage has such a long winter, you should participate fully in winter sports.

2. POWER (NUMBER) SENTENCE

There are two types of cross country skiing that can be done on most city trails.

3. HOWEVER STATEMENT

Snowshoeing is an excellent aerobic exercise; however, you need a good pair of snowshoes to navigate through the deep snow.

4. COMPOUND SENTENCE

Youth hockey is extremely popular in Anchorage, so more ice rinks have been built to accommodate these athletes.

5. INFINITIVE (TO, PLUS VERB)

To ski jor, you must have a harness, skiing equipment, and an obedient dog.

6. THE LIST STATEMENT

Learning how to stop, choosing the right wax, and skiing down hills safely can be potential problems for a new cross country skier.

7. GET THEIR ATTENTION

Snowboarders often get discriminated against because of their reputation for being wild and reckless on the slopes.

8. RHETORICAL QUESTION

Is it possible for snowboarders and downhill skiers to share the slopes safely?

9. SIDE BY SIDE (SEMICOLON) STATEMENT

Diagonal skiers need groomed trails; volunteers are needed to help maintain them.

10. APPOSITIVE

Snowboarding, a winter sport typically associated with teenagers, should really be considered by anyone wanting some outdoor fun.

11. USING A QUOTATION (*quoteland.com or brainyquote.com*)

Dave Barry says, Snowboarding is an activity that is very popular with people who do not feel that regular skiing is lethal enough.”
