

Sentence Charting

A Snappy Strategy

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Sentence Charting is a writing strategy that helps students get a clear view of how their sentences flow by analyzing sentence length, beginnings, and structure. This strategy also gives students an objective view of their word choice by isolating verbs. Sentence charting can be used during the revising, editing portion of the writing process – it’s something students can do on their own, before they ever come to conference.

Sentence fluency and word choice are two of the six traits of good writing explained in materials published by Great Source. For more information on Write Traits®, visit Greatsource.com.

So, here’s the chart:

Sentence #	# of Words	First Four Words	Verbs	Structure, type, etc.
1				
2				
3				
4				
5				

- Shown here are five columns and six rows, including a heading column. The first column is where we’ll list the number of sentences we plan to analyze. (This will vary based on the teacher.) The second column lists the number of words in each sentence. The next column will display the first four words in each sentence we analyze. Next, the verbs in each sentence. And the final column may vary according to what you have taught. If you have discussed sentence structure, you might want students to record whether their sentences are simple, complex, or compound in this column so that they can become aware of the simplicity or sophistication of their own writing.

Note: this chart does not require a “handout” to be made. It might be best for students to get into the habit of creating their own charts on the spur of the moment so they can use this strategy in testing situations.

1. Use literature to introduce this writing strategy. Display and read aloud a few paragraphs of fluent text. (We'll use the first paragraph of chapter two from *To Kill a Mockingbird* as an example.)
2. Show and explain the sentence chart to students.
3. Model analyzing the paragraphs from *To Kill a Mockingbird* or another fluent excerpt from any book. Here is the completed chart for the first five sentences in chapter two of *To Kill a Mockingbird*.

Sentence #	# of Words	First Four Words	Verbs	Structure, type, etc.
1	10	Dill left us early	left, return	
2	30	We saw him off	saw, occurred, would be	
3	10	I never looked forward	looked	
4	48	Hours of wintertime had	was, had found, looking, spying, had given, learning, following, sharing	
5	5	I longed to join	longed	

4. Review the chart with students, discussing the variety in sentence length, beginnings, and verbs used. With variety in sentence structure, the writer often produces a certain cadence that is pleasing to the ear. Here again, if you have taught other aspects of sentence structure, be sure to hold students accountable for recognizing those structures in their own writing. Older students, especially, should be able to demonstrate more sophisticated writing techniques.
5. Next, model using the chart to analyze your own writing. Let students help you revise your writing based on the chart's indications. We're looking for variety, remember.
6. Then, give your students a practice this strategy by recording, analyzing, and then revising their own work.
7. To join our mailing list and get more strategies or learn about our high-interest reading material for reluctant secondary readers, visit us online at www.wegottheread.com.