

Simple Sentence Patterns

Hemingway Unit

5.1 Reading

Ernest Hemingway was an American writer whose novels and short stories are still widely read today. His influence upon 20th century American literature cannot be overstated. His explorations of concepts including honor, sacrifice, masculinity, and “grace under pressure” made him a celebrity in his own time, and the complexity of thought that attends his most famous works still keep critics busy today.

Hemingway’s works are likely to be encountered in literature, history, and women’s studies courses (due to his controversial portrayals of female characters). Students in creative writing classes will almost certainly examine Hemingway’s prose and explore his famous “iceberg theory” of composition.

The excerpt that follows is taken from a newspaper article the author wrote in his mid-twenties while working for *The Toronto Star* in 1923. The piece was intended to introduce North American audiences to the sport of bullfighting and draws heavily upon the author’s experiences as a spectator in Spain.

Style Note

While he was not yet a famous writer, there is clear evidence here of Hemingway’s style—one defined by brevity, lucidity, and striking imagery. His early training as a journalist helped him hone what would become the most celebrated authorial style of the 20th century. Note that he does not tell his audience how to feel about his description of events; rather, he attempts to make himself invisible so that readers can draw their own conclusions. The result is a deceptively one-dimensional veneer that hides great depth of meaning.

Reading Activity

As you move through Hemingway’s passage, try to get a feel for the way sentence length can dictate pacing. Note where and how he seems to speed you through some sections and slow things down in others.

*In rode two of the marshals in the velvet jackets and white ruffs. They galloped up to the president’s box, swerved and saluted, **doffing** their hats and bowing low. From the box an object came hurtling down. One of the marshals caught it in his plumed hat.*

“The key to the bullpen,” said the Gin Bottle King.

The two horsemen whirled and rode across the arena. One of them tossed the key to a man in torero costume; they both saluted with a wave of their plumed hats, and had gone from the ring. The big gate was shut and bolted. There was no more entrance. The ring was complete.

The crowd had been shouting and yelling. Now it was dead silent. The man with the key stepped toward an iron-barred, low, red door and unlocked the great sliding bar. He lifted it and stepped back. The door swung open. The man hid behind it. Inside it was dark.

Then, ducking his head as he came up out of the dark pen, a bull came into the arena. He came out all in a rush, big, black and white, weighing over a ton, and moving with a soft gallop. Just as he came out the sun seemed to dazzle him for an instant. He stood as though he were frozen, his great crest of muscle up, firmly planted, his eyes looking around, his horns pointed forward, black and white and sharp as porcupine quills. Then he charged. And as he charged, I suddenly saw what bullfighting is all about.

*For the bull was absolutely unbelievable. He seemed like some great prehistoric animal, absolutely deadly and absolutely vicious. And he was silent. He charged silently and with a soft, galloping rush. When he turned he turned on his four feet like a cat. When he charged the first thing that caught his eye was the picador on one of the wretched horses. The **picador** dug his spurs into the horse and they galloped away. The bull came on in his rush, refused to be shaken off, and in full gallop crashed into the animal from the side, ignored the horse, drove one of his horns high into the thigh of the picador, and tore him, saddle and all, off the horse's back.*

The bull went on without pausing to worry the picador lying on the ground. The next picador was sitting on his horse braced to receive the shock of the charge, his lance ready. The bull hit him sideways on, and horse and rider went high up in the air in a kicking mass and fell across the bull's back. As they came down the bull charged into them. The dough-faced kid, Chicuelo, vaulted over the fence, ran toward the bull and flapped his cape into the bull's face. The bull charged the cape and Chicuelo dodged backward and had the bull clear in the arena.

Without an instant's hesitation, the bull charged Chicuelo. The kid stood his ground, simply swung back on his heels and floated his cape like a ballet dancer's skirt into the bull's face as he passed.

"Olé!"—pronounced Oh-Lay!—roared the crowd.

The bull whirled and charged again. Without moving, Chicuelo repeated the performance. His legs rigid, just withdrawing his body from the rush of the bull's horns and floating the cape out with that beautiful swing.

Again the crowd roared. The Kid did this seven times. Each time the bull missed him by inches. Each time he gave the bull a free shot at him. Each time the crowd roared. Then he flopped the cape once at the bull at the finish of a pass, swung it around behind him and walked away from the bull to the barrera.

Reading Discussion Questions

1. Consider the first sentence of the passage. What can you recognize about the word relationships that come after "two"? What would happen if we dropped them from the sentence?
2. Paragraph 6 contains two sentences that begin with coordinating conjunctions. Is this acceptable? What rhetorical purpose does this strategy serve?
3. Reread the first five sentences of the final paragraph. What can you notice about these constructions? How and why are they similar?
4. Locate the three shortest sentences in the passage.
5. To review the grammar lesson from the previous unit, find one subordinated sentence in Hemingway's piece.
6. Read the final sentence. Pick out the subject(s) and verb(s).

5.2 Writing

Writing Practice A

Fill in the template below to create a passage that deals with a different topic.

For the _____ was absolutely unbelievable. He/she/it seemed like some great _____, absolutely _____ and absolutely _____. And he/she/it was _____. He/she/it _____ silently and with a _____. When he/she/it _____, he/she/it _____ on his/her/its _____ like _____. When he/she/it _____, the first thing that caught his/her/its eye was _____. The _____ and, they _____. The _____ came on _____, refused to be _____, and _____.

Writing Practice B

Think of a sport or pastime that has fallen out of favor with American society or one that is embraced by a different culture but criticized in our own culture. Describe the topic and then how and why many Americans have a problem with it. Use the following template to get started:

Paragraph 1

_____ is a _____ that involves _____. The ultimate goal is to _____. This is accomplished by _____ and _____ before _____. If _____ does not occur, the result will be a _____.

FINISH DESCRIPTION OF THE TOPIC.

Paragraph 2

Many Americans have a negative view of _____ because it involves _____ and _____. People tend to believe that _____ presents _____ ideas about _____. For example,...

FINISH PARAGRAPH ON WHY AND HOW THE TOPIC IS VIEWED IN A NEGATIVE LIGHT.

5.3 Grammar

Simple Sentence Patterns

A simple sentence pattern is made up of a single main clause. A main clause is a sentence that contains at least one subject and one main verb. Simple sentences will contain neither subordination nor coordination, both discussed in previous chapters. Good writing typically contains a mix of simple, coordinated and subordinated sentences.

It is important to understand that a simple sentence is not another name for a short sentence.

1. My best friend from school, Mary, is coming with me to the *Plaza de Toros* after dinner.
2. Mary and Malcolm were upset with the poor abilities of the inexperienced bullfighter and quickly left in a cab.
3. Fitzgerald wept.

Example one contains one subject, "Mary," and one verb, "is coming."

Example two shows how a simple sentence may contain two subjects, "Mary and Malcolm," as well as two verbs, "were" and "left."

Example three shows that the only requirements for a main clause are one subject and one verb.

A Note on Prepositional Phrases

Prepositional phrases allow writers to add details related to time (during, by, since), location (to, down, near), and manner/condition (with, like, in). We can recognize prepositional phrases because they will begin with a preposition and end with a noun or pronoun—the object of the preposition. Moreover, these phrases will never contain a subject-verb pairing.

The following are the most common examples (they account for over 90% of preposition usage):

at	with	by
in	to	for
of	from	on

(Note that “for” and “to” can operate as other parts of speech, depending on how they function in a sentence.)

A Simple sentence can contain an unlimited number of prepositional phrases, but simple patterns do not require the use of prepositional phrases to be complete. Look again at the above examples, this time with their prepositional phrases struck through. Notice that what remains are the essential parts of the main clause, the subject (s) and main verb (s).

My best friend ~~from school~~, Mary, is coming ~~with me to the Plaza de Toros after dinner~~.

Mary and Malcolm were upset ~~with the poor abilities of the inexperienced bullfighter~~ and quickly left ~~in a cab~~.

Fitzgerald wept.

Now look again at Hemingway’s piece, noting where and how often he employs simple sentence patterns. Look, too, for how many prepositional phrases he uses. Simple sentences are highlighted; prepositional phrases are underlined.

In rode two of the marshals in the velvet jackets and white ruffs. They galloped up to the president’s box, swerved and saluted, doffing their hats and bowing low. From the box an object came hurtling down. One of the marshals caught it in his plumed hat.

“The key to the bullpen,” said the Gin Bottle King.

The two horsemen whirled and rode across the arena. One of them tossed the key to a man in torero costume; they both saluted with a wave of their plumed hats, and had gone from the ring. The big gate was shut and bolted. There was no more entrance. The ring was complete.

The crowd had been shouting and yelling. Now it was dead silent. The man with the key stepped toward an iron-barred, low, red door and unlocked the great sliding bar. He lifted it and stepped back. The door swung open. The man hid behind it. Inside it was dark.

Then, ducking his head as he came up out of the dark pen, a bull came into the arena. He came out all in a rush, big, black and white, weighing over a ton, and moving with a soft gallop. Just as he came out the sun seemed to dazzle him for an instant. He stood as though he were frozen, his great crest of muscle up, firmly planted, his eyes looking around, his horns pointed forward, black and white and sharp as porcupine quills. Then he charged. And as he charged, I suddenly saw what bullfighting is all about.

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The bull came on in his rush, refused to be shaken off, and in full gallop crashed into the animal from the side, ignored the horse, drove one of his horns high into the thigh of the picador, and tore him, saddle and all, off the horse's back.

The bull went on without pausing to worry the picador lying on the ground. The next picador was sitting on his horse braced to receive the shock of the charge, his lance ready. The bull hit him sideways on, and horse and rider went high up in the air in a kicking mass and fell across the bull's back. As they came down the bull charged into them. The dough-faced kid, Chicuelo, vaulted over the fence, ran toward the bull and flapped his cape into the bull's face. The bull charged the cape and Chicuelo dodged backward and had the bull clear in the arena.

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The bull whirled and charged again. Without moving, Chicuelo repeated the performance. His legs rigid, just withdrawing his body from the rush of the bull's horns and floating the cape out with that beautiful swing.

Again the crowd roared. The Kid did this seven times. Each time the bull missed him by inches. Each time he gave the bull a free shot at him. Each time the crowd roared. Then he flopped the cape once at the bull at the finish of a pass, swung it around behind him and walked away from the bull to the barrera.

Exercise

Highlight all of the simple sentences in the following paragraph.

HINT: Crossing out prepositional phrases can help you isolate main clauses.

Many people today believe that bullfighting is an inhumane and outdated tradition that should be abolished. However, most people do not understand the sport. Indeed, American football might seem unnecessarily brutal to an uninitiated audience. Hemingway believed bullfighting to be a valiant and beautiful ritual. In it he saw the values most important to him—bravery, valor, grace, and beauty. Unfortunately, in the decades proceeding his death he became an easy target for cultural critics looking to malign “outdated” notions of masculinity.

Hemingway embraced several other activities that have become controversial in the 21st century. For example, he loved big game hunting, sportfishing, and boxing. These pursuits have come under attack as examples of hyper-masculine, hetero-normative pastimes that encourage aggressive behavior. Such criticisms have value and deserve consideration. However, there is more to Hemingway's celebration of these sports than a simple love of violence. Careful readers of his novels and short stories can unearth larger concerns relevant to all humanity and, by extension, to existence itself.

Grammar Practice A

Cross out the prepositional phrases in the following sentences to locate the remaining simple sentence. Not every sentence will have a prepositional phrase.

1. Good prose is lean, sparse, and free from unnecessary ornamentation.
2. At one point in her lecture, I thought the professor was going to burn Hemingway in effigy.
3. While living in Cuba, Hemingway briefly met Fidel Castro.
4. After a hard day of fishing, I like to walk to *La Floridita* and consume fourteen mojitos.

5. It is always important to read between the lines of a Hemingway story.
6. The author projected a tough-guy persona but was something of a klutz.
7. After his suicide by a self-inflicted gunshot wound to the head, Hemingway's family told the press it was a gun-cleaning accident.
8. In *A Moveable Feast* the author attacks old friends while trying to secure his own legacy in the pantheon of American literature.
9. Could Hemingway have knocked out George Foreman in a three-round boxing match?
10. In the final analysis, his gifts greatly outweigh his shortcomings.

Grammar Practice B

Write 20 original simple sentences of various lengths. Include at least one with no prepositional phrases, one with at least 3 prepositional phrases, one with a compound (more than one joined by “and”) subject, and one with a compound verb. Make one 2 words in length and one at least 20 words in length. Highlight these 6 required sentences.