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## Week 1: Sentence Flow

### Exercise—Old Friends

This activity can be found in the [Practice Section of Good with Words Chapter 8.](#)

*“Second platoon,” he says. “They’re the tip of the spear. They’re the main effort for the company, and the company is the main effort for the battalion, and the battalion is the main effort for the brigade. I put them down there against the enemy because I know they’re going to get out there and they’re not going to be afraid.”*

—Sebastian Junger, *War* (2010)

## Background

In *The Art of Advocacy*, Noah Messing of Yale Law School uses a clever analogy to explain (1) the interplay between old information and new information and (2) why it is so often preferable to give some old information before you give any new information. He says that telling readers what they already know before you tell them something new is “the cognitive equivalent of what happens to most people when they walk into a crowded room. If they immediately see a few friends, they will calm down. But if they see a slew of unfamiliar faces, most people will be anxious and uncomfortable.” He therefore offers this advice to lawyers and law students: “Your briefs and motions will make judges comfortable if your sentences greet them with old friends.”

## Assignment

Find the “old friends” in a piece of writing you admire. The piece could be from a novel. It could be from a memoir. It could be from an essay, contract, or letter. (If you are looking for letters, Martin Luther King’s “Letter From Birmingham Jail” is a good candidate, as are any of the ones Warren Buffett has written to the shareholders of Berkshire Hathaway. Or you can browse the many great examples collected by Shaun Usher in his book and website *Letters of Note*.)

Once you find your piece, focus on four or five paragraphs. Circle or highlight any “old friend” you see as you move from sentence to sentence. Note the old friend’s placement. Note its form: does it use the exact same word that appeared in a previous sentence? Does it use a close synonym? A pronoun?

Then take a look at four or five paragraphs of your own writing. How many old friends show up there? If there aren’t enough to make the reader comfortable, add more to the party. If there are too many, kick some of the old friends out and make room for new ones. They’ll bring fresh insights and information with them.

**Important Reminder:** An old friend can be from more than just the previous sentence. It can also come from further back in the paragraph or even from earlier paragraphs. It just has to be something your readers will recognize.

## Exercise—Spotting Sentences (Percentages)

*“Your job as a writer is making sentences.*

*Most of your time will be spent making sentences in your head.*

*In your head.*

*Did no one ever tell you this?*

*That is the writer's life.*

*Never imagine you've left the level of the sentence behind."*

—Verlyn Klinkenborg, *Several Short Sentences About Writing* (2013)

**Step 1:** Think of an important document you have written recently. Estimate the percentage of the document that is made up of each of the four types of sentences:

- simple sentences
- compound sentences
- complex sentences
- compound-complex sentences

**Step 2:** Write those estimated percentages down on a piece of paper.

**Step 3:** Read the document. (If it's really long, read at least the first three pages.)

**Step 4:** Count the simple sentences. Count the compound sentences. Count the complex sentences. Count the compound-complex sentences.

**Step 5:** Calculate the actual percentage for each category (e.g. 45% simple, 15% compound, 25% complex, 15% compound-complex).

**Step 6:** Compare your estimated percentages from Step 2 to your actual percentages from Step 5.

**Step 7:** Consider the questions below:

- How do you feel about the actual percentages you discovered?
- How do they match up with the percentages the primary audience of the document likely wanted?
- How do they match up with the percentages you think a writer slightly better than you would include?
- How do they match up with the percentages you think a writer a lot better than you would include?
- What steps are you going to take to close those gaps?

**Step 8 (Optional):** Use the next Discussion Prompt to share your estimated percentages and your actual percentages. Feel free to include any thoughts on what you learned about your writing by doing this exercise.

## Exercise—Good Sentences (Finance)

*"Savoring good prose is not just a more effective way to develop a writerly ear than obeying a set of commandments; it's a more inviting one."*

—Steven Pinker, [The Sense of Style: The Thinking Person's Guide to Writing in the 21st Century](#) (2014)

We introduced the idea of a "Good Sentences" assignment in the first course, believing strongly that "to write good sentences, you need to read good sentences." Here is the [link to the video](#) in case you have not taken the course or you simply want a quick review.

We'll continue to have the assignment in this course and the two that follow. Regularly exposing yourself to quality writing, even in small doses, really is one of the best ways to improve your own sense of how to more effectively put words and ideas together.

[Judge Henry Minor Wisdom](#), whose judicial opinions played a key role in fighting segregation during the Civil Rights Movement, highlighted this point for lawyers and law students when he wrote the following in an essay back in 1993. "The close association of good reading with good legal writing has always been obvious."

Yet the lesson extends to other professions as well. Good reading is closely associated with good medical writing, good historical writing, good business writing, as well as every other kind of good writing I can think of.

With that in mind, here are some options to choose from for this week. The first set comes from the "[Finance](#)" section of the Good Sentences website.

- [What You Can Learn From the New Science of Smarter Spending](#) by Cass Sunstein (*New Republic*, 2017)
- [Betting on the Blindside](#) by Michael Lewis (*Vanity Fair*, 2010)

The second is a series of book excerpts tied to the "Finance" theme. You might even think of our Good Sentences assignment as a way to consistently make deposits in a mental bank you can productively draw on for the rest of your writing life.

- [Capital Without Borders](#) by Brook Harrington (2016)
- [When Genius Failed](#) by Roger Lowenstein (2000)
- [The Value of Everything](#) by Mariana Mazzucato (2018)

## Exercise—Takeaways Reflection (Week 1)

In your own notebook or workbook, explain what you just learned about the following two concepts and how you might apply them to your next writing project:

- "Old Friends"
- "Architect of Time"

# Week 2: Corresponding Ideas in Corresponding Form

## Exercise—Previously On (Week 2)

Take out your notebook and write down what you remember about the concepts covered in earlier sessions.

- The first is the Venn Diagram approach to writing that we learned about in the reading.
- The second idea is that as writers, we are the architects of information.

Jot down some quick notes about these concepts, just to activate your learning process a bit more robustly.

## Exercise—Agreement

This activity can be found in the first [Practice Section of Good with Words Chapter 7](#).

### Background

Once you understand parallel structure, you'll be less likely to slip into a mistake I see my students make all the time: using an inconsistent structure when arranging items in a list. Here's an example from a memo detailing the likelihood that a noncompete agreement a baker signed with her former boss would be upheld in court.

*To be upheld, the agreement must not be against public interest, not produce undue hardship on the baker, and must have reasonable restrictions.*

You can see the mistake more clearly if you arrange the list in bullet points:

*To be upheld, the agreement must*

- *not be against public interest*
- *not produce undue hardship on the baker*
- *must have reasonable restrictions*

Each item needs to be able to finish the lead-in words “To be upheld, the agreement must . . . .” The first item does that: “To be upheld, the agreement must not be against public interest.” The second item does that: “To be upheld, the agreement must not produce undue hardship on the baker.” But we run into a problem with the third item. When read with the lead-in words, that item creates a double “must”:

*To be upheld, the agreement must must have reasonable restrictions.*

Remembering to put “corresponding ideas in corresponding forms” helps solve that problem. It prompts you to check each item and ask, “Are their structures the same? Do their forms correspond?”

You can create a list, for example, that goes “noun, noun, noun.” You can also create a list that goes “adjective, adjective, adjective.” But you can’t create one that goes “noun, noun, adjective.” “Apples, oranges, and bananas” is a perfectly fine list. “Apples, oranges, and salty” is a grammatical mess.

And in a way, that’s what the memo about the baker produced: a grammatical mess. The parts of speech are different than in the “apples, oranges, and salty” example. The memo’s list was never going to be as straightforward as what “apples, oranges, and salty” should have been, which is “noun, noun, noun.” But the principle is the same. Parallel structure was violated. Corresponding ideas were put in confusingly uncorresponding forms. It’s as if Patrick Henry had said, “Give me liberty, or give me died.”

Here’s another example, from a cover letter written by a second-year law student:

*This fall, I will be exploring my interest in other areas of the law by taking Evidence, Copyright, and writing for the Journal of International Law.*

The bullet-pointed list again exposes the culprit:

*This fall, I will be exploring my interest in other areas of the law by taking*

- *Evidence*
- *Copyright*
- *writing for the Journal of International Law*

You can write, “This fall, I will be exploring my interest in other areas of the law by taking Evidence.” You can write, “This fall, I will be exploring my interest in other areas of the law by taking Copyright.” But you can’t write, “This fall, I will be exploring my interest in other areas of the law by taking writing for the *Journal of International Law*.” That last item throws the whole arrangement off.

## **Assignment**

Check your writing for inconsistent structures. They often pop up in lists of three or more items. If you spot one, try to smooth out the inconsistency. Typically, the revision will involve changing the last item in the list. But you may have to change other items as well.

To help you practice, try editing the examples below. Then move on to the next quiz, where you'll get to see the modifications I suggested each author make.

[Online Bio of Third-Year Law Student](#)

He was a quarterfinalist in the Campbell Moot Court Competition, president of the Sports Law Society, and was managing editor of the *Michigan Journal of International Law*.

#### Email by Second-Year Law Student

I am excited to learn more about litigation, see what types of advocacy are effective, and to improve my legal writing.

#### LinkedIn Page of Second-Year Law Student

Lou is also an enormous New York Yankees fan, a lover of history, and never misses an episode of *Saturday Night Live*.

#### Draft of Book on International Law

The beginning of the 21st century has seen an unprecedented growth in the power and influence of international courts. These courts have increased in number, expanded their scope, and the amount of cases is rapidly multiplying.

## Exercise—Omit

This activity can be found in the second [Practice Section of Good with Words Chapter 7](#).

### Background

An awareness of parallel structure can also help you develop a pair of more advanced writing moves. One involves omitting an implied word or phrase from what would otherwise be a perfect parallel structure construction. Poet Alexander Pope wrote a preface to a translation of the *Illiad* back in 1712 that includes two examples of this move in a rather complex sentence. This example highlights what Pope considers the differences between two towering literary figures: Homer of ancient Greece and Virgil of ancient Rome.

*Homer was the greater genius; Virgil, the better artist; in the one, we most admire the man; in the other, the work.*

Without the omission, the sentence would read:

*Homer was the greater genius, Virgil was the better artist; in the one, we most admire the man; in the other, we most admire the work.*

The second version isn't bad, and it is certainly nicely symmetric. But Pope's version, with the omission, is at once more succinct and more sophisticated. There is an elegant efficiency to it, a sense that by trimming words you can add style.

Pope achieves the same effect later in the paragraph after two sentences that exhibit a more traditional parallel structure. Here's the first of those two more traditional sentences:

*Homer hurries us with a commanding impetuosity; Virgil leads us with an attractive majesty.*

Here's the second:

*Homer scatters with a general profusion; Virgil bestows with a careful magnificence.*

And here's where Pope opts again for omission:

*Homer, like the Nile, pours out his riches with a sudden overflow; Virgil, like a river with its banks, with a constant stream.*

## Assignment

Find a sentence you've written that would benefit from the omission Pope employs. Or create one in the writing you do this week, whether that be the formal writing you do for work or school, or the informal writing you do communicating with friends and family.

To help your brain recognize the pattern, here are some additional examples from a wide range of sources.

**Magazine Article:** "The loss of a child is an unbearable grief, the murder of a child an unthinkable atrocity."

—Jill Lepore, "Baby Doe" (2016)

**Food Memoir:** "There is a communion of more than our bodies when bread is broken and wine drunk."

—M. F. K. Fisher, *The Gastronomical Me* (1943)

**20th-Century Short Story:** "The streets were a furnace, the sun an executioner."

—Cynthia Ozick, "Rosa" (1983)

**21st-Century Novel:** "The fear was respect; the respect, fear."

—Zadie Smith, *On Beauty* (2005)

**Appellate Brief:** "Ozzie was nine years old at the time; Zayden only two."

—legal brief in the University of Michigan Child Welfare Appellate Clinic (2016)

**Poetry:** "Some say the world will end in fire. / Some say in ice."

—Robert Frost, "Fire and Ice" (1920)

**Harder Poetry:** "This bed thy center is, these walls, thy sphere."

—John Donne, “The Sun Rising” (1633)

**Sociology:** “Ethnographers shrink themselves in the field but enlarge themselves on the page because first-person accounts convey experience—and experience, authority.”

—Matthew Desmond, *Evicted: Poverty and Profit in the American City* (2016)

**Forgiveness:** “To err is human; to forgive, divine.”

—Alexander Pope, “An Essay on Criticism” (1711)

## Exercise—Nifty Not

This activity can be found in the third [Practice Section of Good with Words Chapter 7](#).

*You can’t really understand something until you understand what it is not.*

—Steven Pinker, *The Stuff of Thought: Language as a Window into Human Nature* (2007)

### Background

The other advanced writing move that parallel structure can help you develop involves the word “not.” A good example comes in an ad campaign HBO used a number of years ago to distinguish its programming from the shows you might see on other channels: “It’s not TV. It’s HBO.” Here are some others:

**Law:** “The life of the law has not been logic; it has been experience.”

—Oliver Wendell Holmes Jr., *The Common Law* (1881)

**Politics:** “The test of our progress is not whether we add more to the abundance of those who have much; it is whether we provide enough for those who have too little.”

—Franklin D. Roosevelt, “Second Inaugural Address” (1937)

**Business:** “This is not a shoe. This is a movement.”

—motto of Toms Shoes, which pioneered the idea of “One for One” matching, where a customer’s purchase triggers a charitable donation

**Sports:** “Golf is not just a game you know. Golf is a career advantage.”

—David Mitchell, *Cloud Atlas* (2004)

**Military:** “This was not a war of planning and discipline; it was one of agility and innovation.”

—General Stanley McChrystal (with Tatum Collins, David Silverman, and Chris Fussell), *Team of Teams: New Rules of Engagement for a Complex World* (2015)

**Hip-Hop:** “I’m not a businessman; I’m a business, man!”

—Jay-Z, “Diamonds From Sierra Leone” (2005)

**Martinis:** “Shaken, not stirred.”

—James Bond in *Dr. No* (1962)

## Assignment

Find some opportunities to try out this “not.” If it helps you remember, you can call it the name my undergraduate students and I used when we first started noticing it as a handy variant of parallel structure: “the nifty not.”

But if that name doesn’t work for you, use something else. Or use nothing at all. As we will learn later in Chapter 10, naming things can aid learning and memory. But that doesn’t have to be true for you in every case. My main concern is that you experiment with these moves, develop a certain comfort with them, and then try to make them your own.

## Exercise—Good Sentences (War)

Same drill as in the previous weeks. Select something to read from the options below and then write out your favorite sentence.

### Option #1

Choose something from the [Veterans](#) section of the [Good Sentences](#) \* library. Here are a few to consider.

- [A Short Story About the Vietnam War Memorial](#) by Molly Ivins (*Dallas Times Herald*, 1982)
- [After Action Report](#) by Phil Klay (*Redeployment*, 2014)

\*The Good Sentences library was originally created for University of Michigan students, so there may be some pieces that you can’t access unless you are a student enrolled in a program there. But click around. There is plenty of stuff that is available to everybody.

### Option #2

Choose something from the [January 2019](#) issue of the [Good Sentences monthly email](#).

### Option #3

Choose something from this list of book excerpts.

- [Thank You for Your Service](#) by David Finkel (2013)
- [Jarhead](#) by Anthony Swofford (2003)

## Exercise—Takeaways (Week 2)

For our takeaways segment this week, I want you to focus on one way that parallel structure can go well and one way parallel structure can go poorly.

The way parallel structure can go well involves the use of what the readings called the “Nifty Not.” The way parallel structure can go poorly was also covered in the readings in the section titled “Agreement.”

Write down a short sentence or two describing what each is and also include how you might use both of them the next time you write or edit something.

# Week 3: Show and Tell

## Exercise—Previously On: Reflection

It's time to take out your notebooks. For this reflection activity, focus on just one thing: a sentence that appeared in both the readings and the classroom videos.

"Symmetry is what we see at a glance."

## Exercise—Summary and Scene (Optional)

Some people are better at writing summaries. Others are better at creating scenes. Choose the exercise below based on which skill you need more practice developing. Or decide to do both exercises: extra practice with each can really pay off.

### 1. Summary

#### Background

Jack Hart, who helped shape several Pulitzer-Prize winning stories during his 27 years as the managing editor of *The Oregonian*, breaks down the difference between summary and scene this way in his 2011 book *Storycraft: The Complete Guide to Writing Narrative Nonfiction*.

| Summary              | Scene                        |
|----------------------|------------------------------|
| Abstract             | Concrete                     |
| Reaches across Space | Unfolds in One Place         |
| Collapses Time       | Seems to Happen in Real Time |
| Organized Topically  | Organized Scenically         |
| Deals with Outcomes  | Deals with Process           |
| Conveys Information  | Reproduces Experience        |

#### Assignment

Focus on the "summary" part of that breakdown. Then go through something you have written recently and identify where you have, for example, reached across space, or collapsed time, or dealt with outcomes. See if you can spot places that contain sentences that are helpfully

abstract, that organize material by topic, and that convey a bunch of information in an efficient, even elegant way.

If you discover that these elements are lacking in your writing, add them. If you discover that they are overabundant, reduce them. Part of getting better at summary involves recognizing just how much of it you should do.

## 2. Scene

### Background

“A great part of the vigor, the vivacity, and the readability of [Charles] Dickens,” the English novelist Phyllis Bentley wrote in *Some Observations on the Art of Narrative*, “derives from the innumerable interweavings of scene and summary; his general method is to keep summary to the barest minimum, a mere sentence or two here and there between the incredible fertile burgeoning of his scenes.” See if you can match Dickens’s deft division.

### Assignment

Go through something you have written recently and try to pare down the “summary” you find. Make room instead for a few more “scenes”—or at least the expansion of ones you have already included. At the very least, identify the ratio of summary to scene on each page. There is no formula for the proper mix. But if we are shooting for Dickens, we probably want to bump up the real estate we give to scenes.

## Exercise—Reverse Outline (Optional)

*Writing nonfiction is more like sculpture, a matter of shaping the research into the finished thing.*

—Joan Didion, “[The Art of Nonfiction No.1](#)” (2006)

A good way to improve the structure of your writing is to create a “reverse outline.” These are outlines that you complete not before you start your draft but after you have finished it.

To learn more about what is involved, check out at least one of the resources below.

### Read

[Amherst College: Reverse Outlining](#)

### Watch

[University of North Carolina: Reverse Outline](#)

Then try out the process on a piece of writing you have been working on recently. It could be a memo for work. It could be a paper for school. It could even just be an important email.

I ask my law students to do reverse outlines all the time. They really are helpful.

Note: If you are looking for ideas on how to structure your own outline, perhaps you'll get some inspiration from the handwritten ones below.

[Joseph Heller's Outline of \*Catch-22\*](#)

[Sylvia Plath's Outline of \*The Bell Jar\*](#)

[Gay Talese's Outline of "Frank Sinatra Has a Cold"](#)

(A more complete [list](#) has been compiled by Emily Temple at Flavorwire.)

## Exercise—Who vs. Whom

**The reports of the imminent death of the word “whom” . . . are greatly exaggerated, so you’d do well to learn to wield it correctly or, at least and perhaps more important, learn not to wield it incorrectly.**

—Benjamin Dreyer, [Dreyer’s English](#) (2019)

In Course 1, we learned about some factors to consider when deciding [whether to use "which" or whether to use "that."](#) In case you want to review those factors, here is the short quiz from the [MLA Style Center](#) we used, as well as a couple additional materials.

- [Explanation: Merriam-Webster](#)
- [Quiz: Softschools.com](#)

Similar confusion surrounds the difference between "who" and "whom." So let's take some time to explore that. Start by checking out the explanation from the *Cambridge Dictionary*. Then take a shot at the quiz from the *Journal of Accountancy*. (Accountants need to be precise about language, too!)

- [Explanation: Cambridge Dictionary](#)
- [Quiz: Journal of Accountancy](#)

### Optional

Combine the lesson from Course 1 on "which" vs. "that" with this current lesson on "who" vs. "whom." You can do that with a quiz designed to help you sort through all four of those terms. It comes from GrammarBook.com.

- [Quiz: GrammarBook.com](#)

## Exercise—Good Sentences (Intellectual Property)

Same drill as in the previous weeks. Select something to read from the options below and then write out your favorite sentence.

### Option #1

Choose something from the [Intellectual Property](#) section of the [Good Sentences](#) \* library. Here are a few to consider.

- [My Purple Scented Novel](#) by Ian McEwan (*New Yorker*, 2016)
- [Wikimedia Says When A Monkey Takes a Selfie, Nobody Owns It](#) by Louise Stewart (*Newsweek*, 2014)

\*The Good Sentences library was originally created for University of Michigan students, so there may be some pieces that you can't access unless you are a student enrolled in a program there. But click around. There is plenty of stuff that is available to everybody.

### Option #2

Choose something from the November 2019 issue of the [Good Sentences monthly email](#).

### Option #3

Choose something from this list of book excerpts.

- [The Immortal Life of Henrietta Lacks](#) by Rebecca Skloot (2010)
- [The Master Switch](#) by Tim Wu (2010)

## Exercise—Takeaways Reflection (Week 3)

Given how important it is to develop the ability to both show AND tell, the concepts to focus on during your Takeaways reflection are the complementary strategies of “Summary” and “Scene.” Take a few minutes to describe the difference between them.

# Week 4: Paragraphing

## Exercise—Previously On: Reflection

We are in the final week of this part of the writing and editing specialization. As a helpful review of where we started, the concept for “Previously On” will be drawn from the first week. That concept is “old information to new information.”

Take a look at your notes, jog your memory, and put down a few sentences on what this concept is and how you can use it to improve as a writer.

## Exercise—The Rhythm of Roth (Optional)

### Download

[Paragraphing\\_Class\\_The Rhythms of Roth\\_ANSWER KEY.pdf](#)

### Background

Following the death of the American writer [Philip Roth](#) in 2018, *The Economist* ran an obituary that celebrated, among other things, the way Roth crafted paragraphs. “His paragraphs are written to careful rhythms,” the piece noted, “from incantatory to fulminatory with every step in between.”

That kind of range is difficult to achieve. But an important first step is recognizing where paragraphs should start and stop. Use the excerpts below to help you practice. A couple are even taken from things Roth wrote. Your job is to find where he and the other authors listed decided to create their paragraph breaks. I’ve covered that up by presenting the excerpts as undifferentiated blobs.

[The answer key can be found in Download.]

### Assignment

**#1 Philip Roth (*American Pastoral*):** This excerpt comes from the first paragraphs of *American Pastoral*, a novel that earned Roth a Pulitzer Prize in 1997 and then came in second when the *New York Times Book Review* compiled, in 2006, its [list of the best works of American fiction of the last 25 years](#). ( [Toni Morrison’s](#) *Beloved* came in first.)

The Swede. During the war years, when I was still a grade school boy, this was a magical name in our Newark neighborhood, even to adults just a generation removed from the city’s old Prince Street ghetto and not yet so flawlessly Americanized as to be bowled over by the prowess of a high school athlete. The name was magical; so was the anomalous face. Of the few fair-complexioned Jewish students in our preponderantly Jewish public high school, none

possessed anything remotely like the steep-jawed, insentient Viking mask of this blue-eyed blond born into our tribe as Seymour Irving Levov. The Swede starred as end in football, center in basketball, and first baseman in baseball. Only the basketball team was ever any good—twice winning the city championship while he was its leading scorer—but as long as the Swede excelled, the fate of our sports teams didn't matter much to a student body whose elders, largely undereducated and overburdened, venerated academic achievement above all else. Physical aggression, even camouflaged by athletic uniforms and official rules and intended to do no harm to Jews, was not a traditional source of pleasure in our community—advanced degrees were. Nonetheless, through the Swede, the neighborhood entered into a fantasy about itself and about the world, the fantasy of sports fans everywhere: almost like Gentiles (as they imagined Gentiles), our families could forget the way things actually work and make an athletic performance the repository of all their hopes. Primarily, they could forget the war. The elevation of Swede Levov into the household Apollo of the Weequahic Jews can best be explained, I think, by the war against the Germans and the Japanese and the fears that it fostered. With the Swede indomitable on the playing field, the meaningless surface of life provide a bizarre, delusionary kind of sustenance, the happy release into a Swedean innocence, for those who lived in dread of never seeing their sons or their brothers or their husbands again.

**#2 Philip Roth (Wikipedia):** This next excerpt comes from an open letter Roth wrote to Wikipedia after unsuccessfully trying to correct some errors listed in entry for his bestselling 2000 novel *The Human Stain*. The book was later turned into a [movie](#) starring Nicole Kidman and Anthony Hopkins. The letter was published by *The New Yorker*.

Dear Wikipedia,

I am Philip Roth. I had reason recently to read for the first time the Wikipedia entry discussing my novel "The Human Stain." The entry contains a serious misstatement that I would like to ask to have removed. This item entered Wikipedia not from the world of truthfulness but from the babble of literary gossip—there is no truth in it at all. Yet when, through an official interlocutor, I recently petitioned Wikipedia to delete this misstatement, along with two others, my interlocutor was told by the "English Wikipedia Administrator"—in a letter dated August 25th and addressed to my interlocutor—that I, Roth, was not a credible source: "I understand your point that the author is the greatest authority on their own work," writes the Wikipedia Administrator—"but we require secondary sources." Thus was created the occasion for this open letter. After failing to get a change made through the usual channels, I don't know how else to proceed.

**#3 Justice Sandra Day O'Connor:** In 2003, the Supreme Court ruled in [Grutter v. Bollinger](#) that because the University of Michigan Law School had a compelling interest in attaining a diverse student body, the admissions office's narrowly tailored policy of giving special consideration to certain underrepresented minority groups did not violate the Equal Protection Clause of the 14th Amendment. [Justice Sandra Day O'Connor](#) wrote the majority opinion in what has become one of the Court's landmark decisions on affirmative action.

As part of its goal of "assembling a class that is both exceptionally academically qualified and broadly diverse," the Law School seeks to "enroll a 'critical mass' of minority students." Brief for

Respondents Bollinger et al. 13. The Law School's interest is not simply "to assure within its student body some specified percentage of a particular group merely because of its race or ethnic origin." *Bakke*, 438 U.S., at 307 (opinion of Powell, J.). That would amount to outright racial balancing, which is patently unconstitutional. *Ibid.*; *Freeman v. Pitts* 503 U.S. 467, 494 (1992) ("Racial balance is not to be achieved for its own sake"); *Richmond v. J. A. Croson Co.*, 488 U.S., at 507. Rather, the Law School's concept of critical mass is defined by reference to the educational benefits that diversity is designed to produce. These benefits are substantial. As the District Court emphasized, the Law School's admissions policy promotes "cross-racial understanding," helps to break down racial stereotypes, and "enables [students] to better understand persons of different races." App. to Pet. for Cert. 246a. These benefits are "important and laudable," because "classroom discussion is livelier, more spirited, and simply more enlightening and interesting" when the students have "the greatest possible variety of backgrounds." *Id.*, at 246a, 244a. The Law School's claim of a compelling interest is further bolstered by its *amici*, who point to the educational benefits that flow from student body diversity. In addition to the expert studies and reports entered into evidence at trial, numerous studies show that student body diversity promotes learning outcomes, and "better prepares students for an increasingly diverse workforce and society, and better prepares them as professionals." Brief for American Educational Research Association et al. as *Amici Curiae* 3; see, e.g., W. Bowen & D. Bok, *The Shape of the River* (1998); *Diversity Challenged: Evidence on the Impact of Affirmative Action* (G. Orfield & M. Kurlaender eds. 2001); *Compelling Interest: Examining the Evidence on Racial Dynamics in Colleges and Universities* (M. Chang, D. Witt, J. Jones, & K. Hakuta eds. 2003). These benefits are not theoretical but real, as major American businesses have made clear that the skills needed in today's increasingly global marketplace can only be developed through exposure to widely diverse people, cultures, ideas, and viewpoints. Brief for 3M et al. as *Amici Curiae* 5; Brief for General Motors Corp. as *Amicus Curiae* 3—4. What is more, high-ranking retired officers and civilian leaders of the United States military assert that, "[b]ased on [their] decades of experience," a "highly qualified, racially diverse officer corps ... is essential to the military's ability to fulfill its principle mission to provide national security." Brief for Julius W. Becton, Jr. et al. as *Amici Curiae* 27. The primary sources for the Nation's officer corps are the service academies and the Reserve Officers Training Corps (ROTC), the latter comprising students already admitted to participating colleges and universities. *Id.*, at 5. At present, "the military cannot achieve an officer corps that is *both* highly qualified *and* racially diverse unless the service academies and the ROTC used limited race-conscious recruiting and admissions policies." *Ibid.* (emphasis in original). To fulfill its mission, the military "must be selective in admissions for training and education for the officer corps, *and* it must train and educate a highly qualified, racially diverse officer corps in a racially diverse setting." *Id.*, at 29 (emphasis in original). We agree that "[i]t requires only a small step from this analysis to conclude that our country's other most selective institutions must remain both diverse and selective." *Ibid.*

**#4 Justice Clarence Thomas:** [Justice Clarence Thomas](#) was one of four justices who dissented in the *Grutter* case mentioned above. The lone African American on the Court and someone whose personal experience with (and antipathy for) affirmative action is recounted in his 2007 memoir *My Grandfather's Son*, he opened his opinion the following way:

Frederick Douglass, speaking to a group of abolitionists almost 140 years ago, delivered a message lost on today's majority: "[I]n regard to the colored people, there is always more that is benevolent, I perceive, than just, manifested towards us. What I ask for the negro is not benevolence, not pity, not sympathy, but simply *justice*. The American people have always been anxious to know what they shall do with us . . . I have had but one answer from the beginning. Do nothing with us! Your doing with us has already played the mischief with us. Do nothing with us! If the apples will not remain on the tree of their own strength, if they are worm-eaten at the core, if they are early ripe and disposed to fall, let them fall! . . . And if the negro cannot stand on his own legs, let him fall also. All I ask is, give him a chance to stand on his own legs! Let him alone! . . . [Y]our interference is doing him positive injury." Like Douglass, I believe blacks can achieve in every avenue of American life without the meddling of university administrators. Because I wish to see all students succeed whatever their color, I share, in some respect, the sympathies of those who sponsor the type of discrimination advanced by the University of Michigan Law School (Law School). The Constitution does not, however, tolerate institutional devotion to the status quo in admissions policies when such devotion ripens into racial discrimination. Nor does the Constitution countenance the unprecedented deference the Court gives to the Law School, an approach inconsistent with the very concept of "strict scrutiny." No one would argue that a university could set up a lower general admission standard and then impose heightened requirements only on black applicants. Similarly, a university may not maintain a high admission standard and grant exemptions to favored races. The Law School, of its own choosing, and for its own purposes, maintains an exclusionary admissions system that it knows produces racially disproportionate results. Racial discrimination is not a permissible solution to the self-inflicted wounds of this elitist admissions policy. The majority upholds the Law School's racial discrimination not by interpreting the people's Constitution, but by responding to a faddish slogan of the cognoscenti. Nevertheless, I concur in part in the Court's opinion. First, I agree with the Court insofar as its decision, which approves of only one racial classification, confirms that further use of race in admissions remains unlawful. Second, I agree with the Court's holding that racial discrimination in higher education admissions will be illegal in 25 years. See *ante*, at 31 (stating that racial discrimination will no longer be narrowly tailored, or "necessary to further" a compelling state interest, in 25 years). I respectfully dissent from the remainder of the Court's opinion and the judgment, however, because I believe that the Law School's current use of race violates the Equal Protection Clause and that the Constitution means the same thing today as it will in 300 months.

**#5 Stephen King:** [Stephen King](#) writes books at a pace at which most people would be happy to write emails. Yet after being injured in a terrible car accident in his home state of Maine in 1999, he struggled to regain his literary rhythm and had serious doubts about whether he would ever be able to finish another book. So he returned to a draft of a memoir he started a couple years before the accident. That memoir later became the celebrated book *On Writing*, and King's prolific output soon returned. A section in *On Writing* about how King's approach to paragraphs is below.

I would argue that the paragraph, not the sentence, is the basic unit of writing—the place where coherence begins and words stand a chance of becoming more than mere words. If the moment of quickening is to come, it comes at the level of the paragraph. It is a marvelous and flexible

instrument that can be a single word long or run on for pages (one paragraph in Dob Dorbertson's historical novel *Paradise Falls* is sixteen pages long; there are paragraphs in Ross Lockridge's *Raintree Country* which are nearly that). You must learn to use it well if you are to write well. What this means is lots of practice; you have to learn the beat.

## Exercise—Good Sentences (Medicine)

Same drill as in the previous weeks. Select something to read from the options below and then write out your favorite sentence.

### Option #1

Choose something from the [Health Law](#) section of the [Good Sentences](#) \* library. Here are a few to consider.

- [First Poem After Serious Surgery](#) by June Jordan (*Kissing God Goodbye*, 1997)
- [Cutting for Stone](#) by Abraham Verghese (Excerpt, 2009)
- [Stiff: The Curious Lives of Human Cadavers](#) by Mary Roach (Excerpt, 2003)

\*The Good Sentences library was originally created for University of Michigan students, so there may be some pieces that you can't access unless you are a student enrolled in a program there. But click around. There is plenty of stuff that is available to everybody.

### Option #2

Choose something from the February 2019 issue of the [Good Sentences monthly email](#).

### Option #3

Choose something from this list of book excerpts.

- [When Breath Becomes Air](#) by Paul Kalanithi (2016)
- [Five Days at Memorial](#) by Sheri Fink (2013)

## Exercise—Takeaways Reflection (Week 4)

Too often, we think of writing sentence by sentence or even word by word. After this week's lesson, consider writing paragraph by paragraph.

In your notebook, write a few sentences that focus on paragraphing and how you might use it to improve your writing.

## Thank You Letter (Optional)

At the end of Course 1, there is an optional Thank You Letter assignment. I have pasted it below in case you finished that course before the assignment was added or you found it useful enough to do again. Thank You Letters really can be a wonderful way to at once practice your writing and make somebody's day.

**Step 1:** Think of somebody in your life worth thanking.

**Step 2:** If you want to go the professional route, think of someone you might want to use your Thank You Letter to reconnect with. If you want to go the personal route, think of (1) a former teacher (2) a former boss or co-worker (3) a friend (4) a family member (5) someone who has put up with you while you have been enrolled in this course.

**Step 3:** Draft a Thank You Letter to that person.

**Step 4:** Make it good.

**Step 5:** If you succeed on Step 4, consider delivering it to the person in the coming weeks and months. Even better, consider reading it aloud to them. As the excerpt below suggests, the mental boost from taking this step could last a helpfully long time.

*Several small but intriguing studies offer glimpses of what gratitude can do for us. . . . Psychologist Martin E. P. Seligman at the University of Pennsylvania tested the effect of different positive psychology interventions among 411 volunteers. The biggest boost in happiness scores came when participants were asked to write and personally deliver a letter of gratitude to a person they had never properly thanked for his or her kindness. The surge in happiness was larger than that from any other intervention, with benefits lasting a month. ([In Praise of Gratitude](#), Harvard Health)*

Some of this course is designed to help you write better sentences to your boss or teachers. Some of it is designed to help you write better sentences to co-workers and peers. But **ALL** of it is designed to help you write better sentences to people you care the most about.

You now have a lot more writing tools at your disposal than you did when you began Week 1. Put them to good use.