



Grammar for Writers

LESSON 8

Writing Like an Editor

Essential Question: How do great writers improve a first draft?



Bellringer: Which Paragraph Is Stronger?

Paragraph A

The old house was big. It was old. It was scary. The windows were broken. The wind was loud.

Paragraph B

The abandoned house loomed over the empty street. Broken windows rattled as the wind howled through the dark rooms.

Vote first. Explain later. What makes one feel more powerful than the other?

Yesterday's Learning

What We Covered

- **Sentence Variety**
Mixing short and long sentences for impact
- **Rhythm & Pacing**
Controlling how quickly or slowly a reader moves
- **Sentence Openings**
Starting sentences in fresh, unexpected ways

Today's Big Question

How do writers transform ordinary, functional writing into powerful, memorable writing?

Today we move from writing sentences to improving them — the craft of editing at the word and sentence level.



First Drafts Are Never Perfect

Professional Writers

Revise every draft before publication — sometimes dozens of times.

Journalists

Cut, clarify, and rework under deadline pressure every single day.

Novelists

Spend months or years revising a single manuscript.

Teachers

Revise lesson plans, feedback, and written materials constantly.



Editing isn't about fixing mistakes — it's about improving meaning. Every revision makes your writing more powerful.

The Five Questions Every Editor Asks

Great editors don't read passively — they interrogate every sentence. Whether you're editing your own work or a classmate's, these five questions are your essential toolkit.

1

Is it clear?

Can any reader understand this on the first read?

2

Is it concise?

Are there extra words that add no meaning?

3

Is it interesting?

Would a reader want to keep reading this?

4

Is every word necessary?

Does removing a word hurt the sentence?

5

Could I write this better?

Is there a stronger verb, a sharper image, a tighter phrase?

Common Problem #1: Repetition

The Problem in Action

The boy walked to school.

The boy opened his locker.

The boy sat down.

The boy waited for class.

What's the Issue?

Each sentence is grammatically correct. Nothing is technically wrong. But read together, the repeated subject "The boy" creates a monotonous, robotic rhythm that drains the writing of energy and momentum.

Repetition of structure signals a writer who hasn't yet considered the *reader's experience*.

Better Version: Fixing Repetition

Original

The boy walked to school. The boy opened his locker. The boy sat down. The boy waited for class.

Revised

The boy walked to school. After opening his locker, he sat quietly and waited for class to begin.

Same Information

Not a single event was added or removed
— the facts are identical.

Better Flow

Combining ideas into one sentence
eliminates the choppy, repetitive feel.

Varied Structure

The subordinate clause at the start
creates natural sentence variety.

Common Problem #2: Too Many Words

✗ Weak

The reason why he left was because he was tired.

This sentence carries extra weight with phrases like "the reason why" and "was because" — none of which add meaning.

✓ Better

He left because he was tired.

Four words cut. Zero meaning lost. The sentence is cleaner, faster, and more confident. Every unnecessary word weakens writing.



Common Problem #3: Weak Verbs

Verbs are the engines of your sentences. A weak verb moves your reader forward; a strong verb gives them a vivid image to hold onto. Watch how a single word changes everything:

She went into the room.

"Went" is functional but empty — it tells us nothing about how she moved or why.

She stepped into the room.

"Stepped" suggests deliberate, careful movement. A different character emerges.

She slipped into the room.

"Slipped" implies stealth, secrecy, or urgency — a completely different story.



Every verb revision changes the image in your reader's mind. Choose verbs intentionally.

Common Problem #4: Vague Language

✗ Vague

The food was good.

This tells the reader almost nothing. *Good* is one of the least informative words in the English language. What kind of good? Good how?

✓ Specific

The spicy noodles filled the room with the aroma of garlic and chili.

Now the reader can *smell* the food. Specific sensory details create a memorable experience that general adjectives never can.

Specific writing is memorable writing. The more precise you are, the more real your writing feels.



Common Problem #5: Telling Instead of Showing

✗ Telling

The teacher was angry.

This labels an emotion and asks the reader to accept it on faith. It doesn't create a moment — it reports one.

✓ Showing

The teacher folded her arms and stared silently across the classroom.

No emotion is named — yet the reader *feels* the tension immediately. Readers believe actions. Not labels.

Editing Demonstration

Original Draft

The old house was big. It was old. It was scary. The windows were broken.

Edited Version

The abandoned house towered over the empty street, its broken windows staring silently into the darkness.

What Changed?

Weak adjectives replaced

"Big" and "scary" swapped for specific, vivid words

Sentences combined

Four choppy sentences merged into one flowing sentence

Stronger verb used

"Towered" replaces the vague "was"

Showing added

"Windows staring" creates a vivid, eerie image

Editing Checklist

Use this checklist every time you revise your own writing. Asking these questions systematically is what separates a first draft from a polished piece.



Weak Verbs

Can I replace a weak, generic verb with a more precise, vivid one?



Unnecessary Words

Can I remove any words without losing meaning?



Sentence Combining

Can I combine two choppy sentences into one flowing sentence?



Sentence Openings

Am I starting every sentence with the same word or pattern?



Specificity

Can I replace vague, general language with precise, sensory details?

Writer's Workshop

Your Task

Rewrite the paragraph below. You are not adding new events. Your job is to improve the *quality* of the writing using today's editing strategies.

The girl walked into the classroom. She was nervous. She looked around. The room was quiet. Everyone looked at her.

Checklist for Your Revision

- **Replace weak verbs**
Find stronger, more specific action words
- **Show, don't tell**
Show nervousness through action, not labels
- **Combine sentences**
Merge choppy ideas into fluid sentences
- **Add specific detail**
What did she see, hear, or feel?

Grammar Lab: Become an Editor

Exchange paragraphs with a partner. You are now the editor. Your job is to find opportunities for improvement — not to criticize, but to make the writing stronger.



Repeated Words

Circle any word or phrase that appears too many times.



Weak Verbs

Underline verbs like "went," "was," "got," and "said."



Vague Language

Mark adjectives like "good," "bad," "big," and "nice."



Unnecessary Words

Put a box around phrases that add no meaning.



Suggest one specific improvement for each issue you find. Be constructive and kind.



Notebook Challenge

The Task

Open your writing notebook. Choose one paragraph from any piece you've already written. Now revise it using everything you've learned today. This is real editing — your own words, your own improvement.

Requirements

01

Remove repetition

Eliminate repeated subjects or sentence structures

02

Replace two weak verbs

Swap out at least two vague action words

03

Improve one sentence opening

Rewrite a sentence that starts with "I" or a repeated subject

04

Remove unnecessary words

Cut any phrases that add length but not meaning

Peer Review

Exchange notebooks with your partner. Read their original paragraph and their revised version carefully. Then respond in writing to these questions:

“

What is the strongest revision your partner made?

Name a specific change — a verb, a combined sentence, a cut word — that noticeably improved the writing.

”

“

Why did that revision work?

Explain using today's vocabulary: does it show instead of tell? Use a stronger verb? Remove clutter? Be specific in your reasoning.

”

Your peer review response should be at least three complete sentences. Use editing vocabulary in your explanation.



Exit Ticket

Complete the Sentence

Today I learned that editing means...

Write a full, thoughtful sentence. Don't just say "fixing mistakes" — dig deeper into what you actually discovered about the revision process today.

Make a Commitment

Write down one specific editing strategy you will use the next time you revise a composition.

- **Name the strategy (e.g., "replacing weak verbs")**
- **Explain how you will apply it**
- **Be as specific as possible**

Looking Ahead

TOMORROW'S LESSON

Agreement Matters

How writers make subjects and verbs work together to create accurate, professional writing — and why errors in agreement can undermine even the most powerful sentences.

What You'll Explore

The rules that govern subject-verb agreement — and the common traps that trip up even experienced writers.

Why It Matters

Agreement errors are among the most noticed mistakes in professional writing. Mastering them signals credibility and care.

Come Prepared

Bring your notebook with today's revised paragraph — we'll use your own writing as practice material.