

Learning together

What Is a Sentence?

ACTIVITY #6

SEQUENCE: SPELLING AND SENTENCE STRUCTURE
2ND CYCLE – PRIMARY

By Lise L'Heureux,
Special Education Teacher, Director,
Instructor, Consultant and Coach



Purpose of the activity

The goal of this activity is to help your child understand the components of a simple written sentence.



Relevance of the activity

Your child is still learning how to read and write. They know that a sentence is organized into groups of words that are usually placed in a certain order. Despite this, your child may have difficulty formulating sentences correctly. This activity clarifies how sentences are organized by giving names to the written components of a sentence.



Supplies

- Sheets of paper and coloured pencils
- A book with simple sentences
- A table to help structure sentences (see Appendix)



LET'S GO!

What?



You have most likely already heard of the simple sentence. In this activity, we will try to answer the question "What is a sentence?"

Why?



Here are four statements:



My dog sleeps on the rug.



My brother got hit in the head with a ball.



I play with my brother my sister and my friend at the park.



My friend's blue and green ball.

What if I told you that "My dog sleeps on the rug" is a simple sentence while **the other three are sentences that are not well constructed**. Yet you may have seen or written similar statements before. So, what questions should we ask ourselves? What do we need to check to be sure that what we have written corresponds to a well-constructed sentence? This is extremely important when learning to write texts: It is a strategy you will use for the rest of your life!

When?



You have to learn to question yourself every time you write: Is my sentence clear? Is it well constructed? At first, it can seem difficult, even tiring. But, asking yourself the right questions on a regular basis will help you formulate well-constructed sentences. Then it will be easier for you to compose sentences with more detail.

How?



To know if what I wrote or what my friend wrote is a well-constructed sentence, I need to be able to explain what a sentence is.

In writing as well as orally, a sentence is used to express an idea. To determine if a sentence is complete, we must examine three aspects.

1 It must be punctuated. We use a capital letter and a period to mark the start and end of a sentence. I also need to use other punctuation marks, such as the comma. For example, in the statement:

✗ "i play with my brother my sister and my friend at the park."

The words are organized well, the idea makes sense, but it is missing the punctuation to mark the start of this idea. Also, I notice that I name three people who come with me to the park: My brother, my sister and my friend. So that means I have to use a comma to separate the first two elements I name and adjust the punctuation, like this: «I play with my brother, my sister and my friend at the park.»

2 It must make sense. For example, in the statement:

✗ "My brother got hit **at** the head with a ball."

The words are well organized and the sentence is well punctuated. On the other hand, something doesn't make sense. You can't really get a ball at your head: It's as if you meant that the balloon had entered my brother's head: That's not possible. I must therefore rephrase it:

✓ "I can say that my brother got hit **on** the head.»



3 It must be complete.

For example, in the statement "My friend's blue and green ball." the words are organized well, the idea makes sense, but it is missing an important part to complete the idea. In a well-constructed sentence, you must be able to answer the following two questions:

- Who or what are we talking about?
- What are we saying about it?
- And this is happening (where, why, how)?... (not required).

Let's take our example again with the statement "My friend's blue and green ball."

My friend's blue and green ball.

Who or what are we talking about?	What are we saying about it?	And this is happening (where, why, how)?
My friend's blue and green ball	x	(not required)

Here, I realize that an important part is missing. My idea is incomplete. What could I say about my friend's blue and green ball? I could say it's deflated. I could also say that I lost my friend's blue and green ball. Look carefully at the difference between the two sentences:

My friend's blue and green ball is deflated.

Who or what are we talking about?	What are we saying about it?	And this is happening (where, why, how)?
My friend's blue and green ball	is deflated.	x

I lost my friend's blue and green ball.

Who or what are we talking about?	What are we saying about it?	And this is happening (where, why, how)?
I	lost my friend's blue and green ball.	x

Now, let's go back to the last statement: "My dog sleeps on the rug." Earlier, I told you that it's a well-constructed sentence. Let's check if you have understood correctly.

- 1 Does my idea make sense? A dog can sleep. It works.
- 2 Is my sentence punctuated correctly? There is a capital letter and a period, so it works. I don't have any groups of words to separate with a comma in this sentence.
- 3 Can I answer the following questions:
 - Who or what are we talking about? My dog
 - What are we saying about it? He sleeps on the rug.

My dog sleeps on the rug.

Who or what are we talking about?	What are we saying about it?	And this is happening (where, why, how)?
My dog	sleeps on the rug.	x

So, I can confirm that this sentence is well constructed!



Don't forget!

You can ask your child to read their sentences out loud. If it sounds strange or difficult to understand, it may be missing a word or might not be well-structured. Rephrasing it orally often helps identify mistakes more easily!



Examples of using the table

Who or what are we talking about?	What are we saying about it?	And this is happening (where, why, how)? (not required)
My dog	sleeps on the rug.	x
My brother	got hit on the head with a ball.	x
I	play with my brother, my sister and my friend	at the park.
My friend's blue and green ball	is deflated.	x
I	lost my friend's blue and green ball.	x

Table that you can use at home

Who or what are we talking about?	What are we saying about it?	And this is happening (where, why, how)? (not required)