

One of the hardest things about teaching grade one was instructing children in capitalization and punctuation. I spent a lot of time and effort trying to help my students place their capitals and periods correctly in a sentence. The difficulty was that the children could readily learn how to punctuate a complete sentence with a noun and a verb, but not if it included a predicate.

**Example without a predicate:** The clown danced.

**Example with a predicate:** The clown danced in the park.










In the second example, most children separated the verb from the predicate and punctuated the sentence incorrectly as:

**The clown danced. In the park.**

In hopes of addressing this challenge I wrote many sentence structure exercises Find exercises near the back of the first edition of Smart Start in Language Arts.

Parts of a Sentence

Name \_\_\_\_\_

<p>1 =    person / place / thing</p> <p>2 =    person / place / thing</p> <p>3 =  action</p>	<p>plus </p>	<p> action</p>
--	--	--

---

1 ✓ The funny boy smiled.

3 ✓ Jumped down the street.

3 Went to the store.

2 The cute girl.

1 The little dog kicked the ball.

1 The mom hugged her baby.

2 The little white bunny.

2 The very fat frog.

366 © by J. Moore 1996

Each exercise required the child to read the sentence and number it.

**Number 1** indicated a complete sentence with a noun and a verb.

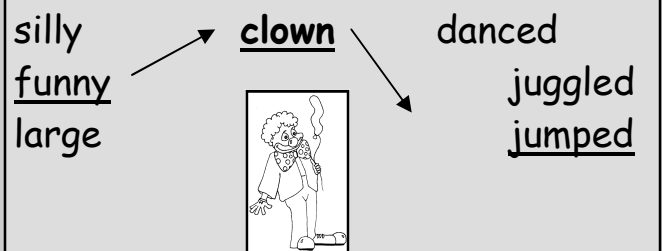
**Number 2** indicated an incomplete sentence containing only a noun.

**Number 3** indicated an incomplete sentence with only a verb

Through these exercises, some progress was made, but clearly not the breakthrough I was hoping for.

In the fall of 2000, our oldest daughter was in the first grade. She was given the choice of attending traditional school or homeschooling. We had a new baby daughter and I had left my teaching position to stay home. Our daughter chose home education and so I began the wonderful process of teaching her to read and write. It was in one of our first writing lessons

that my answer unexpectedly emerged. I brainstormed the vocabulary for a sentence about a clown.



She wrote *The funny clown jumped*. Without thinking, I asked "Where?" and she replied "in the circus." She selected the vocabulary and

wrote: *The funny clown jumped in the circus.*

Suddenly, I understood. Predicate must be based on a combination of verbs and **who, what, where, when, why, how** phrases. How amazing! From teaching grade six and grade four language arts, I knew that the question words were an integral part of learning at the higher levels. Now, I knew how significant they were to writing sentences in grade one.

While my daughter finished writing her sentence, I started brainstorming different clauses and discovered how simple it was to explain the concepts to her. We practiced verbally first.

The clown danced...	<i>where</i>	in the circus
	<i>for whom</i>	for the crowd
	<i>why</i>	for fun
	<i>how</i>	quickly
	<i>when</i>	in the afternoon
	<i>with what</i>	with a balloon

The next discovery was equally helpful. The question word phrases could be placed at the beginning of the sentence to vary sentence starters.

**For example:**

**Where:** *In the circus tent, the clown danced.*

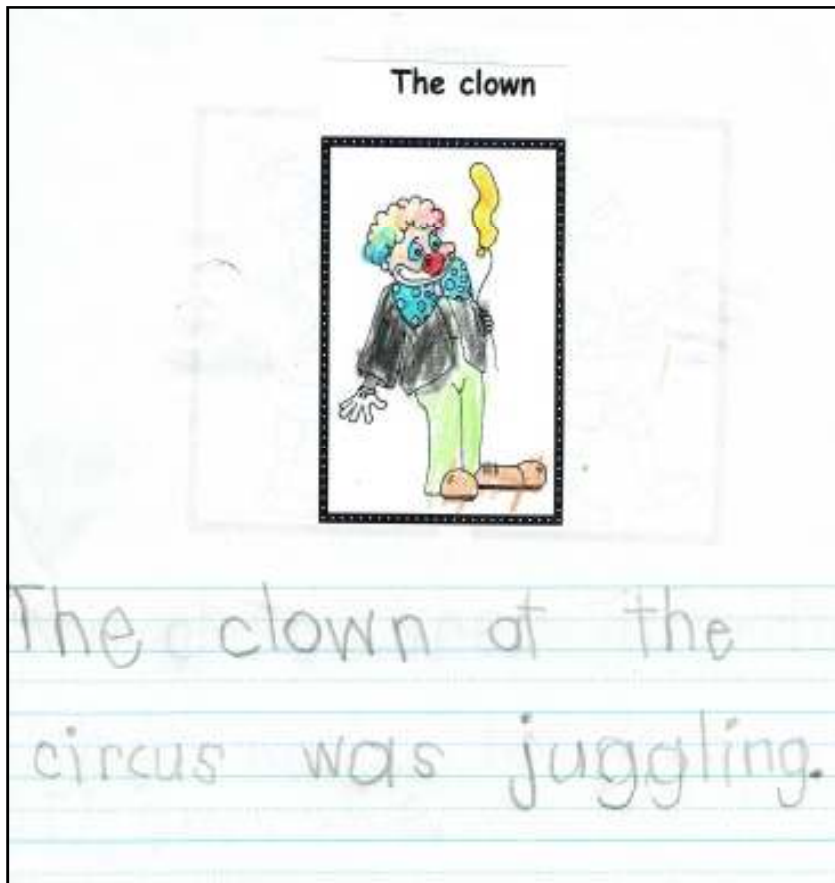
**For whom:** *For the crowd, the clown danced.*

**Why:** *For fun, the clown danced.*

**How:** *Quickly, the clown danced.*

**When:** *In the afternoon, the clown danced.*

**With what:** *With a balloon, the clown danced.*



Five years later, I began to teach our youngest daughter to read and write. We started our first lesson on sentences using the *where, why, how, when, what, for whom* clauses. I explained how you could use the question words phrases at the beginning or at the end of a sentence containing a noun and a verb. I asked her if she was going to put her question word phrase at the beginning or the end of her sentence.

“

Neither!” she beamed. “I’m going to put mine in the middle!”

“You can’t!” I replied and instantly regretted it.

“I can!” she said without missing a beat. “The clown at the circus was juggling!” In one deft moment, she gave me the missing piece. I had forgotten about appositives.

Sentences can be constructed with a **question word phrase** at the **beginning** of a sentence, **between the noun and verb**, and **after** the noun and verb.