

SSC

(Sentences to Study and Change)

a proven method of learning
to write and speak in good English

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I am grateful to many members of Learningguild who have given me completed SSC pages, or joined in inviting and/or annotating them, and to pupils at Holy Mother Public School in Bharatpur, Rajasthan, India, whose pages have been sent to me. My particular thanks go to Romey Borges, a member in New Delhi, who suggested that I make a booklet on the basis of the earlier Guidelines page and what is now on pages 4 and 6.

All students doing SSC work should have their own copy of the booklet, and, initially, a sheet with photocopies of pages 4 and 6, so as to make a start. After that, page 6 can be copied on both sides of sheets. A good aim for many students is to do **six** pages (and so 24 sections) a week, whatever other writing one is doing. Preferably after competent annotation, pages should be bound, or put in folders, for revision. Students would find it very helpful to study one another's annotated SSC pages. I sometimes make copies of pages with such headings as 'Student A' if a student is willing to have his or her annotated work made available to others.

Copies of this booklet are available for \$3.30 (\$2.20 for Learningguild members). Payment may be made in \$1.10 stamps. The booklet will be posted within Australia on receipt of a further \$1.10 stamp. Arrangements can readily be made for bulk purchase: for example, ten copies would be posted within Australia for \$30.

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John Howes

Introduction

In order to speak and write English (or any language) well, one must learn to form well-constructed **sentences** in it. For that, good models are needed, initially quite simple ones in which most words are in common use. **Those models need to be studied so that their structure and full meaning are well understood.** Students need often to ask themselves and to answer the question “Why is **that** word **there**?” and sometimes to put it to a person competent to help them. Especially if they are learning a language they have not “picked up” in childhood, it is a great help if they find in a suitable dictionary a sentence they want to study, copy it carefully, and then, preferably just below that copy, write a sentence of their own in which much of the original’s structure is retained but some words changed. (See what follows the numerals 1 and 5 on the next page.) Hence the title of the method presented here and used extensively in Learningguild. **The changes should be made in such a cautious way that a writer of a new sentence at 5 has reason to be confident that it, like that at 1, is in acceptable English.** As experience is gained, preferably along with constructive annotation (written comment) from a competent helper, that writer can become more adventurous in SSC, though still retaining at least part of the structure of the original. This booklet as a whole will also help people to be competent and confident **helpers** whether or not their primary occupation is teaching.

The main features of the SSC method are set out on the next two pages. **Experience shows the necessity of a thorough knowledge of and detailed adherence to the Guidelines on p.5.** Very well suited for use in SSC are the *Oxford Basic English Dictionary (OBED)* and the *Oxford Essential Dictionary (OEssD)*, whose texts are virtually identical. Wherever possible, students should have their own copy of one of these, in which the two essential requirements are met that (i) the vocabulary is quite wide but not too wide for elementary or intermediate students of English and (ii) many of the words are accompanied by example-sentences. The method invites and encourages students to choose words that **they at that time want to learn to use well**, and to write sentences many of which can express their own situations or interests. A sensible reaction to the brief sight of many words and their explanation is “No, I don’t need that word as yet.”

Such work must be fortified by a growing understanding of the “parts of speech” (nouns, verbs, etc.), and hence an increasing ability to identify them in model sentences and one’s own. Many students in the past forty years and more have had an unsystematic school education very different from the kind well described by R.W. Burchfield at ‘grammar’ in his *New Fowler’s Modern English Usage* (1996):

Ideally every English-speaking person should begin to distinguish the several parts of speech at an early age, and continue to study the various aspects of the subject in a graduated manner throughout his or her time at school.

On this booklet’s p.7 is a brief introduction to grammatical analysis, and therefore to the parts of speech, with some reference to my book *Making up Sentences (MS)*, of which the 3rd edition was published by Learningguild in 2021. On p.8 there is advice, particularly in the numbered paragraphs, that will help students to avoid common errors. Read this page and pages 5, 7 and 8 quite often, sometimes aloud.

SSC (Sentences to Study and Change)

This work should always be done in accordance with all the GUIDELINES on the opposite page. Those Guidelines are intended to assist you to make your SSC work as clear, accurate and fruitful as one could wish — and also to save time for any helper who advises you! With the aid of Guidelines A-D, get used to the five numbered requirements in each of the four sections of a page such as this one. Then complete the first three sections here by composing **your own** sentences at 5, similar to the ones shown at 1 and in the column at the right. Then make the fourth section yourself. After that, use pages with the normal framework printed on p.6. On them, make any notes or write any questions you wish in the right-hand column. Specify there any dictionary you have used if it's not your normal one, which for most students will be *OBED* or *OEssD* (full titles are on p.3).

<p>2 hat</p> <p>3 noun</p> <p>4 a thing that you wear on your head</p>	<p>1 She's wearing a hat.</p> <p>5*</p>	<p>* A suitable sentence here would be 'He's not wearing a hat.'</p>
<p>2 eat</p> <p>3 verb</p> <p>4 (1st m) to put food in your mouth and swallow it[⊗]</p>	<p>1 Have you eaten all the chocolates?</p> <p>5*</p>	<p>* 'Has she eaten all the biscuits?' would be a suitable sentence.</p>
<p>2 eat</p> <p>3 verb</p> <p>4 (2nd m) to have a meal[⊗]</p>	<p>1 What time shall we eat?</p> <p>5*</p>	<p>* 'What time will they eat?' would be a suitable sentence.</p>
<p>2</p> <p>3</p> <p>4</p>	<p>1</p> <p>5</p>	

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(See Guideline G.)

⊗ The 'to' used in *OBED* and *OEssD* to begin explanations of most verbs is not so used in the *Shorter Oxford English Dictionary* and may be omitted.

GUIDELINES

Follow all these Guidelines in all your SSC work. Get to know them well with reference to the opposite page. Put a tick after each of the paragraphs if you thoroughly understand it all, and mark anything you don't yet understand, adding a question mark in a circle in the right-hand margin, so that you can readily ask a helper for explanation.

- A. Use an elementary-and-intermediate dictionary, such as *OBED* or *OEssD*, that has this essential feature: very often, there is a **WHOLE SENTENCE**, or more than one, to show how a particular word is used. In those two dictionaries such sentences are printed in italics. We give the sentence(s) the top central place, next to the numeral 1, because the SSC method is focused on sentences to be studied and changed. Choosing for the box at 2 a word whose employment you want to master, you study its use and the whole sentence that includes it. **Each sentence you put at 1 is like an orange from which you want to squeeze as much juice as you can: you aim to understand why the sentence has those words in that order.** When only one part of speech and one meaning are given, as for 'hat', put (as opposite) the part of speech at 3 and the meaning at 4. All the copying, from 1 to 4, should be carefully done and carefully checked.
- B. Sometimes, as at 'eat' opposite, more than one meaning is given for a word, and the meanings are numbered. **Do not combine these meanings in any of your sections.** Copy there just one of them, having first written, in brackets before it and with 'm' for 'meaning', '1st m' or '2nd m' or whichever it is. If you decide to do SSC for more than one meaning given for a word, make different sections, as has been done opposite. (Sometimes you might be content to make a note in the right-hand margin about another use.)
- C. After careful study of 1-4, write at 5 a full sentence that YOU have composed, so that, at 5 as well as 1, the word at 2 (or some form of it) is used as the part of speech shown at 3 and with the meaning given at 4.
- D. Aim to derive maximum benefit from 1 by making your sentence at 5 similar in structure to it, as in the sentences mentioned opposite as suitable. Later, you can add to that structure, but maintain it or some of it. Look for opportunities to draw at 5 on some situation or interest of your own.
- E. Every sentence, whether at 1 or at 5, needs to end with a full stop, a question mark or an exclamation mark.
- F. **For nearly all your SSC work, choose words for which at least one example-sentence is provided.** If you really want to include a word for which no full sentence is given, but only a phrase, put that phrase into square brackets at 1; if the word has no example, put a dash. (For 'phrase', see p.7, para. 4.)
- G. All your SSC work should normally be **unassisted** by spell-checks or grammar-checks on a computer, or by any other person, and **checked** by yourself. At the bottom right of each page, put a tick, if you honestly can, by the U and by the C.

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2 3 4	1 5	

Grammatical Analysis

We begin with word-analysis (called parsing) in which words are classified as different “parts of speech”: nouns, verbs, etc. **Many words can be used as more than one part of speech, and we parse words according to the use they are given in a particular sentence.** Sometimes what we classify is not a single word but a set of words taken together, such as the noun ‘Flinders Street’ and the verbs ‘is coming’ and ‘are being introduced’. In my book *Making up Sentences (MS)*, Chapter One deals in turn with four of the parts of speech: nouns, articles, pronouns, verbs. Chapter Two explains the other five: adjectives, adverbs, prepositions, conjunctions and interjections.

To introduce the parts of speech to children at an Indian school in 2006, I used the two sentences ‘The cat ate it!’ and ‘Oh! The tall girl runs so fast along the track after the gun has fired.’ Students beginning SSC should soon be able to parse those two and many other sentences intelligently, even if they are not familiar already with the parts of speech, by studying “ELEMENTS OF PARSING” below and practising. Soon they should go on to much fuller treatments such as those in *MS*.

A second form of grammatical analysis is the identifying of subject-locutions and object-locutions (Sub-Ls and Ob-Ls). I use the word ‘locution’ as a very useful technical term covering any individual word (or similar item, such as a numeral or symbol or abbreviation) and any unified group of words and/or similar items, including phrases, clauses and sentences. In ‘The cat ate it!’ the locution ‘The cat’ is the Sub-L and the locution ‘it’ the Ob-L. (See *MS* Ch.1, Secs 3, 6, 7, and Ch.3, Sec. 3.) In the other sentence, there are the Sub-Ls ‘The tall girl’ and ‘the gun’, and no Ob-Ls.

A third form of grammatical analysis is **clause-phrase** analysis (later, see *MS* 6:2.2-9). The Sub-Ls just mentioned may be called phrases (phrases are unified sets of words without any personed verb, i.e., any verb that may be labelled as first or second or third person: 1:6 & 7). Also phrases are ‘so fast’, ‘the track’ and ‘along the track’. ‘After the gun has fired’, with its Sub-L and its personed and “matching” verb (1:7.14), is a clause (an adverbial one, of time). For ‘clause’, see 2:2.2, and for types of clause, 2:4 and 6:2.3-8.

ELEMENTS OF PARSING

In *The cat ate it!* the words are respectively an article, a noun, a verb and a pronoun. The only **articles** are *the* (the definite article) and *a* and *an* (indefinite articles). **Nouns** may be names or classifiers of individual beings or things or groups or qualities, and there are also nouns called gerunds, derived from verbs, such as *parsing* as used above. **Pronouns** are words we use instead of using nouns: examples (all of these called “personal”) are *I, you, he, she, them* and even *it*. The fundamental use of **verbs** (such as *ate*, and *is* in ‘Jo is a stamp-collector’) is to enable us to assert that some action, activity, event, process or state pertains (that word is like ‘belongs’) to something, now or in the past or the future; but we may also use them to say (with a negative adverb such as *not or never*) that it does not, or to ask whether it does, or to command or request that it should.

In *Oh! The tall girl runs so fast along the track after the gun has fired*, *The* is the definite article, *girl, track* and *gun* are nouns, and *runs* is a verb. *Has fired* is also a verb: two words but one verb. *Oh* is an **interjection**, like *Yes*. *Tall* is an **adjective**: adjectives are often used to say more than is conveyed by a noun, noun and article, or pronoun. **Adverbs** often say how ... or when ... or where ...: *fast* and *so* are, here but not always, adverbs. **Prepositions**, mostly put ahead of nouns or pronouns, express relationships: *along* here is a preposition. **Conjunctions** are joining words (hence their name): here *after* is a conjunction, showing how the girl’s running is related to the gun’s firing. The word *after* is a preposition in *after dinner* and, like *happily* and *ever*, an adverb in *They lived happily ever after*.

Advice

The fundamental advice has to be “**Understand, revise and follow every one of the Guidelines.**”

Guideline D asks for a sentence at 5 which shows that you are aiming to derive maximum benefit from your study of the example-sentence you have copied at 1. Because it is so important to be able to identify a word (sometimes a pair or set of words) as, **in its use in a given sentence**, a particular “part of speech”, get to know p.7 of this booklet very well, and practise this identifying, called parsing.

Be very careful to avoid basic errors (and to recognize and correct them when you check your work). List for yourself some kinds of errors you have made in the past, and use that list when you check. One very common error is to fail to give a noun its plural form (often by adding *s*) when it has to be understood as plural. Many others occur because of failure to keep in mind and apply one of 1-4 below.

At the end of the first paragraph of the Introduction, there is mention of the constructive **annotation** you should seek from a competent person. It is very helpful if, as well as providing, in red, ticks and some corrections and explanations, the annotator sometimes invites the student to write (in green) a correction, or an answer to a question. I use a red square with a dot in the middle to mark such points, and then put another dotted square at the top right followed by a numeral to indicate the number of such squares to be found below. In revision, the original error can be contrasted with the correction. We learn so much by repeated attention to such pairs.

DERIVING MAXIMUM BENEFIT FROM YOUR DICTIONARY

(Which dictionary? See the second paragraph of the Introduction.)

1. At *interested*, there is *Are you **interested in** cars?*. By its use of bold print there, the dictionary is in effect saying “Remember that we often say **interested in!**” Use such **combinations** in your own sentences at 5, and revise them. (Where there is no bold type, still study the structure!) Often one of the words in those combinations is a **preposition**, used after a noun, adjective or verb.
2. To distinguish two different kinds of use of **verbs**, first study carefully the entries for *hear* and *see*, and the related panels with the heading ‘WHICH WORD?’. Verbs such as *hear*, *see* and *watch* are commonly used “transitively”: that is, with them we cross straight to object-locutions (see the third paragraph on p.7) for what is heard, seen or watched. With verbs such as *listen* and *look* we cannot do this: they are used “intransitively”, and often need to end a sentence or be followed by a preposition (for those two verbs, often *to* and *at* respectively). Some verbs, e.g. *eat* (see p.4 and Guideline B) and *break*, can be used in both ways. Study example-sentences to see in which way or ways a verb is used, and remember those uses as transitive or intransitive.
3. To distinguish two different kinds of uses of **nouns**, go first to ‘service’. At 1st m and 2nd m we find (*no plural*). Look out for that in entries for nouns. A noun thus used (e.g. *heaviness*) is an NU, a noun used for something thought of as **uncountable** with it. An NC is a noun (e.g. *cat*) used for something thought of as **countable** with it. Some nouns can be used in both ways. **A noun that is both an NC and singular needs an introductory word**, often an article, so look out for such nouns.
4. Frequently study “word-families” in your dictionary: groups of words called cognate, such as ‘interest’, ‘interested’, ‘interesting’. Do SSC for all, or, for some, add notes in the margin. Look out for similar patterns elsewhere, as in ‘bore’, ‘bored’, ‘boring’ and ‘excite’, ‘excited’, ‘exciting’.
5. Read many of the dictionary’s example-sentences **aloud**, studying their structure. They can be used to begin imagined conversations. If you can, hold such conversations with other students.