

Patterns
of *Patterns*
POWER

Teaching

GRAMMAR

Through

Reading and Writing

Grades 9-12

JEFF ANDERSON

Travis Leech • Holly Durham

“I can’t wait to put *Patterns of Power*, 9–12 in the hands of every high school English teacher in my district! This practical approach to teaching writing through the beauty and power of mentor texts supports our instructional philosophy by inspiring teachers to finally retire ineffective, prescriptive grammar instruction. Teaching with the Invitations to Notice, Compare and Contrast, Imitate, Celebrate, Apply, and Edit will help students understand the *why* of grammar and punctuation while motivating them to explore possibilities rather than avoid errors.”

—Tracy Winstead, District Coordinator, High School English Curriculum and Instruction



“If high school teachers are looking for a way to teach grammar and conventions that is meaningful and transfers to student writing, they should look no further than *Patterns of Power: Teaching Grammar Through Reading and Writing*, Grades 9–12. By starting with a mentor sentence, students are invited to take an inquiry stance as they think through the writer’s moves and the impact on the reader. *Patterns of Power*, 9–12 helps students gain the confidence and agency they need to try new grammar and convention moves in their own writing.”

—Erica Bissel, Coordinator of Reading and Language Arts



“Jeff’s books have been pivotal to the success of our writing program since *Everyday Editing*. His invitational approach to noticing author’s purpose and craft is non-threatening and engaging to students. We are excited to dive into this new book with Travis Leech and Holly Durham and continue inspiring our students to ‘sharpen their ideas.’”

—Dr. Susan Diaz, Executive Director of Secondary Curriculum and Instruction



“Up early one morning, I thought I’d skim this book while sipping that first cup of coffee. The skimming stopped almost immediately as I began reading slowly to catch every idea, to understand each teaching move, to jot my own notes in my journal. My coffee grew cold and was forgotten. I was watching master teachers Jeff, Travis, and Holly make things such as colons and commas, apostrophes and appositives, phrases and fragments become more than things to be learned; instead, they were turning conventions of language into conversations I *wanted* to have with kids. Filled with the well-designed lessons that show you how to move kids from noticing to naming to using, this is a book that won’t sit on your bookshelf. It will stay beside you as it guides you through lessons that actually help kids think about how they write.”

—Kylene Beers, coauthor of *Notice and Note: Strategies for Close Reading* and *Forged by Reading: The Power of a Literate Life*



“The *Patterns of Power* series epitomizes our philosophical approach to grammar: that it should arise from authentic literature and be presented when it would make sense to students based on their writing. Students need not be numbed by grammar instruction that follows a rigid textbook. Rather, a flexible approach of presenting examples which help readers to discover patterns, understand the conventions of language, appreciate great writing, and become enthusiastic writers is the most effective and enjoyable one.”

—Michael R. Bowman, Supervisor of Curriculum & Instruction



“Jeff Anderson has done it again! We know our secondary students need practice understanding and applying the conventions of English. *Patterns of Power, 9–12* provides lessons that engage high school students in learning what is often missing in a world of quick text messages and limited face to face interactions. Students will use a variety of engaging texts to hook them into learning, practicing, and becoming proficient readers and writers of the English language.”

—Heather Anderson, Educator, Author, and Consultant

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For Terry Thompson, who gave me the real family I always wanted.

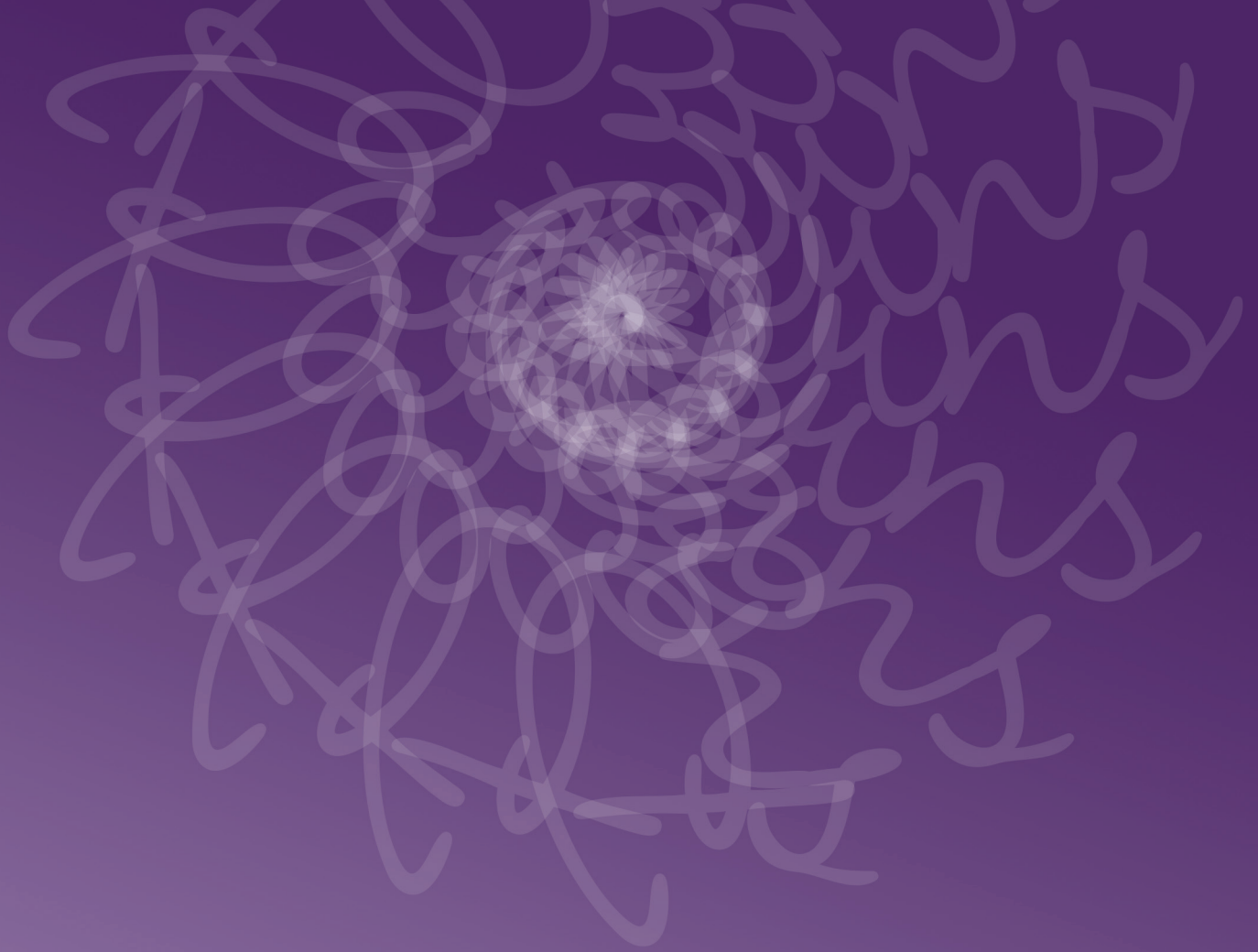
Jeff

For Keri, who inspires me to be a better human.

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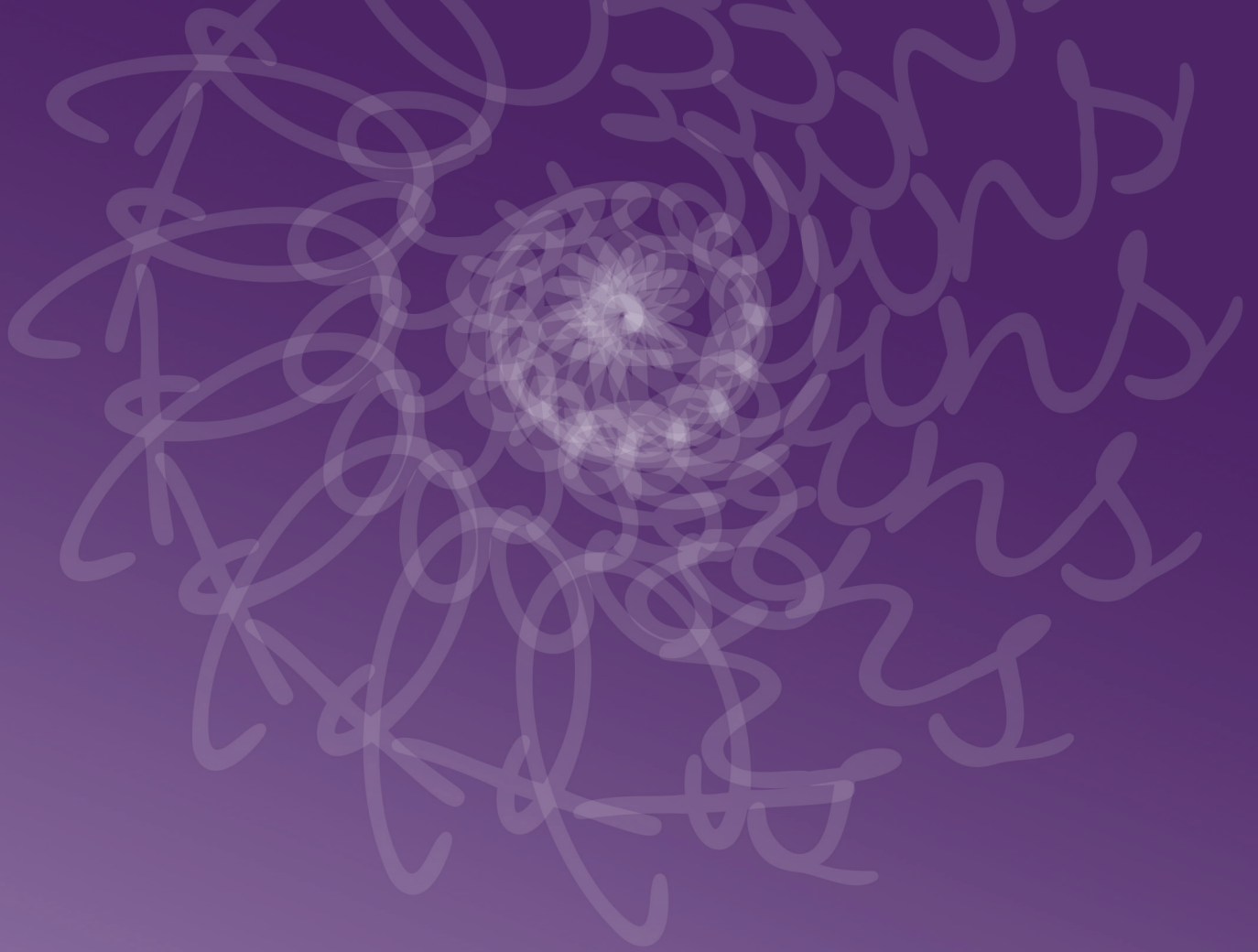


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♥ *Holly*

Introduction:

Looking Closely at the World Through Grammar

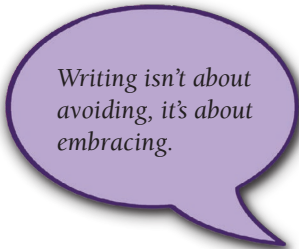
The object of education is to teach us to love what is beautiful.

—Plato, *The Republic*

Our *best* self knows what Plato says is true; however, in the pressure cooker called high school, our *survival* self can kick in, causing us to spew warnings, prescriptions, and edicts because “we’ve got a long way to go and a short time to get there” (Reed and Feller 1977).

The spew ensues:

- Avoid splices.
- Avoid fragments.
- Avoid run-on sentences.
- Avoid changes in point of view.
- Avoid second person.



Writing isn't about avoiding, it's about embracing.

High school students are highly adept at avoiding, when they actually need to engage, not avoid.

And they particularly, almost pathologically, want to *avoid* errors; they want to *avoid* the rabid red pen (or the green or metallic one). As a result of this *avoidance*, teenage writers come to believe that tossed-about terms such as *sentence variety* and *error-free writing* are the goal. But they know only the abstract labels—not *their patterns*, not *their purposes*, and not *their relationships to each other* or *how to use them* to create style and craft that enhances their intended meaning and effect.

So is it any wonder that few high school students see education's role as one of teaching them to love what is beautiful? Probably even fewer will see education as an opportunity to learn structures and patterns that will help them more fully experience the world that surrounds them. Or see writing as a lens to observe, expose, and investigate truth and beauty. Or see grammar patterns as a vehicle to generate, stimulate, and sharpen ideas.

And we already have a sneaking suspicion that flooding high school students with sentences or excerpts overflowing with errors probably *won't* help them become better writers. And, of course, none of our best selves would toss aside authentic reading and writing and log our class onto some quick-fix, “data-driven” computer program that's simply a worksheet in technology's clothing.

Your *best* self most certainly has some questions about those instructional practices.

But your *survival* self might just take the plunge: it's Friday afternoon, the final bell's blasting—wouldn't it be easier to just “go along to get along” and do the “warm-up” many of your colleagues insist has been the key to their success for some twenty-five years? And, besides, Janine will make the copies if you give her your copier code.

But your *best* self quietly asks, “Does it work, though?”

Here's the bottom line: we all just want to do something that engages our students, gets the job done, and makes sense.

What Makes Sense for Teaching Grammar in High School?

Study Model Texts

Beautiful, balanced, pleasing patterns can be looked at and talked about, effectively engaging students while burning effective patterns into their brains' visual stores. Studying models is supported by common sense and the basic tenets of sound pedagogy, brain research on mirror neurons, and grammar research conducted in the United States and the United Kingdom on actual living, breathing high school students (Myhill 2021, Applebee and Langer 2013, Graham and Perin 2007).

Instead of hammering teens with the mistakes they should avoid, we play with the patterns of language to mold meaning and create engaging effects on readers. Creating an environment in which writers study and appreciate the power and meaning of grammar found in model texts—rather than an environment in which they fear and avoid mistakes—will shift the focus to language's power to inspire and create meaning-making. An environment filled with model texts will generate writers who naturally come to know and use the patterns of the English language.

Investigate Purposeful Patterns That Make Writing Work

Soaking student writers in effective writing allows them to discuss and focus upon what works in writing. What if, in addition to providing ample models, we encouraged students to consider why an author made certain choices and discussed their effects on us? Why not—by actively processing through talk—raise high school students' conscious level of attention (Brandt and Egleman 2017) to love what is beautiful while we're at it? (You're welcome, Plato.) Why not flood them with what is possible when expressing their ideas, facilitating their ability to reach and connect with audiences near and far?

High school students are thinking about the meaning-driven use of conventions beyond academic English. For example, Holly's daughter, who is fifteen, recently upset a friend during a heated texting conversation when she put a period at the end of the last sentence in her text *by accident*. It turns out, if you are texting someone back and forth and you leave out the last period, they'll know the conversation can keep going. A period means “you're, like, done with that person.” It's a convention for texting that's kind of clever, and it tells us Holly's daughter and her friend understand that punctuation has function and meaning. Every night, and on weekends, the texts high school writers are exposed to do not often follow academic rules. And high schoolers need to understand punctuation in both systems, so they can maneuver

Behind every grammatical move, there is an effect, and each choice a writer makes has an effect. That's author's purpose and craft.



If QR Interested

How We Learn
by Stanislas Dehaene

Pleasing patterns play upon the brain's circuitry. . . . We find pattern and symmetry pleasing in nature because it gives order and sense to the world.

—Joe Moran, *First You Write a Sentence*

between texting language and academic language. All students *need* that power, and a worksheet *can't* and *won't* ever give it to them. It takes conversation and a different way of looking at conventions and grammar to assist with toggling between purpose and audience.

In the *Patterns of Power* philosophy, teen writers explore grammar as a set of special-effects devices for the words and punctuation and usage they use to read and write. They experiment and grapple with the power of meaning that grammar creates—moving, pausing, stopping, speaking, yelling, comparing, timing, identifying, emphasizing.

Kill the Fill-In-the-Blank Worksheets

Have you ever noticed that worksheets avoid the gray areas of usage? Like some outside, ever-present authority, worksheets wield the gavel of absolute right and wrong. This dichotomy interferes with meaning-making and asks students to be good guessers, searching for what is right rather than what makes meaning. Instead, when students actually write and read, they thrive through experimentation—trying things out and seeing what works for their purposes. Expression and meaning dance across the page when students talk about the patterns they see and then imitate them in their own compositions. This type of hands-on, engaging grammar instruction mirrors the latest neuroscience on learning, which insists we consider students' emotional and cognitive environment. According to French neurologist Stanislas Dehaene (2020):

Negative emotions crush our brain's learning potential, whereas providing the brain with a fear-free environment may reopen the gates of neuronal plasticity. There will be no progress in education without simultaneously considering the emotional and cognitive facets of our brain—in today's cognitive neuroscience, both are considered key ingredients to the learning cocktail. (xxiii)

Why not approach grammar with brain science?

Teach Grammar as Patterns Instead of Rules

Instead of *rules*, we call the conventions of grammar *patterns* because, to us, this term better represents their power and the nuance required to use them effectively. High school students' brains are already attracted to patterns. All brains are. Patterns are everywhere—in fabrics, nature, architecture, design, mathematics, and many other things. Not surprisingly, however, teenagers are not drawn to rules. Rules limit or shut down learners. To high school students, rules require a right or wrong answer. In contrast, patterns are created, noticed, and repeated naturally. Patterns show and rely on purpose, rather than an outside authority, for meaning and effect. Rules activate an environment of threat rather than one of investigation; an environment of punishment rather than one of expression; a right or wrong lens rather than one of meaning and special effects. Would you rather face down rules burdened with confusing exceptions or turn toward attractive, meaningful patterns, which surround us and communicate shared meaning?

Engage Readers and Writers in Conversation

In the student-centered *Patterns of Power* process, we facilitate lessons driven by student conversation. We ask questions, clarify, and highlight relevant responses, stretching concepts out when needed or shortening them when they are not helpful. In this way, direct instruction is response-driven rather than teacher-driven.

It's no secret that teens love to talk. The *Patterns of Power* process leverages this strength and serves as an essential thread throughout the entire process.

Stop Marking Up High School Students' Writing

It's so easy to give more feedback than the writer can process. Sometimes, as writing teachers, the most important thing we can do is let things go, not comment on every piddly problem. Writers develop over time, not in an instant. Learning to write is a process. One of the most crucial things we can do when teaching through the *Patterns of Power* process is to quash our compulsive need to address every issue at once. We need to make some space for imperfection.

And how often does well-meaning restrictive instruction crush innovation? Language languishes in a right-or-wrong environment. Students easily become risk averse: "There is only one choice, the right one, which I'll never ever get. Anything I come up with will be inept and incorrect." To teenagers, the distinction between right and wrong is arbitrary. In the world of right or wrong, high school writers will avoid being wrong at any cost, even if it requires them to shut down.

Sometimes, as writing teachers, the most important thing we can do is let things go.

What Do High School Writers Need to Know About Grammar?

Learning is a vital principle and the human brain has an enormous capacity for plasticity—to change itself, to adapt.

—Stanislas Dehaene,
How We Learn



If QR Interested

The Runaway Species

by Anthony Brandt
and David Eagleman

So what *do* high school writers truly need to know about grammar to be able to read and write well? How *do* we teach them? And what will *inspire* high school students to write pages that brim with enthusiasm, thought, and authenticity?

Creating an environment in which writers study and appreciate the beauty and meaning of grammar and conventions, rather than studying and memorizing what is *always* wrong or *always* right, makes space for growth and meaning to unfold. This type of environment will focus their energy on language's power to inspire and affect us. This approach will generate writers who naturally come to know and use the patterns of the English language. They'll instinctively note that the most effective patterns are repeated more often because they get the job done easily and elegantly.

Grammar is innovation, not stagnation. Grammar is not some dead and buried part of writing, as some high school writers might believe. Nor is it some sort of police helicopter, flying over us in pursuit of offenders. Grammar is more like a lump of clay waiting to be shaped through purposeful manipulation and movement. The acts of tinkering and experimenting with our writing transform our ideas into meaning and effect. In *The Runaway Species: How Human Creativity Remakes the World*, Brandt and Eagleman (2017) define ways we innovate, which we see as a template for how writers use the power

of grammar. According to Brandt and Eagleman, innovators build upon what exists now to shape what is next. What if we use some of what innovators do as a lens to look at language?

- Bending
- Breaking
- Blending
- Being open to alternatives
- Proliferating options
- Tolerating risk

Language languishes in a right-or-wrong environment.

Consider using these six tenets of innovation as tools to give students creative freedom to discover and come to know grammar. What would be the impact on young minds of viewing language as alive, shapeable, and engageable? What if students were encouraged to play with sentences, words, and punctuation? What if when they did, they were tolerating risks, bending usage for their purposes, breaking rules for effect, or blending things in new ways to create meaning and deeper understanding?

The Patterns of Power Process in High School Classrooms

High school writers can meet or exceed their language and convention standards while concurrently uncovering links between writing and reading.

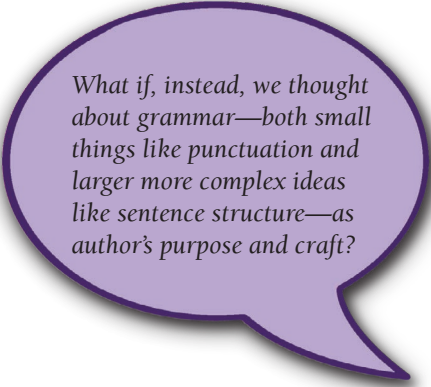
High school writers can meet or exceed their language and convention standards while concurrently uncovering links between writing and reading. Through our conversations with high school writers, we can help them internalize a hidden truth—that grammar and conventions entwine composition and comprehension. Conventions and grammar activate meaning in the writing and reading processes, linking effect and purpose for writers and readers. The conventions aren't separate. They are, in fact, the meaning-making element, binding reading and writing with meaning. *Patterns of Power* high school classrooms cultivate curiosity and nurture noticing with complex books and articles offering a continual conventions curriculum. Every sentence holds a truth about writing, if only we pay attention.

Every sentence holds a truth about writing, if only we pay attention.

We want high school students to become experts at the sport of noticing the “good stuff” writers do. Our recurrent question, “What do you notice?” (Chambers 1985), develops students’ observational cognitive structures (Garner 2007), inviting them to engage, to slow down, to look closely, to talk and question freely, and to pay attention in new ways to the language moves writers make. Innovation. Creation by inspiration.

The thinking and observation skills high school students will gain in *Patterns of Power* grammar lessons will not only directly apply to the reading and writing they do, but they will also affect students’ ability to reason and draw connections between style, attitude, tone, and author’s purpose and craft. These skills will affect how students read math problems and see patterns in science and social studies. This concentration, this observation, this repetition of patterns that literacy requires bolsters anything we do, academic or otherwise.

Using the *Patterns of Power* Process to Teach Grammar to High School Students



What if, instead, we thought about grammar—both small things like punctuation and larger more complex ideas like sentence structure—as author’s purpose and craft?

How do we approach grammar without making students—or ourselves, for that matter—apoplectic or bored?

Standards ask teen writers to look at writing and reading through author’s purpose and craft. Take the purpose and craft of composing *prepositional phrases*, for example. When many of us hear the term *prepositional phrases*, we may think of squirrels and everywhere they can be, or we freeze: *What’s the difference between a phrase and clause? I remember my English teacher talked about them all the time. Or was that predicates? What’s that?* Suddenly, the black hole of terminal doubt and fear sucks anyone nearby into a vortex of abstraction, never to be heard from again.

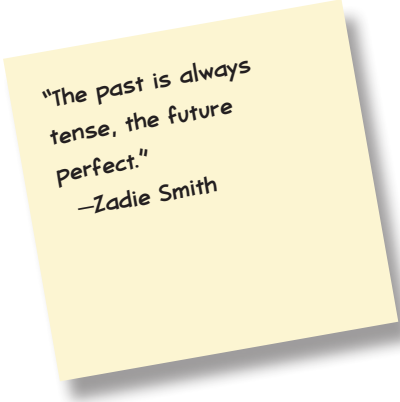
What if, instead, we thought about grammar—both small things like punctuation and larger more complex ideas like sentence structure—as author’s purpose and craft? What if we considered prepositional phrases as *Patterns of Power* that telegraph *setting* and *time* to our readers with purpose? And what if we increased students’ attention to the power of more complex syntactical structures, engaging them in talk about their impact and constantly filling their wells with what language *can* do rather than what it *can’t*. Over time, repeated engagement with authentic texts naturally prunes misconceptions and refines understandings of how language works.

In the *Patterns of Power* process, which is based on the invitational method (see page 8) introduced in Jeff’s book *Everyday Editing* (2007) and developed in the *Patterns of Power* family of products, we share easy-to-implement solutions, which systematically teach high school writers and readers what they need to know. Our goal is to empower you—and your learners—to thrive in the twenty-first century. In *Patterns of Power*, you won’t find lists of basic rules to memorize or definitions to spout or worksheets disguised as high-tech. Instead, you’ll find curated, authentic texts—both fiction and nonfiction. Through open-ended conversations, you’ll use these short excerpts as your coteacher to engage learners in ways that

- focus attention,
- demonstrate author’s purpose and craft,
- model skills, and
- explore meaning and effect.

In the following section, we’ll read and explore a bite-sized chunk of text. We’ll show you how to lead investigations in which students drive the talk, the discovery, the learning. And we’ll explain how these very conversations are the essential tool to break through to your students and open the floodgates of thinking, meaningful analysis, and creation. We can’t *make* high school students write or read, but we can *inspire* them to do so.

A Snapshot of the *Patterns of Power* Process



"The past is always
tense, the future
perfect."
—Zadie Smith

To begin this work, the teacher displays a well-crafted sentence or two. Since writing is a series of decisions, students note some of the moves the writer has made in the sentence, such as using a comma to break it up or using dashes to set off information, discussing the effects of these choices. In turn, these moves become options to choose for meaning and effect. Then the students try out the pattern alone, with their teacher, or with a partner, crafting sentences that borrow liberally from the model's pattern, not its content. This can be as small as just one move. As students celebrate their attempts at the pattern, they begin to collect new possibilities as options to create meaning and effect in their own writing. Finally, students are nudged to apply some of these new patterns to their individual compositions, free to risk, bend, and blend. Nudging writers toward application of the *Patterns of Power* permeates planning and instruction. This focused application creates a space where adolescent writers experiment and play with meaning.

The *Patterns of Power* Process

The invitational process is driven by students' natural curiosity about language and life. These experiences occur over a series of days in ten-minute increments. (The process is explained fully in Chapter 2.)

Invitation to . . .	What Teachers Do	What Students Do
Notice	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▶ Select and display model sentences that demonstrate a standard. ▶ Ask, "What do you notice?" ▶ Wait. ▶ Honor, name, and extend upon student answers. ▶ Ask, "What else?" 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▶ Explore model sentences from literature that demonstrate a grammar standard in context. ▶ Discuss what they notice or see or question in the model.
Compare and Contrast	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▶ Display a second version or imitation of the pattern. ▶ Ask, "How are the selections similar and different?" 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▶ Discuss how the original model is similar and different from a new example of the pattern.
Imitate	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▶ Select one or more of the following: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Teacher demonstrates an imitation. • Pairs or groups collaborate on an imitation. • Individual writers imitate. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▶ Collaborate with teacher or partner, or work individually to create their own sentences that follow the pattern. ▶ Express thoughts, feelings, or observations through the lens of the pattern.
Share and Celebrate	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▶ Provide time and space to share and celebrate. ▶ Teach safe and social ways to give positive feedback. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▶ Share and celebrate creations. ▶ Express joy as they celebrate other writers' imitations.
Apply	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▶ Launch students' individual or collaborative authentic use of the standard. ▶ Build confidence by encouraging writers to experiment with the standard in other content areas and contexts. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▶ Problem-solve a new way to use the pattern to express themselves. ▶ Use the craft/skill as a lens through which to look at the world.
Edit	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▶ Display four versions of the original model plus three modified versions of it. ▶ Ask, "What did we learn about writing from the author?" ▶ Examine the three modified versions of the sentence, one at a time. ▶ Ask, "What changed?" ▶ After the change is named, ask, "What is the effect of the change?" 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▶ Secure in the pattern, collaboratively brainstorm what they learned about writing from the author. ▶ Explore three versions of the original model sentence with one or more changes made in each of them. ▶ Problem-solve and discuss <i>what changed</i> and <i>what the effects of that change are</i>.

How to Use This Book

If you're new to the *Patterns of Power* process, this book is arranged so you can easily access all a high school teacher needs to teach the grade 9–12 grammar lessons. Additional support for planning and application is included in Part 1 and also within each lesson found in Part 2. If you've already had experience with the invitational process, you'll notice we've made a few adjustments to it. Even if you feel familiar with the invitational *Patterns of Power* process, we suggest you begin with the overview in Part 1. Revisiting the *why* behind your instructional moves is essential to teaching the lessons that follow.

You may decide to jump right to the lessons in Part 2, but be forewarned. We give you brief “just what you need at the moment” material in the lessons. We highly recommend you read Part 1 first and return to it whenever you need clarification. On the next two pages we include a breakdown of what you'll find in the rest of the book.

Part 1

Getting Started with the *Patterns of Power* Process

In Part 1, we explore intentional planning, instruction, and application that will push high school students to actively participate as meaning-makers rather than to passively avoid errors. The first three chapters give a narrative overview of the *Patterns of Power* process, offering what's essential to implement the lessons that follow in Part 2.

Chapter 1: Into PLANNING: A Step-by-Step Guide to Preparing Engaging Grammar Lessons

Spending a few minutes talking with our colleagues about what students at our grade level need to know and how a particular convention connects to author's purpose and craft is the crux of successfully implementing the *Patterns of Power* process. This chapter explores a simple, step-by-step process for effectively planning and thinking through grammar instruction that emphasizes the relationships between reading, writing, and grammar.

Chapter 2: Into the CLASSROOM: How to Teach Grammar with the *Patterns of Power* Process

Displaying a powerful piece of authentic literature launches the *Patterns of Power* process, and creating space for talk and interaction builds students' conscious-level awareness of the moves writers make to create meaning. In Chapter 2, each phase of the *Patterns of Power* process is broken apart and explored through a model lesson on prepositional phrases to help you understand what will make the pattern stick.

Chapter 3: Into APPLICATION: Guiding Writers to USE the *Patterns of Power*

We have discovered that, once students have worked through the six-phase process of learning a pattern, they may still need additional practical strategies, a nudge to use the pattern authentically, or a quick exercise to be assessed or graded. We round out Part 1 with additional application strategies in Chapter 3, ensuring the patterns are applied through multiple experiences, increasing students' depth of understanding, flexibility, and inclination to use the patterns in their daily reading and writing.

Part 2 Into the Lessons with the *Patterns of Power* Process

Part 2—the largest part of the book—showcases a collection of ready-to-go lessons designed for classroom use. These brief lessons are grouped by writer’s craft and author’s purpose. We include content, texts, and instructional moves based in the state and national standards for grade levels 9–12. They aren’t labeled by grade level, so start in any chapter based on your students’ current needs. In addition, we include classroom-ready support materials alongside each lesson. You’ll have everything you need at your fingertips—no need to flip back and forth between the text and the appendix.

Chapter 4: The Purpose and Craft of PUNCTUATION

Chapter 5: The Purpose and Craft of CLAUSES

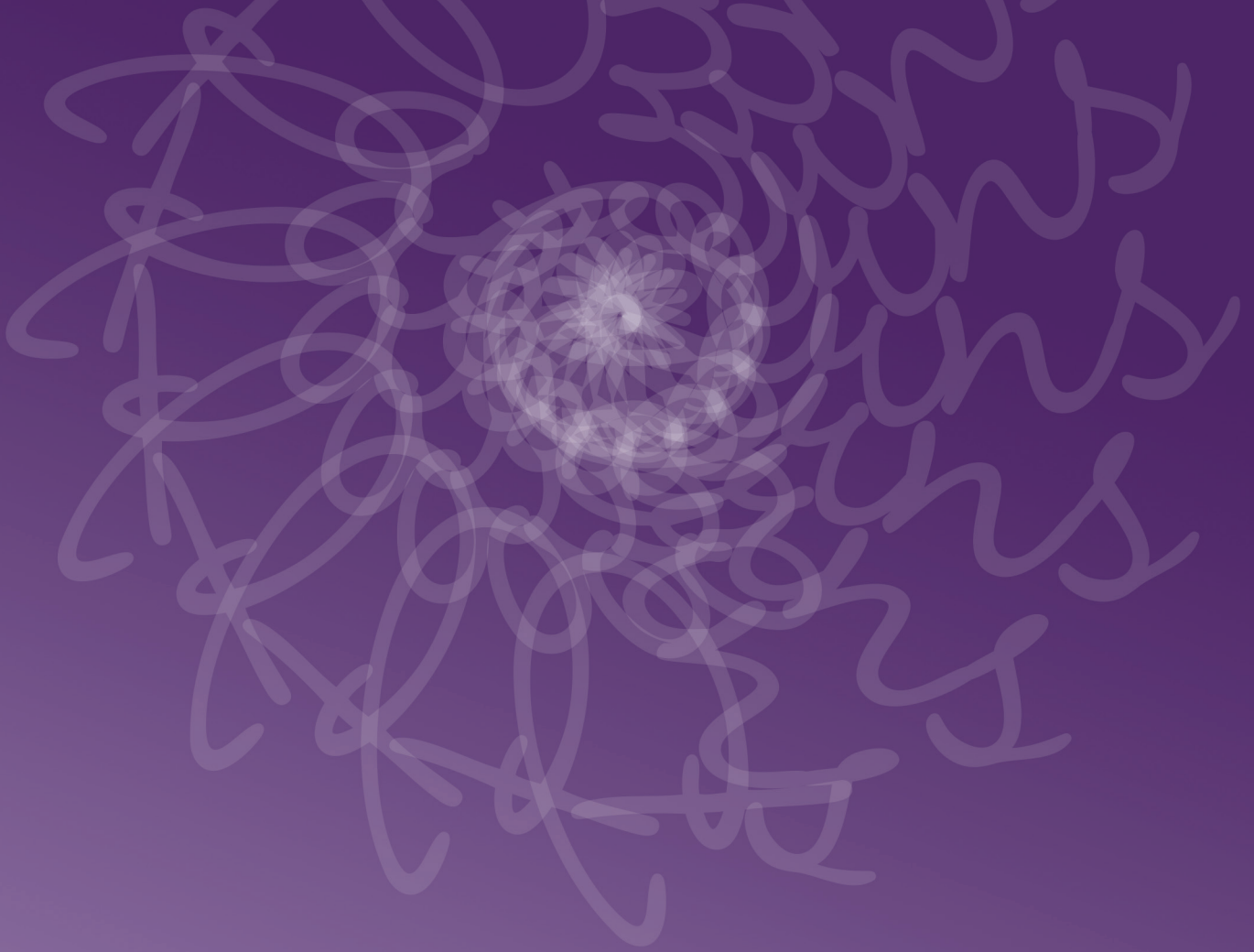
Chapter 6: The Purpose and Craft of PHRASES

Chapter 7: The Purpose and Craft of PARALLEL STRUCTURE

Chapter 8: The Purpose of CITATIONS

Chapter 9: The Purpose and Craft of CREATIVE PATTERNS

Whether you teach ninth, tenth, eleventh, or twelfth grade, beginning or Advanced Placement writers, you can find the right lesson at the right level for your class. Tip Boxes, thoughtful quotes, and Power Notes hang out on the pages of the lessons and chapters, ready to help you go deeper or to invite you to pause and think when you need it.



Part 1

GETTING STARTED

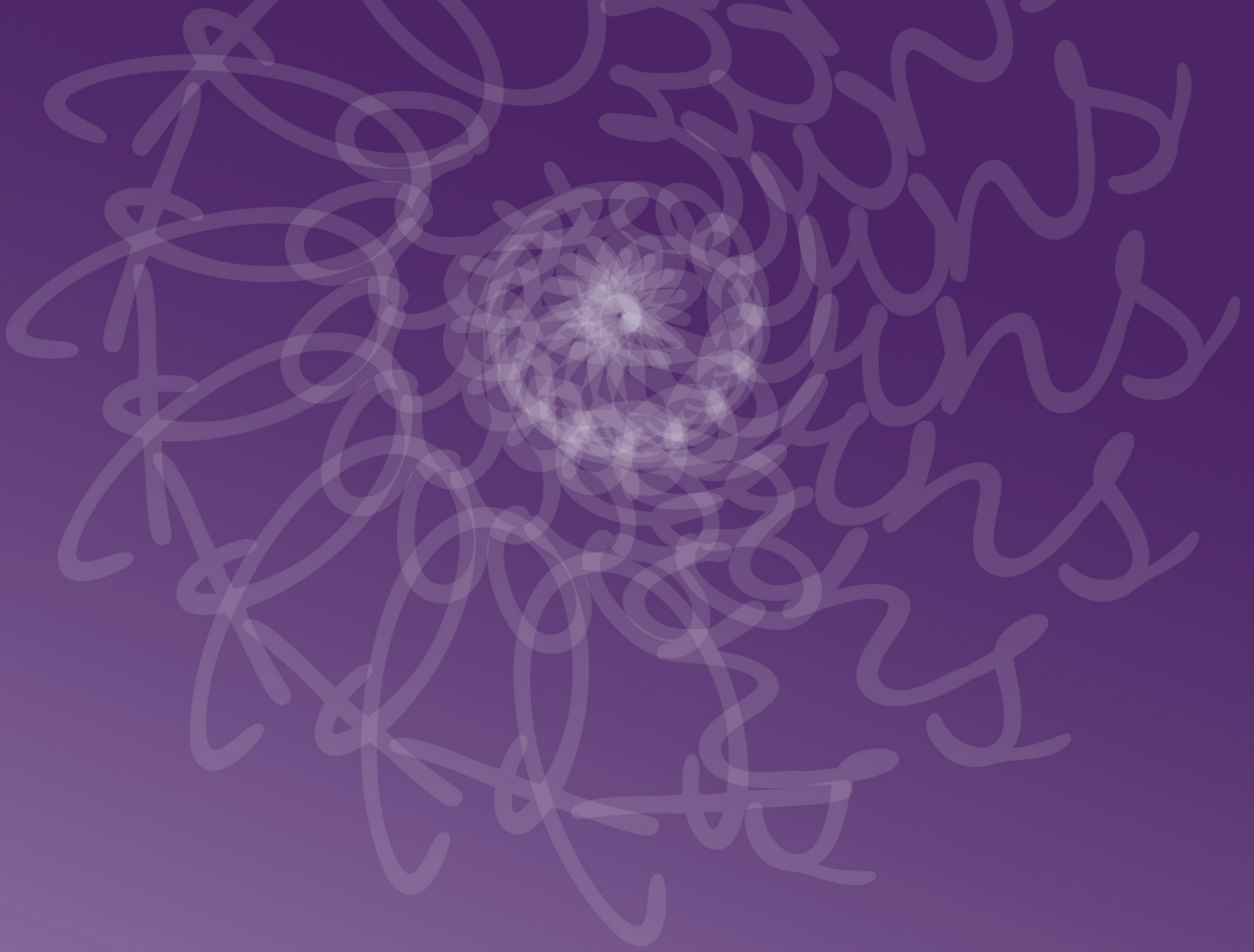
with the

P of **Patterns**

POWER

PROCESS





Getting Started with the Patterns of Power Process

The blue pages of this book give you all that you need to get started. The three chapters in Part 1 give you access to what you need to plan, teach, and apply the *Patterns of Power* process grammar lessons in your high school English class:

Chapter 1 **Into PLANNING: A Step-by-Step Guide to Preparing Engaging Grammar Lessons**

Chapter 2 **Into the CLASSROOM: How to Teach Grammar with the *Patterns of Power* Process**

Chapter 3 **Into APPLICATION: Guiding Writers to USE the *Patterns of Power***

These blue pages build the foundation of the *Patterns of Power* approach. On the following page we explain how to launch the classroom process in a Quick Chart. Just take a quick scan and you are ready for what comes next. Maybe you're already familiar; maybe this is all new. Take a breath and get started.

Beginning the *Patterns of Power* Process

SHOW

a beautiful, interesting, and/or effective sentence(s)
(rather than one riddled with errors).

ASK

"What do you notice?"

STUDENTS

- Study the sentence(s).
- Discuss noticings with a partner or small group.
- Revise their thinking as they listen to each other.
- Share answers with the class.
- Clarify thinking.

TEACHERS

- Allow students think time.
- Listen as students discuss noticings.
- Allow multiple answers.
- Honor all responses.
- Ask clarifying questions, when needed.
- Use student answers to name focus phrase.
- Avoid abstract labeling and exceptions.



Into PLANNING: A Step-by-Step Guide to Preparing Engaging Grammar Lessons

H

igh schoolers are at an age when they begin to see the world around them and consider their place in it. Things get inherently scarier as they approach senior year and the real world looms closer than they expect. Learning grammar and how to communicate clearly in writing is more crucial than ever. Students apply for jobs; they take high-stakes exams, such as the SAT/ACT, and driving tests. Understanding how to use effective language to achieve certain purposes is essential to maneuvering and navigating in the adult world.

Breaking grammar instruction down into manageable chunks and adding depth is the key to making it stick.

High school English standards tend to be broad and designed with the assumption that students have mastered many of the foundational conventions prior to walking in the door of your English classroom. Students may have never internalized what *compound* and *complex sentences* are, but now they are expected to use parallel structure and purposefully placed phrases and clauses in their writing. Sounds great, but *really* . . .

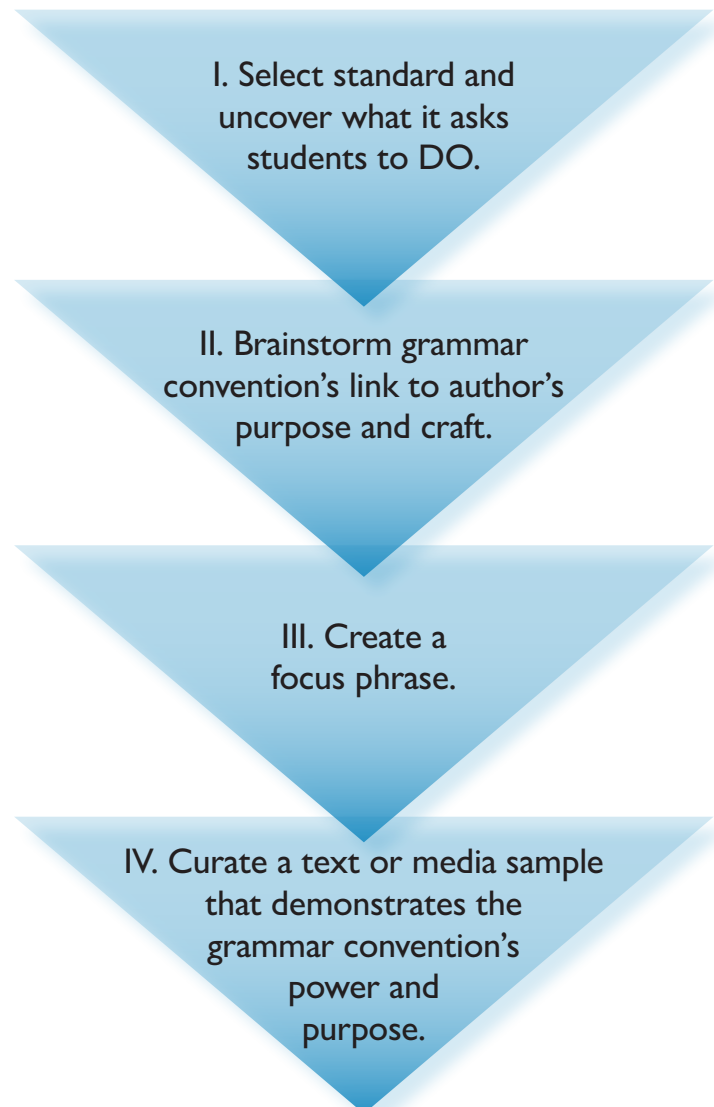
In truth, high school students are at vastly different levels of understanding. Many students recall grammar “things”—like FANBOYS, a popular acronym for coordinating conjunctions—but they don’t apply them consistently or even know what they *are* or *do*. Grammar rules are like vague dreams from which students can recall only disconnected bits and pieces. So why didn’t FANBOYS stick? Especially with such a catchy name? It’s unlikely that no one *ever* taught them this before they set foot in your classroom. But the question isn’t, Why didn’t anyone *teach* these concepts to them? The more relevant question is, Why didn’t grammar or convention concepts ever *stick*?

Teaching to *Depth*, Not Teaching to *Death*

Often grammar doesn't stick because its instruction lacks depth. Covering all of the comma rules or types of sentences in one or two periods, and then quizzing students on how well they memorized them, certainly covers a lot of ground. But that's just it—the ground was covered with a spray of standards from a sprinkler. Roots didn't have time to grow. The key to making grammar stick is to break its instruction down into manageable chunks, allowing the concepts to grow deep roots. Inquiry invites students to grapple with ideas and make sense of them, which allows deeper understanding to take hold.

The *Patterns of Power* process begins with planning. Before our students even set foot in the classroom, we have examined the standards and broken them down into digestible chunks.

The *Patterns of Power* Planning Process



The Patterns of Power Planning Process

Select a Standard and Uncover What It Asks Students to DO

The standards act as starting points. They need to be broken down and analyzed. Often, this untangling may lead you back to student writing and an earlier convention that needs to be addressed. Depending on the student work or prior data, you may need to teach a convention or standard from prior years.

And though the standards may seem straightforward, once the untangling begins, it is clear they are not. One standard can break down into multiple teaching goals. For this reason, it is easy to ask students to do too much, too fast, without the depth of inquiry necessary. While working with standards and conventions, then, the first focus of planning should be prioritizing what to teach first.

Been There, Done That

It is important to keep in mind that the students sitting in front of you have had numerous lessons on conventions before they got to high school. They have been hearing about subjects and predicates, comma rules, and sentence types since elementary school. A high schooler who struggles with writing a sentence doesn't need a packet of worksheets on which they identify the subject and predicate—they've been doing that for years, and it hasn't worked. It is necessary to determine where the breakdown in understanding is occurring.

For instance, if we unpack the standard encompassing phrases and clauses, we find multiple lessons and understandings embedded in the standard, and we need to sort through them. Initially, we may decide it's best to focus on phrases for now, saving clauses for later. That is a sensible way to break it down. But there are far more layers waiting for us.

To start with, there are several types of phrases listed in the standard:

- Noun
- Verb
- Adjectival
- Participial
- Prepositional
- Absolute

If we dig even deeper and consider more foundational standards or concepts that apply to phrases, we have an additional set of topics to unpack:

- Nouns/verbs/adjectives
- Participles/prepositions
- Sentence types
- Comma rules
- Dashes
- Subjects/predicates

And we could keep going. It's enough to send you spiraling downward into a grammar fever dream. But wait! The inquiry process drives discovery of grammatical concepts and deep consideration of their purpose. It allows students to own the learning and consider the *why*—which is a large part of the standard. The goal is NOT to cover everything. The goal is NOT to reteach

every grammar rule students don't recall. The goal is to design a learning experience where students can discover *how* grammar creates meaning and, in this case, how phrases can create meaning and add clarity to writing.

Standards Are Like Russian Nesting Dolls

Even though we've already selected a standard, we still may not have decoded what the standard asks a high schooler to know and do as a reader and writer. If we don't have a clearly defined learning target, how on earth will we know when our writers hit it? What a standard really asks isn't always clear on a first or second reading. When you start looking at a standard, it keeps opening into smaller standards, like a set of ever-shrinking Russian nesting dolls.

Figure 1.1

Standards can be like Russian nesting dolls. When you open up a standard to analyze its component skills, what looked like one standard turns out to have many standards within it.



Most adults have to edit and look up grammar rules when writing. Asking a colleague if you used a comma appropriately or if a sentence looks correct is a common occurrence. Allow students the same courtesy.

To highlight a particular pattern of power for instruction, we delve into each standard and sort out its smallest developmentally appropriate chunk. With this in mind, we ponder the following questions, knowing we'll build on a convention's concept over time:

- What have our writers shown us they already know?
- What's a digestible chunk for this grade level?
- What do our particular writers need to know *first*?
- What will our writers need to know about the convention to gain meaning from it as both readers and writers?

Let's walk through these questions while planning a tenth-grade lesson on using phrases to convey meaning.

What have our writers shown us they already know?

Review student writing. This does not need to be a formal essay or a lengthy process. It can be as simple as a journal entry or a free response to a class reading. But examining the writing and listing what students struggle with will help you home in on where you need to begin. Students may lack control of specific conventions, and they may have developed bad habits, but they are not in a place where starting from the very beginning will engage them. Consider what concepts they already understand. Likely, you will see high schoolers using phrases in their writing, though they may struggle with punctuation or precise wording or placement. Ascertaining what students already know helps to avoid planning with a deficit mindset.

Tip

Grammar instruction should not start from point zero. Functioning as if students know nothing can produce passivity or even resentment, neither of which leads to genuine learning. True, in many cases, students have bad writing habits, but they are not completely devoid of grammatical knowledge. Most adults have to edit and look up grammar rules when writing. Asking a colleague if you used a comma appropriately or if a sentence looks correct is a common occurrence. Allow students the same courtesy.

What's a digestible chunk for this grade level?

Deciding to initially focus on phrases helps make grammar instruction a bit more digestible. However, phrases can go in many different directions. Reconsider the types of phrases discussed earlier in this chapter. Tenth graders likely can find the subject or a noun in a sentence, so noun phrases could be a good place to start. Or perhaps you've seen in students' work that they tend to add phrases at the beginning and at the end of sentences. In that case, maybe a better starting point would be introductory phrases, followed by concluding phrases.

Tip

Note that the words *prepositional* and *adverbial* didn't make it into the text here. The second the word *prepositional* comes out of a teacher's mouth, students' eyes glaze over—they've done this before and have a variety of good, bad, and/or ugly feelings about grammar quizzes. More on that soon.

What do our particular writers need to know first?

Now let's look at prepositional phrases through a planning lens. In their writing we have seen students using them, but they need fine-tuning. We'll fine-tune our focus even more by considering prepositional phrases that function as adjectives, which tell us more about a noun in the sentence. This purpose connects solidly to the standard and breaks down the concept into manageable parts. Also, students understand these phrases conceptually and are already trying to use them to create clarity, but they need support in making them more purposeful.

Tip

Now back to our earlier note. The purpose of this approach is to promote inquiry, not shut students down. We do not need to begin by teaching the definition of a prepositional phrase or to even say the dreaded words. In lieu of opting for abstract terminology that doesn't hold much meaning for students, we pick one type of phrase, highlight a sentence that embodies it, and focus our attention on the purpose of the grammatical convention. Later, once the concept is no longer abstract—and if useful—we may choose to introduce the terminology.

What will our writers need to know about the convention to gain meaning from it as readers and writers?

Once we've narrowed a standard down to a manageable chunk, we look at usage. Writers craft a variety of patterns for different purposes. In high school English standards, students are expected to show command of the language. That is impossible without understanding the standard's purpose alongside its function.

There needs to be less focus on linguistic terms and definitions and more attention paid to the job the conventions actually *do*, meaning-wise. If we lose our focus on the convention's connection to author's craft and purpose, then meaningless abstract terminology and definitions may dominate our conversations with students. The standards do not ask students to memorize or define terms. With all this in mind, we'll ensure our instruction encourages students to consider how they can use the focus pattern as readers and writers.

Generally, standards ask students to apply skills in their own writing, not to label or diagram a sentence or complete a fill-in-the-blank or multiple-choice worksheet. Deep down, we already know that quick takes like these don't require higher-order thinking.

Let's consider the important information needed to gain meaning. Try writing or talking or expressing yourself without using any prepositional phrases. It's more difficult than it sounds. Try to maintain it. When you want to give more information about something or someone, prepositional phrases allow you to do so in a succinct and interesting way. They allow you to communicate clear ideas in one sentence, as shown in Figure 1.2.

Prepositional phrases bring great clarity to a sentence. They can round out writing and communicate important concepts to the reader. When communicating, it is important to add phrases to help the receiver know exactly what is being talked about. Note the evolution of the sentences in Figure 1.2. How powerful are the sentences with the added phrases? And how much clearer are their messages?

Author's purpose is why writers do what they do, and writer's craft is how they do it. Writers craft their compositions in certain ways for clarity.

In the end, the whole purpose of grammar and conventions instruction is to elevate writing. When determining what a standard asks, we consider how writers use it as a craft move.

Brainstorm a Grammar Convention's Link to Author's Purpose and Craft

Linking the conventions of language to the art and craft of what authors do isn't always easy, but it is essential for real grammar instruction to happen. We continually connect the convention to craft and to the clarification of meaning. In this section, we'll explore changing the thinking about conventions to be less about *correctness* and more about *communication*, connecting these important patterns more deeply to author's craft and purpose—the *how* and the *why*.

Author's purpose is *why* writers do what they do, and writer's craft is *how* they do it. Writers craft their compositions in certain ways to achieve specific effects. They don't use ellipsis points because they think they're three pretty polka dots all in a line . . . writers use conventions to help convey meaning. There is a purpose to where they place those little black dots. And writers need to know what effect conventions will have on a reader.

In the end, the whole purpose of grammar and conventions instruction is to elevate writing. When determining what a standard asks, we consider how writers use it as a craft move.

It's helpful for writers and readers to know that all grammar moves provide additional detail. For a high school writer, the use of purposeful and strategic phrases to communicate with readers is essential.

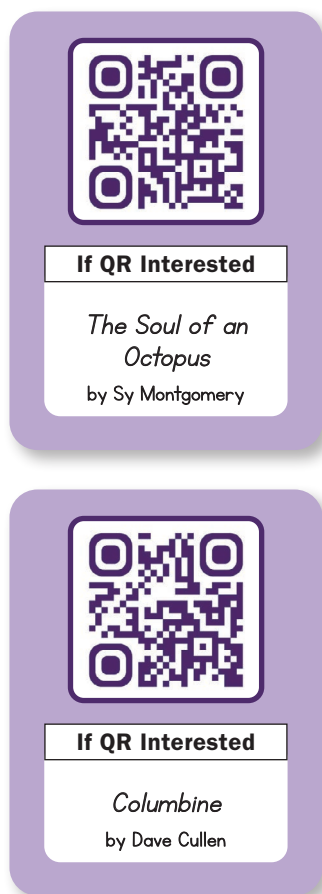


Figure 1.2

<i>The Power of Prepositional Phrases to Describe a Noun</i>	
Simple Sentence	Add Detail with Prepositional Phrase
Octopuses are famous.*	Octopuses are famous for showing up.
	Octopuses are famous for showing up in places.
	Octopuses are famous for showing up in places that surprise you.
Eric shot the next video scene.+	Eric shot the next video scene on his own.
	Eric shot the next video scene on his own, in his car.
	Eric shot the next video scene on his own in his car, driving, with the camera facing him.
	Eric shot the next video scene on his own, in his car, driving, with the camera facing him from the dash.

*From *The Soul of an Octopus: A Surprising Exploration into the Wonder of Consciousness*, by Sy Montgomery

+From *Columbine*, by Dave Cullen

Students will understand *how* to craft meaningful effects. They'll also gain the knowledge needed to edit for the convention's correct usage when (inevitably) they make a mistake in their own compositions. Pondering a convention's intended effect on a reader can unlock the *why*. And when students know *why* a convention is used—its purpose—they will be able to comprehend its meaning while reading. Once they understand a convention's purpose and how it is used purposefully, they become better readers. When students find themselves puzzling their way through a PSAT passage or an Early American primary source document, an understanding of how and why authors use phrases and clauses will help them better comprehend what they're reading. After all, one could easily get lost, never to be seen again, in the labyrinth of Dickens's clauses and phrases. So while this book focuses on writing, it also works to improve reading. Conventions are not just labels or rules to rattle off with no understanding. They are part of what we all do to read and write.

Create a Focus Phrase

Once we've clarified what we want to teach writers, and once we understand why and how authors use it, we create a focus phrase. The term *focus phrase* is from Terry Thompson's book *The Construction Zone* (2015).

A focus phrase helps teachers and students commit to a concise and manageable learning target, such as "I use semicolons, instead of periods, to show connections between sentences." The focus phrase needs to be as brief as possible so that students will be able to say and internalize it. This tangible and



If QR Interested

The Construction Zone

by Terry Thompson

clearly defined learning goal also keeps students from getting tripped up by terminology or definitions that seem abstract. Additional benefits of the focus phrase, such as those listed below, become evident throughout the writing and teaching process:

- Keeps teachers focused on the instructional goal during planning and delivery.
- Maintains student focus on the learning target throughout the instruction.
- Becomes a source of self-talk for students working independently, and eventually becomes their independent thought.

Although the long-term goal is for students to use phrases and clauses appropriately in their writing, in the earlier stages, students need a more tangible and attainable goal to allow them to internalize the target. In the initial steps of the *Patterns of Power* process, students are invited to investigate phrases, talk about what they notice, and come to conclusions. This process should be one that allows for discovery. Discovery does not mean the process is so broad that students are looking at anything phrase-like. For this instructional goal, depending on students' needs, an overarching focus phrase could be something like one of these:

- “I use phrases to more fully describe ideas in my sentences.”
- “I use phrases to create a picture for my audience.”
- “I use phrases to clarify my ideas and better prove my argument.”
- “I use phrases to add description to my writing to make it more interesting.”
- “I use phrases to combine my ideas into one sentence to make my writing clearer.”

Why don't we just say, “I use prepositional phrases to modify nouns and verbs”? Remember what we talked about earlier—that's a big turnoff for students. But the bigger issue is that it isn't concrete. Even just the word *modify* isn't inviting and clear to students. *Describe* is far more inviting, as well as far more tangible. We don't usually say to someone, “Please modify that a bit more for me.”

Here, we brainstorm several focus phrases to refine and clarify them for ourselves. When we generate more than one focus phrase, we have options from which to choose the best one for our particular situation. Plus, the focus phrase we choose might look different, depending on our students' needs. For this reason, you'll notice that, although we include suggestions for focus phrases within the lessons in Part 2, we encourage you to fashion them for the writers in your classroom.

In the focus phrase examples above, we wanted something that took high school writers closer to the function of prepositional phrases in particular. So we settled on the first option (“I use phrases to more fully describe ideas in my sentences”), thinking it would be most useful for our students.

When crafting your own focus phrases, seeing some weaker ones beside stronger ones can accelerate your understanding. The process takes practice, so a better understanding of why certain focus phrases are accessible to students while others are not will help fine-tune your process.

How to Make Focus Phrases Stronger

Weaker Focus Phrase	Stronger Focus Phrase
<p>“I use prepositions correctly when creating prepositional phrases that start with to (unless it’s an infinitive), of, about, at, before, after, by, behind, during, for, from, in, over, under, or with.”</p>	<p>“I use prepositional phrases to ground the reader in space and time.”</p>
<p>What makes this focus phrase weaker? <i>Besides its length and attempt to cram everything in, the phrase uses too many terms. A focus phrase like this is overwhelming to students. It also seems like a checklist and isn’t connected to the author’s purpose for using the preposition, which is to show a relationship of time and space.</i></p>	<p>What makes this focus phrase stronger? <i>It’s brief, it avoids abstract terms that aren’t explained by what they do, and it names the purpose of the prepositional phrase: to ground a reader in time and space. The power of a phrase such as this is that it allows for conferring and conversations. Students can ask the teacher or one another, “Does this word/phrase show how these things connect?”</i></p>
<p>“I can write a compound sentence correctly, using the correct coordinating conjunction and placing the comma correctly.”</p>	<p>“I create compound sentences to show relationships between my ideas.”</p>
<p>What makes this focus phrase weaker? <i>It is focused on the mechanics but not on the purpose. If students are focused only on punctuating correctly for points, they are not thinking about purpose. Any phrase that shifts students’ focus to correctness should be avoided.</i></p>	<p>What makes this focus phrase stronger? <i>It is actionable and tangible. Students can find ideas that are related in their writing and use compound sentences to connect them. This is not a daunting task and connects to the purpose of the writing.</i></p>
<p>“To give my writing a variety of sentence lengths, I use different types of sentences in my writing.”</p>	<p>“I create complex sentences to combine ideas that are related.”</p>
<p>What makes this focus phrase weaker? <i>This is a lot—it’s subjective and vague. Few writers use different types of sentences for the sake of variety. They do it to create certain effects and communicate ideas.</i></p>	<p>What makes this focus phrase stronger? <i>It is clear and tangible. Students can find sentences that are closely related and try to combine them by creating a complex sentence. To be actionable, the focus has to be narrower than “varying sentences.”</i></p>
<p>“I use punctuation, including semicolons and colons, correctly in my writing.”</p>	<p>“I use a semicolon to show that sentences or lists are closely related.”</p>
<p>What makes this focus phrase weaker? <i>It is overcrowded. Colons and semicolons are related, but they should not be combined in the same lesson or focus phrase, unless it’s for contrast’s sake.</i></p>	<p>What makes this focus phrase stronger? <i>It is short and to the point. It clearly states what the convention does. It presents an action that is doable by students.</i></p>

Once you've selected your focus phrase, set it aside until students are ready for it. Before you share the focus, students should have an open-ended exploration of sentences that feature the grammatical convention—in our case, purposeful prepositional phrases. Our hope is to provide a space for inquiry and more organic discovery; sharing the focus phrase at the beginning of the lesson suggests students should simply look for evidence of the phrase. It can unintentionally prevent students from experiencing grammatical purpose. For this reason, we share the focus phrase only *after* the model text has been displayed and explored. We hold the focus phrase back until students have encountered and interacted with the focus convention in an authentic text. We discover it together. Yes, we have planned it, but we keep it in our back pocket until students' comments show that it's time to reveal it.

For a summary of our thoughts on focus phrases, see the chart, *Developing a Focus Phrase*, on page 27.

Curate a Text or Media Sample That Demonstrates the Convention's Power and Purpose

After we've defined our focus phrase, the next planning component is to find a model text that shows the convention in action. The text chosen might be a strategic connection to something students will read or are already reading. It can also be an intriguing sentence or two from a choice novel that will allow you to pair a book talk with the grammar lesson. The text should be brief. The purpose of the text is to direct students' attention to a particular convention. Often one sentence is adequate to demonstrate a skill or standard in context, but it is possible we may need more than one sentence to model a particular skill or give sufficient context. Teaching parallel structures may require more text than teaching clauses, for example.

When selecting a sentence that demonstrates the accurate use of the skill, be sure to identify the author's purpose and craft for yourself. Consider the sentence's length and level of difficulty. We've found that sentences from literature that are readable and interesting work most effectively. You may be in a position to gauge high schoolers' reading level; however, it is not advisable to use text that is too juvenile. Remember, the students are reading only a few sentences, not trying to comprehend a whole novel independently, and will have time to discuss. If the sentences are a bit more complex than some students are used to, they can still take part. It's also important to consider how easily the sentence can be imitated.

To tackle prepositional phrases, we chose sentences with phrases that added clarity but didn't have numerous distractions. We also chose to begin with a sentence that didn't seem too academic or beyond the reach of students—we avoided big words students would have to look up to understand. Even with advanced classes, choosing a straightforward sentence is usually the best place to start.

In *The Goldfinch*, by Donna Tartt, we found a straightforward, accessible sentence that perfectly highlights our focus skill, prepositional phrases:

"Three important things happened to my mother after she arrived in New York on the bus from Kansas, friendless and practically penniless."



If QR Interested

The Goldfinch
by Donna Tartt

Developing a Focus Phrase

STANDARD

Use various types of phrases
(prepositional) . . . to convey meaning

Individual Action

Choose a portion of a sentence to expand on.

Individual Action

Create a prepositional phrase.

ACTION

Purpose (Why?)

Add prepositional phrases to make concepts clearer to the reader.

Craft (How?)

- Find a noun or idea that needs to be expanded on in a sentence.
- Add phrases to further clarify the concept.
- Use the appropriate preposition so the phrase flows well in the sentence.
- Place the phrase carefully to make its meaning clear.

Focus Phrase ("I" Statements)

Weaker*

I use prepositions correctly when creating prepositional phrases.

I can add prepositional phrases to my sentences and punctuate them correctly.

Stronger

I use words that connect my phrases to what they describe.

I create phrases to add description in my sentences.

Examine the Standard
Start with a standard,
then break it down into
an individual action
students can do.

Explore the Purpose
and Craft
Brainstorm why writers
would use this action
(author's purpose) and
how they would create this
action (author's craft) in
writing.

Experiment with
I Statements
Brainstorm possible
I statements for students
to better understand a
specific action they will do
as a writer. When revising
focus phrases, ask . . .

- Is the focus phrase a clear, doable action for students?
- Is it crafted with the least number of words possible?
- Does this action focus on a single move a writer can make?
- Is it free from abstract terminology?

*Note: Many standards have multiple actions students will need to accomplish in order to master them. This standard for phrases could refer to any type of phrase. For this example, we chose to focus on prepositions and prepositional phrases and what they can do for writers and readers.

We chose this mentor sentence because it illustrates the power of phrases well. The additional phrases add a large amount of information to the root sentence, “things happened,” a phrase that tends to make its way naturally into teenage writing. When students are invited to imitate this sentence pattern later, they can begin with the same root sentence and add on phrases from there.

“To Thine Own Self Be True”

Even though each lesson in this book includes possible sentences, craft connections, and focus phrases, you should still talk through the author’s purpose and craft links with colleagues before jumping into instruction. You’ll find that your lessons are more flexible and effective when you take the time for this important step of planning and clarifying a clear focus phrase and finding a model text. Once you do this, the other steps in the *Patterns of Power* process—comparing and contrasting, imitating, applying, and editing—almost write themselves.

Putting the *Patterns of Power* Process on Your Schedule

Regardless of schedule, we have noticed significant improvement in applying conventions when we allow ten minutes per day for these lessons. We also understand that may be a tall order with many high school schedules. Since some have forty-five-minute classes or an A/B block schedule, every day may not be feasible; still, we suggest as close to every day as possible. We also discourage having a *Patterns of Power* day, to go through all of the steps in one class period. While more sophisticated writers may be able to manage more than one of the invitations or more than one sentence in one day, overkill is never your friend.

The ideal structure is to allow ten minutes for each part of the process. Of course, there is no absolute formula. Responsively adjusting by extending, accelerating, or repeating one or more of the ten-minute blocks may be necessary, depending on the complexity of the convention and student readiness. Another consideration should be grade level and maturity. A ninth-

Daily 10-Minute Invitations	
Day	Invitation to . . .
1	Notice
2	Compare and Contrast
3	Imitate with Shared Writing
4	Imitate as a Pair
5	Share and Celebrate
6	Imitate Independently
7	Share and Celebrate
8	Edit