

## JESI, 2009: Imitating Sentence Patterns

One of the oldest and most effective methods of teaching students about writing clear, elegant prose is through imitation. By consciously imitating the syntactic patterns of effective sentences, students gain control over their own prose.

With students who are struggling with the basic syntax of English, the exercises in the following link may prove useful.

[http://en.wikibooks.org/wiki/Rhetoric\\_and\\_Composition/Teacher's\\_Handbook/Teaching\\_Sentence\\_Structure/Exercises](http://en.wikibooks.org/wiki/Rhetoric_and_Composition/Teacher's_Handbook/Teaching_Sentence_Structure/Exercises)

But we want to strive for more elegance in our students' writing, especially in our more advanced students. Below is an example of what you could do with your students. I would suggest that you not try to make students copy the pattern exactly, but that they get as close as they can.

"This is a snail shell, round, full, and glossy as a horse chestnut.  
Anne Morrow Lindbergh  
Gift from the Sea

The car passes and you can't see through the dark windows and you can hear the snow crunching under the tires, squeaky and frozen.  
Rodman Philbrick  
Freak the Mighty

"In a warm and sultry forest far, far away, there once lived a mother fruit bat and her new baby.  
Janell Cannon  
Stellaluna

" That cheerful eye, under the influence of slavery, soon became red with rage; that voice, made of sweet accord, changed to one of harsh and horrid discord; and the angelic face gave place to that of a demon."

Frederick Douglas  
Narrative of the life of Frederick Douglass

"Religion is like language or dress. We gravitate toward the practices with which we were raised. In the end, though we are all proclaiming the same thing. That life has meaning. That we are grateful for that which created us."

Dan Brown  
Angels and Demons

Take one of these sentences and try to imitate the syntax. Try it; it's more difficult than it seems.