

# "PENS" TO THE RESCUE

## Help For Our ELD\* Populations

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**F**or students whose native tongue is Spanish or Vietnamese, learning English can be chaotic.

Fortunately, instruction in the Sentence Writing Strategy, "PENS," can bring linguistic order where there is confusion. Over the past three years, Dave Moynahan, a Resource Specialist at Irvine Intermediate School in Garden Grove, California, has successfully implemented a modified version of instruction in the Sentence Writing Strategy within one Level 4 English Language Development (ELD) class per year in which Spanish and Southeast Asian students are enrolled. Irvine Intermediate School is situated in close proximity to the Little Saigon area of the city. The school's population includes 47% Hispanic, 41% Asian, 9% Caucasian, and 3% other students. Dave is a SIM Trainer, a Special Education mentor teacher, and an editor of *SIMPATICA*, a newsletter for SIM Trainers in California. This article provides a detailed description of his plan for implementation of "PENS" instruction for his special class.

**"For students whose native tongue is Spanish or Vietnamese, learning English can be chaotic."**

### "Languaging" the Sentence Writing Strategy

Why teach the Sentence Writing Strategy to students learning English as a second language? I wasn't sure! However, I was sure of two things: I had heard it mentioned as a possibility at a National SIM Trainers' Conference in Kansas, and I was surrounded at Irvine Intermediate School by Hispanic and Southeast Asian students who were struggling to learn English.

I designed a unit of instruction that could be

taught in a relatively short period of time (two months) during regularly scheduled, 45-minute class sessions. The unit is comprised of a series of lessons adapted from the lessons in the Sentence Writing Strategy instructor's manual. Due to the fact that the class includes thirty to thirty-five students for whom English is their second language, the lessons emphasize the Verbal Practice Stage of instruction focusing on verbal rehearsal and elaboration activities. I chose this approach to ensure that the students would be constantly "languaging" what they are learning. The dynamic result is that they speak, write, think, and understand English in a way that they could not before the instruction.

I teach the unit with the help of the ELD\* teacher and an instructional aide. The ELD teacher and the aide are present in the classroom during all the lessons. I am present when new information is presented, when students are taking oral tests, and when feedback is provided to students. Often, the ELD teacher and the aide supervise student practice of the Sentence Writing Strategy, and I return to my own classroom. The three of us work together to score the students' lessons.

Before beginning the unit, the ELD teacher implements the Pretest and Make Commitments Stage of instruction without my help. By the time I arrive in the classroom, the students are usually excited and anxious to learn something new. I begin with a much abbreviated Describe Stage (10-15 minutes). Since these students are desperate to learn anything that will enable them to compete in an English-speaking world, I emphasize what

*(continued on page 2)*

\* English Language Development

(continued from page 1)

they will be able to do at the end of two months, how it will empower them both in school and the work place, and we agree upon a loose timeline for the month.

Each student is given a five-page study packet which is drawn from the Verbal Elaboration Activity in the *Sentence Writing Strategy* Instructor's Manual. The packet appears overwhelming, but I emphasize that we will be working with just a small segment of the packet each day. On the study sheets in the packet are listed questions and answers related to the Sentence Writing Strategy. Each lesson focuses on a group of questions and answers. For example, the information for Simple Sentences is "chunked" in the following manner: CHAD B. SWIM<sup>‡</sup>; prepositional phrases; noun phrases; verb phrases; simple sentence-independent clause-subject-verb-noun; the "PENS" Steps; the Search and Check Questions; the "PENS" Steps (elaborated).



My approach to introducing new information is always the same:

1. I read the questions and answers. They listen and follow along on their study sheets.
2. I ask each of the questions. They answer in unison.
3. They ask each of the questions in unison. I answer.
4. We "chain" quickly around the room. I ask questions; individuals answer.
5. I choose volunteers to answer all the questions for the day. (I give lots of encouragement for trying and courage here.)
6. Each student pairs up with

another student for oral practice.

7. When ready, they test me.
8. They take the material home at night to practice.
9. On the next school day (and additional days, if necessary), the ELD teacher and instructional aide help me give individual oral tests to all the students.

As we "language" the lesson's practice material again and again, the students' ears become more and more comfortable with this strange new vocabulary. Oral tests are usually a noisy, exciting, high-energy time as the students try to be among the among the first to pass the test. They must pass each test with 100% accuracy, or they lose their turn and must go practice some more. After students pass the test, I ask them to assist other classmates with their practice activities or to give practice tests to students who are waiting to receive a test from one of the teachers. Some students can proceed to the next set of questions and study independently.

The lessons begin with the "CHAD B. SWIM" mnemonic device for helping verbs for a number of reasons. Typically, the students are not familiar with mnemonic devices, so I use it to "hook" them. It appears very difficult to them at first, but they soon find out that they can learn the information quickly. The information is also perfect for creating a fast-moving, exciting, and fun class activity. When students see that they can learn difficult information quickly and easily while having fun, they begin to look forward to additional instruction and become motivated learners.

The lesson sequence that I use is described below. As you will see, I generally introduce new information on one day and give oral tests on the next day. Thus, most lessons begin with an oral test for the first 20 minutes of class time. New

information is introduced during the final 25 minutes of class time. **Several of the lessons may require more than one day.**

**"As we "language" the day's practice material again and again, their ears become more and more comfortable with this strange, new vocabulary".**

#### Lesson 1: Introduce helping verbs

I first read the 23 helping verbs and have the students read them with me to check their pronunciation. Then we work on these questions and answers.

**Question:** What is a helping verb?

**Answer:** A word used with a verb to form the complete verb.

**Question:** What is the mnemonic device for helping verbs?

**Answer:** CHAD B. SWIM is 23 years old.

**Question:** What is the number that goes with CHAD B SWIM?

**Answer:** 2323 3 2413

**Question:** What are the helping verbs in English?

**Answer:** Student(s) recite the 23 helping verbs using the mnemonic device.

#### Lesson 2: Introduce prepositions

I first give students an oral test on helping verbs. Then I work with the students on the following questions and answers.

(continued on page 3)

‡ "CHAD B. SWIM is 23 years old" in a mnemonic device for remembering the 23 helping verbs. Students use the number, 2323 3 2413 in conjunction with the sentence to help them remember how many helping verbs begin with the letters in CHAD B. SWIM. For example, two helping verbs start with the letter "C" ("can" and "could"), three start with the letter "H" ("have", "had", and "has"), and two start with the letter "A" ("am" and "are").

(continued from page 2)

**Question:** What is a preposition?

**Answer:** A little word that generally shows location.

**Question:** Can you give some examples?

**Answer:** In, at, to, by, on\*\*

**Question:** What are some prepositions that do not show location?

**Answer:** of, for, during, since\*\*

**Question:** What is a prepositional phrase?

**Answer:** Several words that begin with a preposition.

**Question:** Can you give some examples?

**Answer:** To the store, for my sister, at school.

### Lesson 3: Introduce noun phrases

First, we have oral tests on helping verbs and prepositional phrases. Then we work on these questions and answers.

**Question:** What is a noun phrase?

**Answer:** Several words used together to form the complete subject.

**Question:** What is the head word?

**Answer:** The most important word in the noun phrase.

**Question:** Can you give an example of a noun phrase?

**Answer:** The yellow Volkswagon bus chugged down the road.\*\*

**Question:** What is the noun phrase?

**Answer:** The yellow Volkswagon bus.

**Question:** What is the head word?

**Answer:** Bus.



Finally, we practice visually recognizing prepositional phrases for about 10 minutes. I display overhead transparencies of pages 160 and 161 in the Instructor's Manual. I ask students to volunteer to read a

sentence and identify prepositional phrases. This is a fast moving, exciting, and fun activity. We actually applaud each successful identification.

### Lesson 4: Introduce verb phrases

I first give oral tests over helping verbs, prepositional phrases, and noun phrases. Then we work on these questions and answers.

**Question:** What is a verb phrase?

**Answer:** Several words used together to form the complete verb.

**Question:** What is the main verb?

**Answer:** The most important word in the verb phrase.

**Question:** Can you give an example of a verb phrase?

**Answer:** I should have finished the test by now.\*\*

**Question:** What is the verb phrase?

**Answer:** Should have finished.

**Question:** What is the main verb?

**Answer:** Finished

Finally, we engage in a short activity to identify noun phrases. I display pages 160 and 161 again on the overhead projector. Students volunteer to read a sentence and identify noun phrases. Again, we keep the activity moving fast, have fun, and include lots of applause!

### Lesson 5: Introduce Simple Sentences

We begin this lesson with oral tests over all the content presented thus far. Then we work on these questions and answers.

**Question:** What is a simple sentence?

**Answer:** A sentence with one independent clause.

**Question:** What is an independent clause?

**Answer:** A group of words that makes a complete statement and has a subject and verb.

**Question:** What is a subject?

**Answer:** Who or what the sentence is about.

**Question:** What is a verb?

**Answer:** The action or state of being of the subject.

**Question:** What is a noun?

**Answer:** A person, place, thing, quality, or idea.

This is pretty heady stuff, but it will take on more meaning later. It is critical to the students' understanding of how English works. Students prefer to call the independent clause "baby talk" because an independent clause is really simple "talk."

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**"These students are not usually familiar with mnemonic devices, so I use CHAD B. SWIM to "hook" them. It appears difficult to them, but the learn the information quickly."**

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Finally, we engage in an activity to identify verb phrases. Again, I display the overhead transparencies of pages 160 and 161 from the manual. Students volunteer to identify the verb phrases. I emphasize what they can do after just five days. The phrases literally "jump" off the page at them. We celebrate! We applaud!

By the end of this lesson, students understand implicitly that a phrase is simply "several words" or a "a group of words" that work together and that the use of noun phrases, verb phrases, and prepositional phrases can create a dramatic "difference" in their sentences (voiced and/or written), i.e., the sentences they now create are longer than sentences they used to create.

### Lesson 6: Introduce the "PENS" Steps

I first administer oral tests over the  
(continued on page 4)

\*\* For the initial practice, we use all of these examples. For the oral test, each student must create his/her own examples to demonstrate understanding.

(continued from page 3)

information covered thus far. Then we focus on these questions and answers.

**Question:** What is the mnemonic device for the *Sentence Writing Strategy Steps*?

**Answer:** PENS

**Question:** What does that stand for?

**Answer:** Student recites the steps of PENS

**Question:** How many kinds of simple sentences are there?

**Answer:** 4

**Question:** What are they?

**Answer:** SV-SSV-SVV-SSVV

**Question:** Can you give me some examples of the different sentence types?

**Answer:** My friend is studying her math. (SV)

Thanh and Phi are playing volleyball. (SSV)

Alejandro is naming and writing the helping verbs. (SVV)

Jack and Jill went up the hill and got a pail of water. (SSVV)

### **Lesson 7: Introduce Search and Check**

We begin this lesson with an oral test of all the information learned so far. Then we work on these questions and answers.

**Question:** What does "Search and Check" mean?

**Answer:** Ask yourself the Search and Check Questions.

**Question:** What are the Search and Check Questions?\*

**Answer:**

1. Are there any prepositional phrases? Cross them out. Any more?
2. Is there any action? Underline twice. Any more?
3. Are there any helping verbs? Underline twice and connect. Any more?
4. Who or what \_\_\_\_\_? Underline once.

### **Lesson 8: Model the Search and Check Step**

The lesson begins with an oral test over the Search and Check Questions. Next, I model how to use the Search and Check Questions using the same overhead transparencies of the simple sentences as I've used in previous lessons (pages 160 and 161). Because of all the practice we have already completed, the students usually volunteer after two or three sentences. At this point, I fade out, and they take over. I enjoy, coach, and celebrate their success!

### **Lesson 9: The "PENS" Steps Elaborated**

We begin this lesson with 10 minutes of the same activity we did in the last lesson. I ask students to volunteer to use the Search and Check Questions on sentences. Then we work on the following questions together.

**Question:** What is the mnemonic device for the *Sentence Writing Strategy*?

**Answer:** PENS

**Question:** What does it stand for?

**Answer:** P-Pick a formula.

**Question:** What does that mean? Give an example.

**Answer:** Choose one of the four simple sentence types. SVV

**Question:** What's next? What does it mean? Give an example?

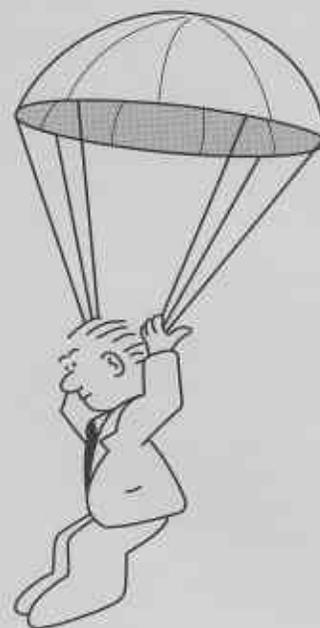
**Answer:** E-Explore words to fit the formula. Think of some words that make an SVV sentence. I fell down and hurt my knee.

**Question:** What's next? What does it mean?

**Answer:** N-Note the words. Write down: I fell down and hurt my knee.\*\* (Students write it down.)

(continued on page 5)

\*\* For the initial practice, we use all of these examples. For the oral test, each student must create his/her own examples to demonstrate understanding.



**Question:** What's next? What does it mean? (*continued from page 4*)

**Answer:** S-Search and Check. Ask yourself the Search and Check Questions.

**Teacher:** Ask the Search and Check Questions for your sentence.

**Answer:** Are there any any prepositional phrases? No.

Is there any action? fell (underline twice)

Any more? hurt (underline twice)

Are there any more helping verbs? No.

Who or what fell down and hurt my knee? I (underline once)

What kind of sentence do you have? SVV

What did you pick? SVV

**Teacher:** Congratulations!

### **Lesson 10: Model the "PENS" Steps**

We begin this lesson with oral tests over all the previous material. Next, I model using the "PENS" Steps to write the four simple sentence types. I purposely choose them in random order, and I leave the examples on the chalkboard side-by-side, so the students can see and hear me using the same "PENS" Steps to write different kinds of sentences. Finally, I call on volunteers to come up to the board and use the "PENS" Steps.

### **Lesson 11: Practice on Simple Sentences**

We begin the lesson with oral tests on the Elaborated "PENS" Steps. Individual students progress at different rates. As the quicker students finish the oral test with 100% accuracy, they move into the Controlled Practice exercises for Simple Sentences. I use only the level one series for Search and Check and the level three and four series for writing a variety of sentences using "PENS." Much of the vocabulary in the level two series is not meaningful to ELD students, and they are unable to complete the sentences. Nevertheless, they can write their own sentences. (**These lessons take approximately two weeks.**)

After this lesson the students can do the following with 100% accuracy:

1. Define, identify, and give examples of prepositions, prepositional phrases, verbs, main verbs, helping verbs, verb phrases, nouns, head words, noun phrases, subjects, simple sentences, and independent clauses.
2. Using the "PENS" Steps, write four kinds of simple sentences. Their writing typically includes the liberal use of noun phrases, verb phrases, and prepositional phrases.

Since our goal is to teach 14 types of sentences, and those sentences are based upon the independent and dependent clause, "mastery" at this stage of instruction is critical. All subsequent work with compound, complex, and compound-complex sentences is comparatively easy **IF** students **really understand** the independent clause (simple sentence). Thus, once students reach mastery on the level four series, most of the critical work is completed. Students have a clear understanding of "baby talk."

### **Lesson 12: Introduce Compound Sentences**

I introduce Compound Sentences to the students as "baby talk" and "more baby talk" or doing what they already know how to do twice in one sentence. We work on new questions and answers as we have in previous lessons. For this lesson, we have two new definitions for a compound sentence and a coordinating conjunction, two new formulas (I,cI and I;I), and a new mnemonic device "FANBOYS." An easy day's work!

### **Lesson 13: Introduce Search and Check for Compound Sentences**

We begin the lesson with an oral test over Compound Sentences. Then I spend about 25 minutes modelling Search and Check with Compound Sentences. We use an overhead with Compound Sentences on it, and students volunteer to model for each other after I have provided models on a few sentences. I emphasize the notion that it's just like Simple Sentences, but you do it twice in each sentence, so be careful!

### **Lessons 14 : Controlled Practice for Compound Sentences**

We continue the oral tests over Compound Sentences. Students who are ready begin controlled practice for Compound Sentences (Levels 1, 3, 4, 5, and 6). **This will take a minimum of five days to complete.**

### **Lesson 15: Introduce Complex Sentences**

For Complex Sentences it's just "more baby talk" or doing more of what the students already do well. There are three  
(*continued on page 6*)

(continued from page 5)

new definitions: complex sentence, dependent clause, and subordinating conjunction, two new formulas (D,I and ID), and a study sheet of subordinating conjunctions. As we go over the questions and answers, I emphasize the idea that it's just like Compound Sentences, but the dependent clause cannot stand alone. I also remind students to be on the lookout for that subordinating conjunction.

#### **Lesson 16: Identifying subordinating conjunctions**

We begin this lesson with oral tests over Complex Sentences. Then I lead an activity where I display an overhead of some level one Complex Sentences to help the students practice spotting the subordinating conjunction in each sentence.

#### **Lessons 17: Controlled Practice for Complex Sentences**

We continue the oral tests over Complex Sentences. Students who are ready begin controlled practice for

**"The students come to understand implicitly that a phrase is simply 'several words' or 'a group of words' . . . and it is through the use of noun phrases, verb phrases, and prepositional phrases that they notice the first dramatic difference in their sentence(s) . . . ."**

Complex Sentences (Levels 1, 3, 4, 5, and 6). **This will take a minimum of five days.**

#### **Lesson 18: Introduce Compound-Complex Sentences**

I introduce the six new formulas for compound-complex sentences (D,I,cI; D,I,I; ID,cI; ID,I; I,cID; I,ID). I

emphasize the notion that even though these sentences appear formidable, they are nothing but more "baby talk." They are merely a combination of two kinds of sentences the students already know. They are three times as long as a Simple Sentence, so a Search and Check must be done three times in each sentence.

#### **Lesson 19: Model Search and Check with Compound-Complex Sentences**

We begin this lesson with oral tests over the six new formulas. Then we spend the remainder of the class doing the Search and Check Step with Compound-Complex Sentences. I model a few sentences, then students model for each other.

#### **Lessons 20: Controlled Practice with Compound-Complex Sentences**

We continue the oral tests over Compound-Complex Sentences. Students who are ready begin controlled practice for Compound-Complex Sentences (Levels 1, 4, 5, 6, and 7). **This will take a minimum of five days.**

#### **Summary**

As a result of this sequence of lessons, the students can do several things after two months:

1. They can identify noun phrases, verb phrases, prepositional phrases, independent clauses and dependent clauses, and fourteen different sentence types with ninety per cent accuracy.
2. They can speak and write fourteen kinds of sentences with ninety per cent accuracy.

They do not necessarily spell correctly, and they may make occasional syntax/grammar errors. At this point in the instruction, the ELD teacher assumes the responsibility for monitoring the final stage of instruction: Generalization.

We consider this instruction to be an experiment in process that appears to work very well with ELD students. Plans to provide staff-development sessions for the whole

(continued on page 8)

## **SLANT SCORING CHART**

Barbara Wasson is Chairman of the Special Education Department, Moorhead State University, Moorhead, Minnesota. She teaches Secondary Practicum for SLD and EDD teachers at the university and recently submitted the work of two of her students. Pattie Witt and Jeanne Kittelson were trained in the SLANT strategy during her class and designed the new SLANT Scoring Chart on page 7. They hope that their revision will be helpful to subscribers of **Strategram**. Thank-you Barbara, Pattie, and Jeanne for sharing with us!

#### **Strategram**

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SLANT STRATEGY SCORING CHART

Name \_\_\_\_\_

Date	Time Period	S	L	A		N	T	Totals
				A	Q			

Created by Pattie Witt & Jeanne Kittelson  
Morehead State University  
May be reproduced for classroom use

A - Attending  
Q - Asking Questions

Scoring Criteria: Necessary points for mastery \_\_\_\_\_  
S - 1 POINT for sitting up the entire 5-minute session

L - 1 POINT for leaning forward the entire 5-minute session

A - 1 POINT for attending to the lesson for the entire 5-minute session  
4 POINTS for each meaningful question asked

N - 4 POINTS for each long contribution (3 or more words)  
2 POINTS for each short contribution (one or more words)  
4 POINTS for raising hand to attempt to contribute, but not called on (awarded only once per 5-minute session)

T - 1 POINT for tracking the lecturer the entire 5-minute session

(continued from page 6)

ELD department in our district and to expand implementation are presently under consideration. We invite corrections, contributions, and collaboration in making this modification of the Sentence Writing instruction even more dynamic. If you would like a copy of the study sheets that we use, please write to me at: **Attn: Daye Moynahan; Irvine Intermediate School; 10552 Hazard; Garden Grove, California; 92643.** ■



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