

**COURSE TITLE:** BEYOND GRAMMAR: Strategies for Improving Sentence Fluency  
**WA CLOCK HRS:** 60  
**OREGON PDUs:** 60  
**PENNSYLVANIA ACT 48:** 60

**NO. OF CREDITS:** 6 QUARTER CREDITS  
[semester equivalent = 4.00 credits]

**INSTRUCTOR:** Marie Noorani  
marie.noorani@gmail.com

**COURSE DESCRIPTION:**

When discussing written composition, the terms sentence fluency, syntactic fluency, syntactic maturity, and syntactic complexity are all used to describe text containing sentences with varied structures that underscore, enhance, and contribute to meaning while tying together ideas so readers progress easily from beginning to end. Sentences that possess these attributes are not only easy to comprehend, but they often have a pleasant, rhythmical quality when read aloud. This course considers the above terms interchangeable and has been designed to help teachers improve their students' sentence fluency/syntactic maturity. But, more than being a "how to teach" course, this is a "what to teach" course. It strives to fill in the knowledge gap left by most teacher training programs when it comes to understanding the fluency errors students make and the remedial strategies they can apply.

Improving students' sentence fluency/syntactic maturity involves more than getting students to write complex sentences: it requires students to deliberately manipulate sentence structures (independent clauses, phrases, introductory elements, parentheticals, etc.) to improve communication. Therefore, methods employed to address sentence fluency in the classroom need to be both instructive and prescriptive. First, teachers must be able to instruct students in identifying sentence structures, knowing the ways structures can be combined, and understanding how sentence structures can enhance readers' comprehension. Secondly, teachers must be able to quickly and accurately identify sentence structure errors that impede fluency, clearly communicate the nature of the errors, and deftly prescribe appropriate revision strategies that can be applied both specifically and broadly to revise sentences and prevent future errors.

The instructional approach presented in this course accomplishes these objectives by:

1. Explicitly teaching basic sentence structures using English grammar terminology,
2. Establishing reader comprehension as the single motivation for sentence complexity,
3. Teaching students how specific sentence structures can hinder or facilitate reader comprehension,
4. Addressing sentence fluency during the revision process, and
5. Providing a comprehensive checklist of revision opportunities and revision strategies that students can apply to first drafts of essays or papers.

This course includes permanent access to the document "The Second Draft: The Secret to Improving Students' Syntactic Maturity." This resource describes the comprehension processes that must govern sentence structure, defines basic grammar terms, explains sentence-combining mechanisms, and provides a checklist of 38 revision indicators with analysis of errors and easily applied revision strategies.

Acquiring the knowledge to help students improve their syntactic maturity is challenging. But, our students deserve instruction in this skill. As one of my former students commented at the end of the school year, "Knowing how to write well is the only thing I've learned that I'll actually use the rest of my life!"

This course is appropriate for teachers in 7th - 12th grade.

All assignments in the Learning Acquisition must be completed independently. (Assignments 1-9)

**LEARNING OUTCOMES:** Upon completion of this course, participants will have:

- Gained knowledge of the mental processes English readers use to comprehend written text and appreciation for how these processes should govern sentence structure
- Acquired the ability to recognize sentence structure errors that impact reader comprehension, the language to communicate the nature of those errors to students, and knowledge of effective revision strategies students can use to fix the errors and improve reader comprehension
- Become familiar with a list of 38 specific revision indicators and revision strategies that can be used as a classroom resource.
- Learned a method for improving students' syntactic maturity during the revision stage of the writing process while increasing evidence of student learning and decreasing time spent grading

**COURSE REQUIREMENTS:**

Completion of all specified assignments is required for issuance of hours or credit. The Heritage Institute does not award partial credit.

The use of artificial intelligence is not permitted. Assignment responses found to be generated by AI will not be accepted.

---

---

**HOURS EARNED:**

Completing the basic assignments (Section A. Information Acquisition) for this course automatically earns participants their choice of CEUs (Continuing Education Units), Washington State Clock Hours, Oregon PDUs, or Pennsylvania ACT 48 Hours. The Heritage Institute offers CEUs and is an approved provider of Washington State Clock Hours, Oregon PDUs, and Pennsylvania ACT 48 Hours.

---

---

---

**UNIVERSITY QUARTER CREDIT INFORMATION****REQUIREMENTS FOR UNIVERSITY QUARTER CREDIT**

Continuing Education Quarter credits are awarded by Antioch University Seattle (AUS). AUS requires 75% or better for credit at the 400 level and 85% or better to issue credit at the 500 level. These criteria refer both to the amount and quality of work submitted.

1. Completion of Information Acquisition assignments 30%
  2. Completion of Learning Application assignments 40%
  3. Completion of Integration Paper assignment 30%
- 
- 
- 

**CREDIT/NO CREDIT (No Letter Grades or Numeric Equivalents on Transcripts)**

Antioch University Seattle (AUS) Continuing Education Quarter credit is offered on a Credit/No Credit basis; neither letter grades nor numeric equivalents are on a transcript. 400 level credit is equal to a "C" or better, 500 level credit is equal to a "B" or better. This information is on the back of the transcript.

AUS Continuing Education quarter credits may or may not be accepted into degree programs. Prior to registering, determine with your district personnel, department head, or state education office the acceptability of these credits for your purpose.

**ADDITIONAL COURSE INFORMATION****REQUIRED TEXT**

PDF document: [The Second Draft: The Secret to Improving Students' Syntactic Maturity](#), by Marie Noorani.

None. All reading is online.

**MATERIALS FEE**

None - PDF text/document attached is free.

**ASSIGNMENTS REQUIRED FOR HOURS OR UNIVERSITY QUARTER CREDIT****A. INFORMATION ACQUISITION**

Assignments done in a course forum will show responses from all educators who have or are taking the course independently. Feel free to read and respond to others' comments.

Group participants can only view and respond to their group members in the Forum.

**Assignment #1: Introduction**

Introduce yourself in a 1-2 page paper. Share a bit about yourself professionally, what interests you about this class, what concerns you may have about your own understanding of syntactic maturity, what concerns you may have about your students' connections with syntactic maturity, and what you hope to gain from this class.

- Download a copy of the book [The Second Draft: The Secrets to Improving Students' Syntactic Maturity](#) by Marie Noorani.

- Read "[Note to Teachers](#)" and "[Introduction](#)" in The Second Draft. (Pages 5 - 21)
- Watch video: "Syntactic Maturity - Introduction"  
<https://www.youtube.com/embed/hIBCQkKANWM?si=djHrKPZakpYziJmM>
- Complete Worksheet for [Assignment 1](#)

Upload your worksheet for assignment 1 and introduction into the response box.

### **Assignment #2: Thought Transporter**

Watch Video: "Chapter 1 & 2"

[https://www.youtube.com/embed/-32NR7Pu558?si=mXIFvSNHuOYNyQ\\_O](https://www.youtube.com/embed/-32NR7Pu558?si=mXIFvSNHuOYNyQ_O)

Read Chapter 1 and Chapter 2 in The Second Draft ("The Thought Transporter" and "The Thought Transporter Parts List" - Pages 22 – 36)

Complete the [Worksheet for Assignment 2](#) and upload it into the response box.

### **Assignment #3: Subjects & Verbs**

Read Chapter 3 in The Second Draft ("*Sentences as Stories: Subjects and Verbs*" - Pages 37 – 53)

Watch Video: "Syntactic Maturity - Chapter 3"

<https://www.youtube.com/embed/UX9n9yb5EG4?si=yil5ALm3NMw2syE9>

Complete the [Worksheet for Assignment 3](#) and upload it into the response box.

### **Assignment #4: Micro Cohesion**

Read Chapter 4 in The Second Draft ("Assembly Instructions Micro Cohesion - Pages 54 – 87)

Watch Video: "Syntactic Maturity - Chapter 4"

[https://www.youtube.com/embed/FATLsT6drfA?si=\\_WNQQPISgxFDs6k\\_](https://www.youtube.com/embed/FATLsT6drfA?si=_WNQQPISgxFDs6k_)

Complete the [Worksheet for Assignment 4](#) and upload it into the response box.

### **Assignment #5: Eliminating Ambiguity**

Read Chapter 5 in The Second Draft ("Taking Out the Guesswork: Eliminating Ambiguity" - Pages 88 – 103)

Watch Video: "Syntactic Maturity - Chapter 5"

[https://www.youtube.com/embed/UWXWe\\_sjhRQ?si=kKFLyTOYLuNa1pFG](https://www.youtube.com/embed/UWXWe_sjhRQ?si=kKFLyTOYLuNa1pFG)

Complete the [Worksheet for Assignment 5](#) and upload it into the response box

### **Assignment #6: Sentence Length & Complexity**

Read Chapter 6 in The Second Draft ("The Long and Short of It: Sentence Length and Complexity" - Pages 103 – 144)

Watch Video: "Syntactic Maturity - Chapter 6"

<https://www.youtube.com/embed/V01zn7LgLSQ?si=c-gBVSHVFzRY-b5o>

Complete the [Worksheet for Assignment 6](#) and upload it into the response box

### **Assignment #7: Concision**

Read Chapter 7 in The Second Draft ("Cutting Out the Dead Wood: Concision" - Pages 145 – 161)

Watch Video: "Syntactic Maturity - Chapter 7"

[https://www.youtube.com/embed/QPy5pBB3B84?si=sME\\_sSh7TBiz0Hya](https://www.youtube.com/embed/QPy5pBB3B84?si=sME_sSh7TBiz0Hya)

Complete the [Worksheet for Assignment 7](#) and upload it into the response box.

### Assignment #8: Word Choice

Read Chapter 8 in The Second Draft ("Emotion and Information: Word Choice" - Pages 162 - 177)

Watch Video: "Syntactic Maturity - Chapter 8"

<https://www.youtube.com/embed/TjaM1hy6HYU?si=xtJY6hdoMGT-EQMa>

Complete the [Worksheet for Assignment 8](#) and upload it into the response box.

### Assignment #9: Reflection

Watch Video: "Syntactic Maturity - Final Video"

<https://www.youtube.com/embed/Gs83G-Cx3mQ?si=p0e9FY-x4M0rFarF>

Complete the [Worksheet for Assignment 9](#) and upload it into the response box.

## ADDITIONAL ASSIGNMENTS REQUIRED FOR UNIVERSITY QUARTER CREDIT

### B. LEARNING APPLICATION

In this section, you will apply your learning to your professional situation. This course assumes that most participants are classroom teachers who have access to students. If you do not have a classroom available to you, please contact the instructor for course modifications. Assignments done in a course forum will show responses from all educators who have or are taking the course independently. Feel free to read and respond to others' comments. Group participants can only view and respond to their group members in the Forum.

---

---

### Assignment #10: Identity Sentences

Identify sentences in your students' writing that illustrate at least 5 different revision indicators discussed during this course and listed in [The Second Draft: Secrets to improving students' syntactic maturity](#).

Write the sentence, name the revision indicator(s) illustrated by the sentence, explain how the structure of the sentence interferes with reader comprehension, and suggest a revision strategy that would promote reader comprehension. (3-4 pages minimum)

### Assignment #11: Evaluate Grammar Knowledge

In this assignment, complete **one (1)** of the following options:

#### Option A)

Review the grammar terms listed in [Chapter 2 of The Second Draft: Secrets to improving students' syntactic maturity](#). Based on any formal or informal assessment you have conducted, evaluate the grammar knowledge of your students as a whole by listing the terms from chapter 2 and writing either S (generally STRONG understanding of grammar concept), P (PARTIAL understanding of grammar concept), W (generally WEAK understanding of grammar concept), N (NO understanding of grammar concept). NOTE: Students do not need to know the formal grammar term to have a strong understanding of a grammar concept since classroom teachers often use their own more "student-friendly" terminology. (3-4 pages)

OR

#### Option B)

If you are not teaching in a classroom while taking this course, complete the following alternate assignment: Design an assessment tool to use with a future class to determine their knowledge of the grammar concepts and terms in "The Transporter Parts List" (Pages 23 - 35) in The Second Draft. This assessment tool should include a component that students fill out, self-reporting on their grammar knowledge, as well as a teacher component that you will complete based on analysis of their writing samples. Describe the format of the student and teacher components. If you have taught language arts in the past, include a brief, general assessment of previous classes' understanding of grammar terms and concepts.

Post your response.

### Assignment #12: Revision Indicators

In a 3-4 page paper, discuss 1) your students' current syntactic maturity and 2) their most frequent sentence structure errors that create ambiguity, lack of cohesion, verbosity, unclear narratives, imprecision, etc. With this in mind, choose the Revision Indicators from The Second Draft: Secrets to improving students' syntactic maturity that would be most appropriate to teach your students right now to yield the greatest improvement in their syntactic maturity. Explain why you choose those particular revision indicators.

### Assignment #13: Lesson Plan

Complete **one (1)** of the following options:

#### Option A)

Design and teach a lesson that focuses on **one (or more)** revision indicators.

1. The lesson should teach students about the comprehension processes related to the revision indicator.
2. Explain how the sentence structure error inhibits reader comprehension, and provide them with a revision strategy they can use to fix the error and promote reader comprehension.
3. Ask students to find and revise the error in their own writing or have them compose and revise their own example sentences illustrating the error.
4. Submit your lesson to your instructor via the lesson tab below.
5. Share what you've learned with other teachers taking our courses by checking the [lesson library box](#) when you submit your lesson.
6. Submit a written 3-4 page reflection on the effectiveness of the lesson and what you would do the same/differently in the future.
7. Please include examples of sentence errors students identified/wrote and their revisions.

**OR**

#### Option B)

Use this option if you do not have a classroom available.

1. Adapt/create a lesson to reflect what you've learned in this course. (Do not implement it.)
2. Write a 500+ word article on the knowledge and strategies you have gained for improving students syntactic maturity.
3. Please refer to the guidelines for our blog [What Works: Teaching at its Best](#) prior to writing your article.
4. When you submit your article to your instructor, please also email a copy to Renee Leon, [renee@hol.edu](mailto:renee@hol.edu) THI blog curator.
5. Indicate whether or not you are OK with having your article considered for publishing on our website.
6. Submit your article to your instructor via the Response field and the modified lesson via Submit Lesson.
7. As you submit your lesson, consider sharing it with other teachers taking our courses by checking the lesson library box.

### Assignment #14: (500 Level ONLY)

In addition to the 400-level assignment, complete (2) two of the following:

#### A) Lead a Professional Development Session

Lead a professional development session about integrating syntactic maturity teaching into language classrooms. Upload a "lesson plan" for this session for feedback. Write a 2-3 page reflection on how it went and any new insights you gained.

**AND/OR**

#### B) Power-Point Presentation

Prepare a PowerPoint, Keynote, or video presentation that you can show to staff, explaining the nuances of syntactic maturity and the strategies they can use to support students who lack syntactic maturity. Slideshows should be a minimum of 8 slides, and videos should be a minimum of 2 minutes in length. Reflect on the effectiveness of the presentation and what you would do the same/differently in the future

**AND/OR**

#### D) Design Your Own

Another assignment of your own design with the instructor's prior approval.

### C. INTEGRATION PAPER

Assignment #15: (Required for 400 and 500 Level)

## SELF REFLECTION & INTEGRATION PAPER

(Please do not write this paper until you've completed all of your other assignments)

Write a 400-500 word Integration Paper answering these 5 questions:

1. What did you learn vs. what you expected to learn from this course?
  2. What aspects of the course were most helpful and why?
  3. What further knowledge and skills in this general area do you feel you need?
  4. How, when and where will you use what you have learned?
  5. How and with what other school or community members might you share what you learned?
- 
- 

### INSTRUCTOR COMMENTS ON YOUR WORK:

Instructors will comment on each assignment. If you do not hear from the instructor within a few days of posting your assignment, please get in touch with them immediately.

### QUALIFICATIONS FOR TEACHING THIS COURSE:

Marie Noorani, M.A.T., earned a B.A. from Washington State University in Social Sciences in 1996 and a Masters of Arts in Education from Washington State University in 1998. She has taught Language Arts to a variety of grade levels, gaining particular expertise in middle school writing instruction and earning a reputation for producing excellent writers. She retired in 2019 and currently tutors middle and high school writers.

## BIBLIOGRAPHY

### BEYOND GRAMMAR: Strategies for Improving Sentence Fluency

Williams, Joseph M. Style: Toward Clarity and Grace. Univ. of Chicago Press, 2009

Crowhurst, Marion. "Syntactic Complexity and Writing Quality: A Review." Canadian Journal of Education / Revue Canadienne de l'éducation, vol. 8, no. 1, 1983, pp. 1–16. JSTOR, <https://doi.org/10.2307/1494403>.

"Essentials - Subordination." Hamilton College, [www.hamilton.edu/academics/centers/writing/style/essentials/subordination](http://www.hamilton.edu/academics/centers/writing/style/essentials/subordination).

Chapter 7: Subordinate Clauses - Washington State University, [public.wsu.edu/~gordon1/Grammar\\_Book/Chapter\\_7.pdf](http://public.wsu.edu/~gordon1/Grammar_Book/Chapter_7.pdf).

Faigley, Lester. "Names in Search of a Concept: Maturity, Fluency, Complexity, and Growth in Written Syntax." College Composition and Communication 31, no. 3, 1980, pp. 291-300. JSTOR, <https://doi.org/10.2307/356489>.

Faigley, Lester. "The Influence of Generative Rhetoric on the Syntactic Maturity and Writing Effectiveness of College Freshmen." Research in the Teaching of English, vol. 13, no. 3, 1979, pp. 197-206. JSTOR <http://jstor.org/stable/40170757>.

Marzano, Robert J. "The Sentence Combining Myth." The English Journal, vol. 65, no. 2, 1976, pp. 57-59. JSTOR <https://doi.org/10.2307/814813>.

Combs, Warren E. "Further Effects of Sentence-Combining Practice on Writing Ability." Research in the Teaching of English, vol. 10, no. 2, 1976, pp. 137–49. JSTOR, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/40170702>.

Ney, James W. "A Short History of Sentence Combining: Its Limitations and Use." English Education, vol. 11, no. 3, 1980, pp. 169–77. JSTOR, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/40172300>.