

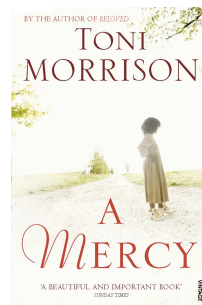
Narrative Language Structures: Writing Workshop from Reading Work:

By MF (2019)

Dedicated to Toni Morrison

Activity based on quotes & passages from Toni Morrison's *A Mercy* (2008).

Teacher's copy (Vintage 2009)

**About Toni Morrison & C1s**

I do not think C1 learners can read Toni Morrison's novels or essays, really, not yet, but she is an extraordinary writer in every sense, and I hope some day some of you will. In any case, all of you, for human, language and sociocultural reasons, can enjoy her video interviews on the Net and even plunge into reading her children's stories (which are hard enough to read, for non-natives), which she co-wrote with her son Slade, e.g. *The Big Box*.

Narrative Language Structures

Beginning of chapter 2, p. 7

[Someone DID something, doING something IN SOME WAY]

1. The man **MOVED** through the surf, stepp**ING** careful**LY** over pebbles and sand to shore.

Meaning of "grammar"

- **Past simple** for something done in a point in the past
- **-ing** for a how that is done
- **adverb** for more detail on that how

Meaning of textual matters

- **Cohesion/Coherence:** This is the opening line in a chapter. Beginnings are very informative/descriptive, generally establishing the topic of the paragraph. They help us understand the setting, where we are. We begin with a **full noun phrase**, not with a pronoun. This is (general) good advice for **beginning paragraphs** (except with "it" as in "It was an unrewarding life. p. 48)

Vocabulary, Etymology & Culture

- *The Surf* here, a **noun**, means 'the tops of the waves on the sea when they are near to the coast or hit against rocks' (Cambridge Dictionary), so we can say it means, 'crashing waves.'
- *Surf* is also a **verb** meaning 'to ride waves with a surf board'. When you surf, you stand upright on a board and ride over breaking waves into the shore.
- A **more figurative** meaning of *surf* is 'search casually,' as in "channel *surf*," click idly between TV stations, or "surf the Net," or navigate the Internet.
- The **origin** of the word is a mystery, though it's thought to have first been used in the 1680s, when Toni Morrison's novel is set, a time when racism was not institutionalized as such. (Sources: vocabulary.com & etymonline.com, adapted & expanded by MF)

Let's continue... Imagine. Novels include descriptions, not only narratives. Descriptions portray people, things, landscapes, events... Narratives describe actions, events, too! See? They mingle!

[Something **WAS and** effect on characters for cohesion -- **descriptions**]

2. Fog, Atlantic and reeking of plant life, BLANKETED the bay and SLOWED him.

[Someone **COULD ... BUT NOT ... NOR ...**]

3. He **COULD** see his boots sloshing **BUT NOT** his satchel **NOR** his hands.

[**WHEN** sth **HAPPENED**, sb **DID** sth + **BUT BECAUSE*** sth **HAD HAPPENED**, sb **COULD NOT**...]
 > **WHEN** + **PAST** + **BUT BECAUSE** + **PAST PERFECT** + **COULD(NOT)**

Note: Making our verbal range richer! Including different tenses and modals!

4. **WHEN** the surf **WAS** behind him and his soles **SANK** in mud, he **TURNED** to wave to the sloopmen, **BUT BECAUSE** the mast **HAD DISAPPEARED** in the fog he **COULD NOT** tell whether they remained anchored or risked sailing on--hugging the shore and approximating the location of wharves and docks.

Note on alternative structure: we could also have "**BUT BECAUSE OF** the wind," for instance (with a noun, instead of a S + V. Find your examples!

Notice how narratives use the past (past simple, past continuous, past perfect, modals in the past, futures in the past) to learn to check your tenses when you finish writing a narrative for class, work or exams! Sometimes your mistake is you switch to using the present! This is possible, but for a reason, like in Spanish. So you need to monitor this during the course.

Syntax & Meaning. Read all the sentences again and try to simplify structure using boxes so you know which are the main structures or boxes. Let me show you. I'm using **bold** for key words and *italics* for key linking devices. This exercise is about syntax, and syntax is crucial for ordering our thoughts and grammar, as well as for understanding if it's problematic whether we know or don't know what the meaning of this or that word is.

1. The man moved through the surf, stepping carefully over pebbles and sand to shore.
2. Fog, Atlantic and reeking of plant life, blanketed the bay *and* slowed him.
3. He could see his boots sloshing *but not* his satchel *nor* his hands.
4. When the surf was behind him *and* his soles sank in mud, he turned to wave to the sloopmen,
but because the mast had disappeared in the fog
 he could not tell *whether* they remained anchored *or* risked sailing on--hugging the shore *and*
 approximating the location of wharves and docks.

Now, if you understand this, does it really matter you understand some of the words that are not highlighted?, like *reeking*, *sloshing*, *satchel*, *sloopmen*, or *wharves*? Do you think basing your comprehension on syntax you could work out what these sentences describe in spite of not knowing all the words? You need to practice this once in a while with your reading at home. Using syntax to understand meaning is very helpful, not only for cloze tests. And it is what natives do when they read books and find words they don't understand. You know it as a native speaker, too!

Reading Aloud & Punctuation. To help you learn syntax, remember to read aloud. It helps a lot. Intonation and punctuation help a lot. So you will also be improving in speaking (stress and intonation) and writing (punctuation)! We can have smaller boxes inside larger boxes, yes!

HOW TO ACHIEVE VARIED SENTENCE STRUCTURE (Rich language range)

Connectors and transitions (understood here are parts of a sentence, not whole sentences) can help you do that, while caring for cohesion & coherence! ♥ So notice this issue as we move on.

Noun phrases as Appositives

5. A quick thinker, he **flushed** with pleasure when a crisis, large or small, needed invention and fast action (p. 10)

**Prepositional phrases**

6. On the way he saw a man beating a horse to its knees (p. 26)
 7. By moonlight I am happy to find a hollow log, but it is wavy with ants (p. 65) - also Time phrase
 8. Within minutes they were back in the wagon steeped in anticipation of a fresh bountiful life (p. 84)

Time clauses as sentence initiators and typical transitions opening paragraphs, too, because of their power to offer a setting we can part from!

9. When I arrive here I believe it is the place he warns against (p. 6) + ending prepositions
 10. Once beyond the warm gold of the bay, he saw forests untouched since Noah, shorelines beautiful enough to bring tears, wild food for the taking (p. 10)
 11. Upon landing they made no pretense of meeting again (p. 83)
 12. Before he could knock, the door was opened by a small, contradictory man (p. 13)
 13. After a leisurely meal of oysters, veal, pigeon, parsnips and suet pudding restored his tastebuds, he reserved bed space with just one man in it and, strolling outside, thought about the disappointing day and the humiliation of having accepted the girl as part payment. (p. 30)
 14. Since your leaving* with no goodbye, summer passes, then autumn, and with the waning of winter the sickness comes back (p. 34)
 15. As the sons died and the years passed, Jacob became convinced the farm was sustainable but not profitable (p. 85)

Participle clauses (past participle & present participle) to start descriptive sentences

Typical in narratives and reviews! Please, find examples in your Reading at home & bring to class!

Participle clauses are a form of **adverbial clause** which enables us to say information in a more economical way. We can use them when the verb we can use in the participle and the verb in the **main clause** have the same subject.

16. Seated at a table cluttered with the remains of earlier meals, he listened to the talk around him, which was mostly sugar, which was to say, rum (p. 27)
 17. Reassured, she went back into the sickroom where she heard Mistress mumbling. (p. 64)
 18. Compared to that, death by shipwreck or tomahawk paled. (p. 74)
 19. Pick~~ING~~ his way with growing confidence, he arrived in the ramshackle village sleeping between two huge riverside plantations (p. 8)
 • Main sentence: He arrived in He picked his way... = S + V. S + V
 • Transformation: We merge the two sentences into one (one S + V)! turning one of the S + V into an **ING verb**! The new sentence will be a How? phrase (*sintagma adverbial de cómo*) in the global syntax of the main sentence HE = Subject ARRIVED = Verb + all the rest as its accompanying predicate.
 20. Walk~~ING~~ in the warm night air, he went as far as possible (p. 32) + placing adjectives & comparisons
 21. Gallop~~ING~~ along, he was sweating so heavily his eyes salted and his hair matted on his shoulders (p. 9)
 • [-ing..., S + V in past: was happening + **SO** + adv + (that) + S + V in past: happened]
 • Rephrasing: As he was galloping, he was sweating... = S + V, S + V
 22. Barely listening to D'Ortega's patter, sly, indirect, instead of straight and manly, Jacob neared the cookhouse and saw a woman standing in the doorway with two children. (p. 21)

Rephrase...

23. **Watching** the couple, Jacob noticed that husband and wife never looked at each other, except for a stolen glance when the other looked elsewhere. (p. 17)
24. **Rocking** in the poorly made saddle, he faced forward while his eyes swept the surroundings (p. 10)

ING NOUNS are NOT the same case...

25. **Penetrating** [the fog] **was** like struggling through a dream

This is an **ING noun** operating as the subject! Now my own examples...

26. **Littering** is not allowed
27. **Looking** at photos for hours on end is too much!
28. Waiting for people, when the weather is bad, particularly if it's windy, is something I hate.

Question. Now analyze... What's this?

29. **Seeded** resentment now bloomed. (p. 15)
30. **Breathing** the air of a world so new, almost alarming in rawness and temptation, never failed to invigorate him (p. 10)
31. **Seated** at a small table surrounded by graven idols, the windows closed to the boiling air, he drank sassafras beer and agreed with his host about the weather (p. 14)
32. Far away to the right, beyond the iron fences enclosing the property and softened by mist, he saw rows of quarters, quiet, empty. (p. 12)
33. **Turning** profit into useless baubles, unembarrassed by sumptuary, silk stockings and an overdressed wife, wasting candles in midday, he would always be unable to ride out any setback, whether it be lost ship or ruined crop. (p. 17)

Some other C1 language items you might want to hunt examples of! (Useful Language)

34. **UNLIKE** the English **fog** he had known since he could walk, or those way north where he lived now, **this one** was sun fired, turning the world into thick, hot gold. (p. 7)

This structure is great for **comparisons**! Try a drilling exercise to learn to use the structure like this:

35. Unlike my mother, I was shy.
36. Unlike life in the city, rural life is slow-paced and easy-going.
37. **In spite of** his dirty hands and sweat-limp hair, Jacob pressed down his annoyance and chose to focus on the food (p. 15) cf. Despite
38. **Yet** he continued to feel a disturbing pulse of pity for orphans and strays, remembering well their and his own sad teeming in the markets, lanes, alleyways and ports of every region he traveled (p. 31)
39. **Still**, at this host's insistence, he trailed him to the little sheds where D'Ortega interrupted their half day's rest and ordered some two dozen or more to assemble in a straight line, including the boy who had watered Regina (p. 20)
40. **Probably** because his dreams were of a grand house of many rooms rising on a hill above the fog (p. 33)
41. **Whatever** it was, he couldn't stay there surrounded by a passel of slaves whose silence made him imagine an avalanche seen from a great distance (p. 20)

Inversion Questions

42. Now **here** he was, a ratty orphan become landowner, making a place out of no place, a temperate living from raw life (p. 10)
43. **Not only** because one had to hold the head while the other tied the trotters. **Mostly because** neither knew precisely what they were doing or how. (p. 51) - ??