

Lesson 5.1

Keeping It Rolling

How much fun would longboarding, inline skating, or bike riding be if you had to stop and restart every five feet? Good writing needs to keep rolling along, too. Periods should signal a smooth, gradual stop—not a slam-on-the-brakes interruption. To find out whether you're giving your readers a smooth ride, read your writing aloud, every word and sentence. If it doesn't flow well for you, it's time to revise.



Sharing an Example: The Rules of the Game

Quietly read aloud the following passage. As you read, ask yourself, *Does this passage roll along smoothly? Is it easy to read with natural expression?* If your answer is no to either question, take another close look to figure out why.

The Rules of the Game

I think there's no better sport than ice hockey. Ice hockey is the King of Sports for me. Hockey is an exciting game. It's exciting because of the speed. The players move fast. The puck moves fast. It's also exciting because of the physical contact. That contact is called checking.

Some of the rules make it exciting, too. The referees are right on the ice. The referee's job is to enforce the rules. Players get a penalty for breaking a rule. Players who break rules have to sit in the penalty box. They may have to sit in the penalty box for two minutes or more. This gives the other team an extra player advantage on the ice. That advantage is called a "power play." Power plays often lead to goals.

Hockey is a great game. It's a really great game to watch live. It's an even better game when you understand the rules.

Respond

As a *reader*, how would you rate the fluency of this passage from **1** (about as smooth as square wheels on a gravel road) to **6** (like a hockey puck sliding over ice):

1**2****3****4****5****6****7****8****9****10**

Analyze

What specific strengths or problems with fluency did you notice in "The Rules of the Game"? Work with a partner or in a writing circle to make a list of things you notice. (You may look at a checklist or rubric as you work—but trust your own responses, too!)

1. _____

2. _____

3. _____

4. _____

5. _____

Share and Compare

Share your thoughts with the class as a whole and work with your teacher to make a list of strengths and problems.

The Rules of the Game, Draft 2

No matter how you rated “The Rules of the Game” for fluency, chances are you have some ideas on how it could be improved. (So do we, and we’ll share them in a bit.) With a partner or in a writing circle, create a new draft. We left room on the page for you to revise, but you can write on scratch paper if that’s easier. As you work, feel free to

- combine sentences.
- cross out words.
- add details.
- change wording to smooth the flow.
- do anything to make the piece read smoothly.

Reflect

The original draft has 20 sentences. Count the sentences in your revision. How does it compare? What does this tell you about the original—and about the revision strategy you used?

Have someone who has not seen your draft read it aloud and then rate it, **1** to **10**, from his or her perspective as a reader. Mark that person’s score here:

1

2

3

4

5

6

7

8

9

10

Combining Sentences = Combining Ideas

Did you use sentence combining as one of your strategies? (We did.) When you combine sentences, you're actually putting several ideas together in one concise sentence. You are also decreasing the total number of words. To see how sentence combining works, look at these four sentences from "The Rules of the Game." We have underlined the key idea in each sentence to show how four little ideas can easily be grouped together in one smooth sentence.

Players can get a penalty.

- + They get a penalty for breaking a rule.
 - + Players who break rules have to sit in the penalty box.
 - + Players may have to sit for two minutes or more.
-
- = **A player who gets a penalty for breaking a rule must sit in the penalty box for two minutes or more.**

From 34 words to 21! No more stop and go—and that makes for one smooth ride.

A Combination Warm-Up

Using the previous example as a warm-up, combine the following four choppy sentences into one longer, smoother sentence. Begin by identifying and underlining the key ideas in each of the four choppy sentences. Then try putting ALL those bits of information together in one long, flowing sentence.

Deer pose problems for gardeners.

- + They pose a problem because they eat plants.
 - + Deer will eat almost any kind of plant.
 - + Deer are extremely hard to discourage.
-

= _____

Get This Writing Rolling!

After that exercise, you are likely ready for some major combining work. Read the following passage carefully—more than once. The second time through, put a plus sign (+) between sentences you think could go together. Then revise with some careful combining. Draw a line through words you no longer need and insert new words to smooth the flow.

May Flower Service Project

My school has a tradition. The tradition we have is delivering flowers on May 1. We deliver the flowers to people in the neighborhood. The neighborhood is around our school. We don't knock or ring doorbells. We leave the flowers on people's porches. There is a note attached to the flowers. The note says "Happy May Day from your friends at Whitford Middle School." The flowers we leave are for planting. The flowers could be planted in flowerbeds or a garden. Some of the neighbors write notes. They send the notes to the school. The notes say how much they appreciate the flowers. The notes reinforce the importance of the project. They are only little flowers, but they can really brighten someone's day.

Share and Compare

Meet with a partner or in a writing circle to share revisions. Take turns reading aloud, listening for the smooth flow. You may also wish to compare numbers of sentences in your final copies. The original had 15 sentences—a lot more than were needed. How many sentences does your revision have? Do any of your revisions improve the flow of the original draft? Discuss your improvements.



A Writer's Questions

A skillful writer could probably just keep combining and combining, ultimately turning a long string of short sentences into a short string of *long* sentences. But—is that really the goal in sentence combining? And if not, what *is* the goal?



Putting It to the Test

Writers working under pressure may resort to a simplistic method of combining sentences—just linking ideas together with the conjunction *and*. Unfortunately, this sometimes transforms choppy sentences into a run-on sentence. What other combining strategies could you suggest for a writer working under pressure?