

# From Sentences to Paragraphs: Tenses, Time Clauses, and Model Writing

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NOTICE: This is the author's version of the following article: McLean, T. (2022). From sentences to paragraphs: Tenses, time clauses, and model writing. *Humanising Language Teaching*, 24(6).  
<https://www.hltmag.co.uk/dec22/from-sentences-to-paragraphs>.

**Permanent link to this version** <https://hdl.handle.net/20.500.14078/3397>

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# Humanising Language Teaching

## From Sentences to Paragraphs: Tenses, Time Clauses, and Model Writing

- Terence McLean, Canada

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Teaching grammar structures can be done effectively utilizing sample sentences (video: [Mini EAL/ESL Lesson: Sentence Variety](#)) that show how to use the target forms; however, some students struggle when asked to put sentences together in a paragraph. This activity offers a straightforward way to ease students through the process going from sentences to paragraphs with an emphasis on simple past, past time clauses, and future time clauses.

### Simple Past

First, students need to practice basic simple past sentence structures. Any grammar book or website worth its salt should sufficiently introduce sample structures, including both regular and irregular verbs.

### Sample Past Tense Sentences

I played soccer yesterday.

My sister studied English last night.

Emily ate breakfast in the kitchen.

The students forgot to do their homework.

I was reading a book at 9:00 last night.

I used to live in Edmonton.

*When she was young, she used to ride her bike every day. (past time clause)*

*She would ride for hours until she had to go home for supper. (past time clause)*

The next step is to encourage students to write a paragraph, including a topic sentence, transitions, and a concluding sentence, using various forms of simple past. Here is sample to show students as a model.

### Sample Past Paragraph 1

#### *My Childhood Ice Rink*

I will never forget the ice rink that my father used to make behind my childhood home. When I was young, we lived in a small town in Ontario, and every winter my father would make a skating rink for me and my brothers. He used to get up early in the morning, shovel the snow, and flood the packed snow on the ground until there was a nice flat sheet of ice. He even made banks of snow around the rink so that our hockey pucks would not fly away. After school, we rushed home, put on our hockey jerseys, laced our skates, and hit the ice with glee. We would play until my mother called us in for supper. We ate as fast as we could and went back to the rink for more Stanley Cup games. Eventually, the evening ended with some hot chocolate as we made game plans for the next day. We really loved that rink. Now, I think that winter is too cold, and I rarely head out to an outdoor rink, but back in the day, I used to dream about cold days and hockey. Thanks, Dad.

Past

Present/Base form

Future

Ask the students to write a similar paragraph about their own childhood. They should try to include regular and irregular verbs as well as *used to* and *would*.

Once the students feel more comfortable writing a past paragraph, encourage the use of more past time clauses, which form complex sentences, so that their writing can flow with more cohesion. Start by giving examples using subordinators such as *after*, *before*, *when*, *while*, and *until*.

## Past Time Clauses

*After* I got home, I cooked dinner.

I cooked dinner *after* I got home.

*Before* I went to bed, I brushed my teeth.

I brushed my teeth *before* I went to bed.

The next step is to encourage students to write a paragraph using simple past and past time clauses. Here is sample to show students as a model (true story with a tad of writer's embellishment).

## Sample Past Paragraph 2

### ***An Unforgettable Forgetful Day***

I will never forget the day my daughter was born. At about 1:00 a.m., on November 2, 1999, my wife woke me up from a nice deep sleep. I was having a fantastic dream about fighting zombies when she said, "Hey, I think my water broke!" When I heard this, I immediately jumped into action. First, I woke up our son, who was sleeping in his room, and we quickly packed our bags. I was getting dressed while he was grabbing his books and toys. Meanwhile, my wife was getting ready for the drive to the hospital. She was calm as she got everything. I, on the other hand, was frantic as I put on my jacket, ran outside, and started the car on that crisp morning. After the car was warm, I got our son, and we made sure to put on our seatbelts. As we were backing out of the parking lot, my son excitedly asked, "Hey, where's mom?" Oops. When I looked out the car window, I saw her glaring at me. Well, in the end, we all made it safely to the hospital, and healthy baby Hanna entered the world at around 3:00 p.m. Yes, I was forgetful that day, but I will never forget November 2, 1999.

Past

Present

Future

Subordinator

Ask the students to write a similar paragraph about their own life. They should try to include simple past, past continuous, and past time clauses.

## Future Tense

The same procedure can be used to give students practice using future tense forms. Here are a few sample sentences.

I am going to visit my mother in Ottawa next month. (*going to* as a plan)

I will love you forever. (*will* as a promise)

We are leaving for Calgary tomorrow morning at 7:00. (*present continuous* as a plan)

The movie starts at 6:00 pm. (*simple present* as a set schedule)

Follow up by giving samples of complex sentences with future time clauses using subordinators.

I am going to visit my brother in Ottawa after I finish my course.

*If you marry me*, I will love you forever.

The next step is to encourage students to write a paragraph using future tense and future time clauses. Here are three short samples to show students as models.

## Sample Future Paragraph 1

### ***Vote for Me!***

If most politicians continue to tell lies, I am going to run in the election myself and bring honesty back. Of course, before I commit to such a challenging task, I will do some research in the field of political strategy. I am definitely going to ask all my friends and family members to vote for me at election time. After I become a political leader, everyone will probably thank me for bringing positive change, but I think that I will not last long because politics is a tough world.

Future Tense

Present/Base form

Subordinator

## Sample Future Paragraph 2

### ***A Good Friend***

If some hungry zombies chase me down the street while I am still wearing my pyjamas, I am going to run to my friend's apartment and hide there. Of course, before I tell my friend why I am in his apartment, I will sneakily hide behind him. I am definitely going to offer my friend to the zombies when they find us hiding at his place. After the zombies devour my friend, they will probably thank me for giving them such a tasty dinner, and they will not bother trying to eat me. What are good friends for? Bon Appetit!

Future Tense

Present/Base form

Subordinator

## Sample Future Paragraph 3

### *Your Ideal Life Partner: Julius*

My friend, Julius is currently single and ready to make the necessary commitment to the right person, so please consider this wonderful gentleman as a potential life partner. If you are in the market for a great guy, Julius is the ideal candidate. Before you talk to other potential partners, think about their motives—are they looking for attractiveness, money, convenience, or connections? If so, they will not be good partners in the future. While you are trying to live happily ever after, they will have a wandering eye, and they will not devote all their time to you. After you realize that these other suitors are not worthy of your attention, Julius will emerge as the obvious choice. If you say yes to Julius, he is going to treat you like royalty, and he is going to work hard to provide you with a lavish lifestyle. Also, if you accept his proposal, Julius will arrange a fantastic wedding ceremony; moreover, he will plan a honeymoon at a surprise destination. After you are married, Julius will never look at another person in the way he will adore you because you will be his only true love. Lucky you! So, if you are a single and looking for Mr. Right, my friend Julius is the dreamboat for you. Please, before it is too late, make the best decision of your life and catch this prize fish while you can. If you do, you will not regret it. Remember, your future starts today!

Present/Base form

Future

Subordinators

## Sample Paragraph 4 – More Advanced

Here is a sample paragraph about a person who has had an enormous influence on my life (no embellishment). This model may help students as they write about a person whom they admire.

### *The Man I Hope to Become*

**As a parent, a friend, and a teacher, I have met many remarkable people, but the individual who has had the most influence on my life is my friend and mentor. Kanji Satoh.** Kanji was the mayor of the Japanese community in which I lived for eight years. **The first way in which Kanji influenced me was with his outgoing personality.** When he laughed, he brightened any room with his addictive cheerfulness. Also, he knew how to involve others who were shy or uneasy. For example, when I went to my first social event in the town, Kanji saw that I was nervous, so he took me around the room, and introduced me to everyone there. I will never forget that. **In addition, Kanji's professionalism also influenced me deeply.** He was a municipal politician, so he knew how to communicate with many kinds of people, and he was open to different viewpoints. For example, Kanji was able to negotiate with business executives one day and a chat

with construction workers the next; he appreciated the value in everybody he met. Indeed, Kanji treated everyone as equals while he adeptly employed both formal and informal communication styles, an essential skill in both politics and life. **The greatest influence that Kanji had on me was through his kindness.** Kanji was a loving and generous family-oriented person who adored his wife and their five children. Even though he was usually extremely busy, Kanji always made time for a weekly family dinner, and he encouraged his children to follow their passions. He invited me into his house and accepted me into his family. I was treated like a family member, which I will never forget. **Sadly, Kanji Satoh is no longer with us; nevertheless, as a result of experiencing first-hand his outgoing personality, professionalism, and kindness, I hope to become more like him so that I can positively influence others in the future.**

Overall, after enough practice writing sentences with past and future time clauses, students will be better able to put sentences together to write paragraphs with more complex structures. Instructor-made sample sentences and paragraphs can help get the attention of students while giving them models to follow as they build their writing skills.

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