



# Subordinating Ideas Using Phrases

## “It All Started with Sputnik”

Grade 9-10

### OBJECTIVES

Students will

- demonstrate understanding of how different types of phrases are used in sentences.
- advance their own style and voice by imitating stylistic models.

### ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

“It All Started with Sputnik,” by Roger D. Launius.  
From *Air & Space Magazine*, July 01, 2007. Fair  
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### ABOUT THIS LESSON

The activities presented here offer students practice with sentence composing techniques similar to those described in Don Killgallon’s series for sentence composing. The series spans ability levels from elementary to college and uses both classical and contemporary texts as models. The thought is that students learn to create stylistically mature sentences by first reading rich texts and then imitating those sentence structures and patterns as they write. In this grammar lesson, students analyze a writer’s use of prepositional and participial phrases to subordinate ideas within sentences and then imitate those techniques to create their own original sentences.

This lesson can be used as an extension of the close reading lesson on “It All Started with Sputnik,” but it also provides a model for incorporating grammar instruction into the study of any literary or nonfiction text. Teachers are encouraged to create sentence composing lessons like this one, using short passages from works in their own curriculum.

**COGNITIVE RIGOR**

English lessons for National Math and Science (NMSI) are designed to guide students through a continuum of increasingly complex thinking skills, including those outlined in taxonomies such as the Revised Bloom's Taxonomy and Webb's Depth of Knowledge Levels. The activities in this lesson ask students to recognize and identify basic sentence parts (DOK Level 1) and then to apply organizational structures in writing original sentences (DOK Level 2). At the same time they move through all levels of thinking identified in Bloom's.

**CONNECTION TO COMMON CORE STANDARDS FOR ENGLISH LANGUAGE ARTS**

The activities in this lesson allow teachers to address the following Common Core Standards:

**Explicitly addressed in this lesson**

**L.9-10.1:** Demonstrate command of the conventions of standard English grammar and usage when writing or speaking.

- b. Use various types of phrases (noun, verb, adjectival, adverbial, participial, prepositional, absolute) and clauses (independent, dependent, noun, relative, adverbial) to convey specific meanings and add variety and interest to writing or presentations.

**L.9-10.3:** Use knowledge of language to understand how language functions in different contexts, to make effective choices for meaning or style, and to comprehend more fully when reading or listening.

**Implicitly addressed in this lesson**

**L.9-10.2:** Demonstrate command of the conventions of standard English capitalization, punctuation, and spelling when writing.

**CONNECTIONS TO AP\***

Students are expected to perform syntactical analysis on both the AP English Literature and AP English Language exams, and students should be able to articulate how authors create specific effects through the manipulation of sentence parts. Practice with examinations of syntax at an early age will allow students to gain the proficiency necessary for this kind of analysis and will translate into more complex original sentences as well. When students sit for college readiness examinations such as Advanced Placement exams and the SAT, their essays are scored holistically, and readers of such exams reward students for their effective and sophisticated use and control of language and syntax.

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**MATERIALS AND RESOURCES**

- copies of Student Activity
- blank sentence strips
- prepared sentence strips (optional)

**ASSESSMENTS**

The following kinds of formative assessments are embedded in this lesson:

- sentence composing activities
- display of knowledge through manipulatives
- graphic organizers

**TEACHING SUGGESTIONS**

**T**his lesson is not intended for use as a stand-alone handout for students to complete independently. Instead, you will find that students are more engaged and will retain the skills better if they work through the exercises using manipulatives like sentence strips and if they model and share their sentences in whole class and small group settings.

The lesson opens with a discussion of phrases and clauses. Teachers may need to review these concepts with students, emphasizing that how a sentence is put together affects its meaning. Teachers also may consider distributing to their students NMSI's "Phrase Toolbox" and "Clause Toolbox" handouts as ready reference tools. These handouts may be found in the Teacher Resource section of the NMSI website. Students may need to review foundational grammatical concepts as they complete the exercises, so consider extending the lesson over several class periods.

**Activity One: Analyzing Prepositional Phrases**

This activity could be completed as a whole class activity or in small collaborative learning groups. It is essential that students not simply identify the prepositional phrases in the sentence; they must recognize that prepositional phrases contribute meaning to the sentence.

**Activity Two: Analyzing Participial Phrases**

If students are very familiar with participial phrases, this activity could be completed in collaborative learning groups; otherwise, this activity should be completed with the whole class. Teachers may need to model responses to Questions 1-3 before asking students to complete the remaining questions.

**Activity Three: Subordinating with Phrases**

If the concepts of participial phrases and/or subordination are relatively new to your students, you may want to complete this activity as a whole class exercise. More experienced students might complete this activity individually or in small collaborative learning groups. Be sure students share and evaluate the sentences they create in Question 2.

**Activity Four: Creating Sentences with Phrases**

This activity asks students to apply the knowledge they have learned in the previous three activities. If students have a clear grasp of prepositional and participial phrases, they can complete Activity Four independently; if they need additional support, ask them to complete Activity Four with a partner.

**ANSWERS:****Activity One: Analyzing Prepositional Phrases**

2.

Prepositional Phrase	Word(s) the Phrase Modifies	Information Added to the Sentence
<i>as a 15-year-old</i>	I	describes the speaker ("I")
<i>with friends</i>	sat	tells where the speaker sat
<i>on the hood</i>	sat	tells where the speaker sat
<i>of a car</i>	hood	tells which hood
<i>on the night</i>	sat	tells when the speaker sat
<i>of July 20, 1969</i>	night	tells which night
<i>at the moon</i>	looking	tells where the speaker was looking
<i>to the Apollo 11 astronauts</i>	listening	tells how the speaker was listening
<i>on it</i>	astronauts	tells which astronauts

3. Responses will vary, but students should note that very little meaning remains if all the prepositional phrases are stripped from the sentence.

**Activity Two: Analyzing Participial Phrases**

2.

Participial Phrase	Word(s) the Phrase Modifies	Information Added to the Sentence
<i>looking at the moon</i>	I	describes what the speaker ("I") was doing
<i>listening to the Apollo 11 astronauts on it</i>	I	describes what the speaker ("I") was doing

3. Responses will vary, but students should note that the participial phrases explain why the speaker sat on the hood of the car and what he was doing.

4. *Sputnik I*, [launched from the Soviet Union's rocket test site near Tyuratam, Kazakhstan,] was a mere 184-pound "hunk of iron."  
 participial phrase: *launched from the Soviet Union's rocket test site near Tyuratam, Kazakhstan*  
 modifies *Sputnik I*  
 identifies the launch site of the rocket
5. One of the visionaries [thrilled by Sputnik] was 14-year-old Homer Hickam.  
 participial phrase: *thrilled by Sputnik*  
 modifies *visionaries*  
 tells which visionaries

**Activity Three: Subordinating with Phrases**

Answers may vary; following are the original sentences from the essay.

- Answers will vary, but students should note that the series of short, choppy sentences is less effective than the one sentence packed with subordinated details.
- Answers may vary but could include: *Starting with the tentative first steps into space with satellites and suborbital astronaut flights and continuing through the breathtaking orbital missions of Mercury, Gemini, and Apollo, the 1960s offered a vicarious thrill ride igniting the imagination of millions.*  
 Again, students should note that the series of short, choppy sentences is less effective than the one sentence with subordinated details.

**Activity Four: Creating Sentences with Phrases**

- Answers will vary.
- Answers will vary.
- Answers will vary.

# Subordinating Ideas Using Phrases

## “It All Started with Sputnik”

### Grade 9-10

Sentences are made up of grammatical units called clauses and phrases.

A **phrase** is a group of words that does not contain both a subject and a verb. When taken together, the words in the phrase function as a single part of speech.

A **clause** is a group of related words that contains a subject and a verb.

An **independent clause** can stand alone as a complete simple sentence.

A **dependent clause** contains a subject and a verb but cannot stand alone. Dependent clauses usually begin with a subordinate conjunction, and they require the addition of an independent clause to create a complete thought.

### Prepositional Phrases

Prepositional phrases are among the most commonly used phrases among writers in English. A prepositional phrase consists of a preposition plus its object and modifiers. Common prepositions include *to, around, under, over, like, as, behind, with, outside, etc.*

Adjective prepositional phrases tell *which one, what kind, how many, and how much*, or give other information about a noun, a pronoun, a noun phrase, or a noun clause.

Adverb prepositional phrases tell *how, when, where, why, to what extent, or under what condition* about a verb, an adjective, an adverb, an adverb phrase, or an adverb clause.

### Activity One—Analyzing Prepositional Phrases

1. Read the following sentence from “It All Started with Sputnik.” As you read, put parentheses around each prepositional phrase.

*As a 15-year-old, I sat with friends on the hood of a car on the night of July 20, 1969, looking at the moon and listening to the Apollo 11 astronauts on it.*

2. Now complete the chart below to indicate what each prepositional phrase modifies and what additional information it provides in the sentence. Part of the chart has been completed for you.

Prepositional Phrase	Word(s) the Phrase Modifies	Information Added to the Sentence
<i>as a 15-year-old</i>	I	describes the speaker ("I")
<i>with friends</i>	sat	tells where the speaker sat
<i>on the hood</i>	sat	
<i>of a car</i>		

3. If you remove all of the prepositional phrases from the original sentence, this independent clause is what you have left:

*I sat, looking and listening.*

This independent clause has a subject (*I*) and a verb (*sat*), as well as two participles (*looking* and *listening*), so it could function as a complete sentence. But what is missing from this sentence? Why is the original sentence more effective?

## Participial Phrases

A participial phrase is a verb form (past or present) that functions like an adjective. The phrase is the participle plus its modifiers.

*Blinded by the light*, Sarah walked across into the concert hall.

*Swimming for his life*, John crossed the English Channel.

## Activity Two: Analyzing Participial Phrases

1. Read again the following sentence from "It All started with Sputnik." As you read, put brackets around the two participial phrases.

*As a 15-year-old, I sat with friends on the hood of a car on the night of July 20, 1969, looking at the moon and listening to the Apollo 11 astronauts on it.*

2. Now complete the chart below to indicate what each participial phrase modifies and what additional information it provides in the sentence. Part of the chart has been completed for you.

Participial Phrase	Word(s) the Phrase Modifies	Information Added to the Sentence
<i>looking at the moon</i>	I	

3. If you remove the two participial phrases from the original sentence, this is what you have left:

*As a 15-year-old, I sat with friends on the hood of a car on the night of July 20, 1969.*

This independent clause has a subject (*I*) and a verb (*sat*), as well as several prepositional phrases, so it could function as a complete sentence. But what is missing from this sentence? Why is the original sentence more effective?

4. Read carefully the following sentence. Underline the subject once and the verb twice; put brackets around the participial phrase.

*Sputnik I, launched from the Soviet Union's rocket test site near Tyuratam, Kazakhstan, was a mere 184-pound "hunk of iron."*

Write the participial phrase here: \_\_\_\_\_

What noun or pronoun does the participial phrase modify? \_\_\_\_\_

What information does the participial phrase add that would otherwise be missing from the sentence?

5. Read carefully the following sentence. Underline the subject once and the verb twice; put brackets around the participial phrase.

*One of the visionaries thrilled by Sputnik was 14-year-old Homer Hickam.*

Write the participial phrase here: \_\_\_\_\_

What noun or pronoun does the participial phrase modify? \_\_\_\_\_

What information does the participial phrase add that would otherwise be missing from the sentence?

**Activity Three: Subordinating with Phrases**

1. Sentences contain one or more **main ideas** and may contain one or more **subordinate ideas**, which may be added by using dependent clauses or various types of phrases. Read again the original sentence in Activities One and Two:

*As a 15-year-old, I sat with friends on the hood of a car on the night of July 20, 1969, looking at the moon and listening to the Apollo 11 astronauts on it.*

The main idea—the independent clause—has been expanded and enhanced with information added through the use of prepositional and participial phrases. Without these phrases, we would need many sentences to convey all the information provided in this one sentence:

*I sat, looking and listening.*

*I was a 15-year-old.*

*I sat with friends.*

*We sat on the hood.*

*The hood was on a car.*

*We sat on a night.*

*The night was July 20, 1969.*

*We were looking at the moon.*

*We were listening to the Apollo 11 astronauts.*

*The astronauts were on the moon.*

Why is the original sentence more effective than this series of sentences?

2. Read the following sentences, which are based on a sentence from "It All Started with Sputnik":

*The 1960s offered a vicarious thrill ride.*

*The ride started with tentative first steps into space.*

*The first steps were with satellites and suborbital astronaut flights.*

*The next steps were breathtaking orbital missions.*

*The missions were Mercury, Gemini, and Apollo.*

*The thrill ride ignited the imagination of millions.*

Combine these six sentences into one, using the first sentence as the independent clause and creating prepositional or participial phrases from the other three sentences. Write your sentence here:

Which is more effective—the three six or the one that combines all of these ideas? Why?



