

Teaching Sentence Development Using the Colon: Imitation is more than flattery

Jeff Anderson says that when students imitate other writer's sentences, they are "trying on" that writer's style, but using their own ideas. In fact, he says the new structure "reveals things about the imitator" (*Everyday Editing*, 2007).

Just as colored chalk is a creative tool for the artist, punctuation can be a creative tool for the writer.

Using the following strategies, we can help students understand and use punctuation not just for correctness, but also as a tool for idea development.

Mentor Model for Using the Colon

The deputy told me to empty my pockets: two quarters, a penny, a stick of bubble gum, and a roll of grip tape for my skateboard.

- Carl Hiaasen, *Flush*, 2005

Lesson Plan Steps

1. Present the model and ask the students what they notice about it. Anderson suggests using Barry Lane's question: *What sticks with you?* (1992).
2. Jot down their ideas. Some will discuss the ideas in the sentences and some (we hope) will mention the punctuation. A primary point for students to hear is that the use of the colon introduces new details. In this example, the details help describe the character.
3. Using Hiaasen's model, write a sentence together as a class, using the sentence pattern template on the overhead or white board.

_____ told me to empty my _____: _____, _____,
and _____.

- a. Fill in the blanks with students' oral suggestions.
 - b. Have students practice in pairs and share aloud.
 - c. Have students write examples individually and share in groups of four.
 - d. Share selected sentences on chart paper from each group.
4. Celebrate student success by having each student group write each on a sentence strip to "publish" on the wall or bulletin board by the group. Each group may design their strip with group logo or other artistic feature.
 5. Share two or three more sample mentor models as needed.
 6. Continue reading individual books and share similar examples found in other reading texts.

Jeff Anderson says that learning to use a new grammatical structure is like learning a new vocabulary word: it takes many examples of seeing it, hearing it, and practicing its use for automaticity. (*Mechanically Inclined*, 2005).

Classroom Practice: Another Mentor Model for Using the Colon

But in his thirteen years, none so real, so vivid as this: he felt a breeze on his face; he smelled the wet earth of a flower bed not far away; he heard the distant whine of traffic and the buzz of a motorboat on the lake behind. (p. 1)

- Ridley Pearson, *The Kingdom Keepers*

**But in her thirteen years, none so real, so vivid, as this: she
felt _____; she smelled
_____; she heard _____ and
_____.**

This lesson is based on ideas and lesson formats from Jeff Anderson's book *Everyday Editing*, 2007.