Learning Targets

- Analyze the narrative techniques writers use to create a sense of pacing in a narrative.
- Apply pacing to my own writing.

Pacing

Narrative pacing is an important part of telling a good story. A writer controls the rhythm of a narrative with specific choices in sentence length, word choice, and details. For example, a series of short sentences can heighten suspense and increase the pace, while a series of long sentences may slow the pace.

Preview

In this activity, you will read an essay and analyze its pacing. In addition, you will write your own narrative using the techniques you have learned so far in this unit.

Setting a Purpose for Reading

- As you read the following essay, mark the text and write notes about where the pacing or rhythm of the narrative changes and how these changes in pacing affect you as a reader.
- Circle unknown words and phrases. Try to determine the meaning of the words by using context clues, word parts, or a dictionary.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

David Matthews is the author of the memoir *Ace of Spades* published in 2007 by Henry Holt and Co. He is the son of an African American father and a Jewish mother. In his memoir, Matthews tells of growing up racially mixed in Baltimore, Maryland during the 1970s and ‘80s. The following essay was adapted from his memoir and printed in *The New York Times Magazine* on January 21, 2007.

Essay

Pick One

by David Matthews

*The New York Times*

1 In 1977, when I was nine, my father and I moved away from the protected Maryland suburbs of Washington—and away from his latest wife, my latest stepmother—to my grandmother’s apartment in inner-city Baltimore. I had never seen so many houses connected to one another, block after block, nor so many people on streets, marble stoops and corners. Many of those people, I could not help noticing, were black. I had never seen so many black people in all my life.
2 I was black, too, though I didn't look it; and I was white, though I wasn't quite. My mother, a woman I'd never really met, was white and Jewish, and my father was a black man who, though outwardly hued like weak coffee, was—as I grew to learn—stridently black nationalist in his views and counted Malcolm X\(^1\) and James Baldwin\(^2\) among his friends. I was neither blessed nor cursed, depending on how you looked at it, with skin milky enough to classify me as white or swarthy enough to render me black. But before moving from our integrated and idyllic neighborhood, I really knew nothing of “race.” I was pretty much just a kid, my full-time gig. And though I was used to some measure of instability—various apartments, sundry stepmothers and girlfriends—I had always gone to the same redbrick single-level school. Nothing prepared me for walking into that public-school classroom, already three weeks into fourth grade. I had never felt so utterly on my own.

3 Mrs. Eberhard, my new homeroom teacher, made an introduction of sorts, and every student turned around to study me. The black kids, who made up more than 80 percent of the school's population, ranged in shades from butterscotch to Belgian chocolate, but none had my sallow complexion, nor my fi

4 In the hallway, on the way to class, black and white kids alike herded around me. Then the question came: “What are you?”

5 I was stumped. No one had ever asked what I was before. It came buzzing at me again, like a hornet shaken from its hive. The kids surrounded me, pressing me into a wall of lockers. What are you? Hey, he won't answer us. Look at me. What are you? He's black. He looks white! No way, he's too dark. Maybe he's Chinese!

6 They were rigidly partisan. The only thing that unified them was their inquisitiveness. And I had a hunch, based on their avidity, that the question had a wrong answer. There was black or white. Pick one. Nowhere in their ringing questions was the elastic clause, mixed. The choice was both necessary and impossible: identify myself or have it done for me. I froze, and said nothing—for the time being.

7 At lunchtime that first day, teetering on the edge of the cafeteria, my eyes scanned the room and saw an island of white kids in a sea of black faces. I didn't contemplate the segregation; it was simply part of the new physical geography, and I was no explorer; I was a weak-kneed outsider, a yellowed freak.

8 In some way I wasn't fully aware of, urban black people scared me. I didn't know how to play the dozens or do double Dutch. I didn't know the one about how your mama's so dumb she failed her pap test. I didn't know that with the wrong intonation, or the wrong addressee, any mention of one's mama could lead to a table-clearing brawl. The black kids at school carried a loose, effortless charge that crackled through their interactions. They were alive and cool. The only experience I had with cool had been vicarious, watching my father and his bebop-era revolutionary friends, and feeling their vague sense of disappointment when I couldn't mimic their behavior. The black kids reminded me of home, but the white kids reminded me of myself, the me I saw staring back in the mirror. On that day, I came to believe that if I had said I was black, I would have had to spend the rest of my life convincing my own people.

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\(^1\) Malcolm X (1925–1965) was an African American minister and civil rights activist who was assassinated in 1965.

\(^2\) James Baldwin (1924–1987) was an African American writer and social critic.
Lunch tray in hand, I made a final and (at least I like to tell myself) psychologically logical choice, one I would live with, and wrestle with, for a full decade to come: I headed toward the kids who looked most like me. Goofy bell-bottoms and matching Garanimals? Check. Seventies mop-top? Check. Then a ruddy boy with blond bangs lopped off at the eyebrows looked up from his Fantastic Four comic book, caught my eye across the cafeteria, scooched over in his seat and nodded me over.

That was it. By the code of the cafeteria table, which was just as binding in that time and place as the laws of Jim Crow\(^3\) or Soweto\(^4\), I was white.

Second Read

- Reread the essay to answer these text-dependent questions.
- Write any additional questions you have about the text in your Reader/Writer Notebook.

1. **Key Ideas and Details:** What contrast does Matthews make between his old neighborhood and his new one?

2. **Craft and Structure:** Identify Matthews’s purpose in telling this story from his childhood. How does his use of narrative elements in the essay help him to achieve his purpose?

3. **Knowledge and Ideas:** Matthews makes the point that the “code of the cafeteria table ... was just as binding in that time and place as the laws of Jim Crow or Soweto.” During the 20th century, the laws Matthews refers to enforced segregation of black and white people in the United States and South Africa. Does his essay prove that his comparison is valid?

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\(^3\) **Jim Crow** is a name given to laws that enforced racial segregation in the United States from after the Civil War until 1965.

\(^4\) **Soweto** is a part of a city in South Africa where black Africans lived under the policy of apartheid.
Language and Writer’s Craft: Sentence Variety

A variety of sentence types gives prose a natural rhythm. Simple sentences consist of one independent clause. Compound sentences consist of two independent clauses joined by a coordinating conjunction. Complex sentences consist of an independent clause and one or more subordinate clauses. Compound-complex sentences have two or more independent clauses as well as at least one subordinate clause.

Consider these examples from the essay:

**Simple Sentence:** “I had never felt so utterly on my own.”

**Compound Sentence:** “Mrs. Eberhard, my new homeroom teacher, made an introduction of sorts, and every student turned around to study me.”

**Complex Sentence:** “I was neither blessed nor cursed, depending on how you looked at it, with skin milky enough to classify me as white or swarthy enough to render me black.”

**Compound-Complex Sentence:** “I was black, too, though I didn’t look it; and I was white, though I wasn’t quite.”

**PRACTICE** With a partner, reread the essay looking for at least one example of each of these sentence types. Then write your own examples.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Sentence Type</th>
<th>Example from Text</th>
<th>Original Example</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Simple (one independent clause)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Compound (two or more independent clauses)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Complex (one independent clause and at least one dependent clause)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Compound-complex (two or more independent clauses and at least one dependent clause)</td>
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</tbody>
</table>
4. What is the overall impact of sentence variety on the pacing of the essay? Provide details from the text to support your answer.

Narrative Writing Prompt
Write a narrative about a time when you made an important decision about yourself. Vary the pacing in your narrative by working in simple, compound, complex, and compound-complex sentences. Be sure to:

• Use descriptive details to help the reader understand your story.
• Provide a smooth progression of experiences or events, using transitions to move through the story.
• Vary the pacing through the use of details and sentence types and lengths.

Check Your Understanding
After completing your narrative, work with a partner and share your stories. Identify the change in pacing and the sentence types each of you used in your stories.
Language Checkpoint:  
Using Subordination and Coordination

Learning Targets
- Understand the difference between subordinate and coordinate clauses.
- Use subordinating and coordinating conjunctions correctly when writing.

Understanding Subordination and Coordination
To understand subordination and coordination, you must first understand independent and dependent clauses.

**independent clause:** a phrase that contains a subject and a verb and expresses a complete thought; can stand alone as a complete sentence

**Example:** David Matthews is the author of the memoir *Ace of Spades*, published in 2007 by Henry Holt and Co.

**dependent (or subordinate) clause:** a phrase that contains a subject and verb but does not express a complete thought; cannot stand alone as a complete sentence

**Example:** Although he is the son of an African American father

1. Read the following clauses, and identify whether they are independent or dependent.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Clause</th>
<th>I/D</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>a. Matthew tells of growing up in Baltimore, Maryland, during the '70s and '80s</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>b. Although he was considered racially mixed</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>c. The essay was adapted from his memoir</td>
<td></td>
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</table>

Using Coordinating Conjunctions
Coordinating conjunctions are words that join two or more words (or phrases) of equal importance.

**The Seven Coordinating Conjunctions**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>and</th>
<th>or</th>
<th>for</th>
<th>so</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>but</td>
<td>nor</td>
<td>yet</td>
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</table>

2. Use each coordinating conjunction one time to complete the sentences. Choose the best option based on context.

a. The black kids reminded me of home, _______ the white kids reminded me of myself.

b. I was stumped, _______ no one had ever asked me what I was before.

c. Matthews’s old neighborhood was integrated, _______ he didn’t have to think about his race at school.

d. Mrs. Eberhard, my new homeroom teacher, made an introduction of sorts, _______ every student turned around to study me.

e. There was black, _______ there was white. I had to pick one.

f. I did not want to choose, _______ did I want a choice forced upon me.

g. I was in a classroom full of students, _______ I had never felt so utterly on my own.
Using Subordinating Conjunctions

Subordinating conjunctions are words that join two clauses, making one of them subordinate to, or less important than, the other.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Quick Guide to Subordinating Conjunctions</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>after</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>although (though)</td>
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<tr>
<td>as (as if)</td>
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<tr>
<td>because</td>
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</table>

3. Read the following independent clauses. Choose a subordinating conjunction to join them, and write your sentence below.

I was used to some measure of instability.
I had always gone to the same redbrick single-level school.

4. Show your sentence to a partner. Did you use the same subordinating conjunction? If not, how does the meaning of the sentence change?

5. For each of the following sentences, select the subordinating conjunction that would clearly tie the dependent clause to the independent one. Make sure that the word fits the meaning within the sentence.

a. _________ my skin was milky enough to classify me as white, I was swarthy enough to be rendered black. (Although, Because, Since)

b. ______________ I moved away from our integrated and idyllic neighborhood, I really knew nothing of “race.” (Because, Before, Whenever)

6. Share your answers with a partner, and be prepared to explain why your answer is correct. Discuss how each subordinating conjunction changes the meaning of the sentence.
Language Checkpoint: Using Subordination and Coordination

7. With your partner, look back at the sample sentences you have seen in this activity. What punctuation mark do you notice in most of the sentences? Where is it placed? Write down the pattern you notice.

Revising
Revise the passage to correct errors of subordination and coordination.

[1] David Matthews had a tough time as a kid because he never really felt that he fit in. [2] His father was a journalist because Matthews grew up around writers. [3] Matthews was biracial, so the other students in his school thought only in black and white. [4] He ultimately had to choose a side and he chose to be white.

1. a. NO CHANGE
   b. kid, and
   c. kid, because
   d. kid, or

2. a. NO CHANGE
   b. journalist for
   c. journalist, so
   d. journalist, for

3. a. NO CHANGE
   b. biracial so
   c. biracial, for
   d. biracial, yet

4. a. NO CHANGE
   b. side, and
   c. side, but
   d. side, for
Check Your Understanding
You have been asked to edit a student’s response to the writing prompt in Activity 2.5. Several clauses should be joined with conjunctions. Suggest which conjunctions you would choose, and explain to the student why the conjunctions make the writing clearer. Then add an item to your Editor’s Checklist to help you remember to check your writing for subordinating and coordinating conjunctions.

I was tired of people saying I didn’t care, that was the last straw. I had to turn my grade around, this was my chance. I heard the teacher describe the project, I knew I had to do well on it. The class was over, I shared my ideas with the teacher.

Practice
Return to the narrative that you wrote at the end of Activity 2.5. If you did not use any coordinating conjunctions, find two sentences you can combine. If you did not use any subordinating conjunctions, find an opportunity to use one. If you already used conjunctions, be sure you used ones that make sense and that you punctuated them properly.