

SUPPLEMENTAL SKILLS INSTRUCTION

WR.1.E ARGUMENT

Varying Sentence Length

Lessons WR.1.A–G offer direct instruction on discrete skills and should be implemented between Lessons 10 and 11. Students may benefit from some or all of the instruction in these lessons; only those lessons or activities that address student needs should be implemented.

Introduction

This lesson is composed of two distinct but related activities that center on skills for effectively varying sentence length to improve argument writing. Each activity may last an entire class period.

Writing Instruction Options:

- Combining Sentences Using Semicolons and Colons
- Splitting Sentences

In this lesson, the teacher provides direct instruction to students on combining sentences using semicolons and colons. Students also practice splitting sentences to improve the clarity of their writing. Students focus on revising their own arguments for effectively combining sentences using semicolons and colons or for splitting sentences before transitioning to a peer discussion of revisions. Student learning is assessed via the completion of the WR.1 Revision Exit Slip: Varying Sentence Length, on which each student records one example of a successful revision.

For homework, students choose three different passages from their arguments and revise each passage focusing on effectively combining sentences using semicolons and colons or splitting sentences as necessary to strengthen their writing. Students also write a few sentences explaining whether or not they will keep the revisions they drafted and the impact this decision has on their arguments.

Standards

Assessed Standard(s)	
W.9-10.5	Develop and strengthen writing as needed by planning, revising, editing, rewriting, or trying a new approach, focusing on addressing what is most significant for a specific purpose and audience.

L.9-10.1	Demonstrate command of the conventions of standard English grammar and usage when writing or speaking.
L.9-10.2.a, b	Demonstrate command of the conventions of standard English capitalization, punctuation, and spelling when writing. a. Use a semicolon (and perhaps a conjunctive adverb) to link two or more closely related independent clauses. b. Use a colon to introduce a list or quotation.
Addressed Standard(s)	
W.9-10.1.c	Write arguments to support claims in an analysis of substantive topics or texts, using valid reasoning and relevant and sufficient evidence. c. Use words, phrases, and clauses to link the major sections of the text, create cohesion, and clarify the relationships between claim(s) and reasons, between reasons and evidence, and between claim(s) and counterclaims.
W.9-10.6	Use technology, including the Internet, to produce, publish, and update individual or shared writing products, taking advantage of technology’s capacity to link to other information and to display information flexibly and dynamically.
SL.9-10.1	Initiate and participate effectively in a range of collaborative discussions (one-on-one, in groups, and teacher-led) with diverse partners on <i>grades 9–10 topics, texts, and issues</i> , building on others’ ideas and expressing their own clearly and persuasively.

Assessment

Assessment(s)
<p>Student learning is assessed via completion of the WR.1 Revision Exit Slip: Varying Sentence Length. Students record the original passage from their arguments as well as the revised passage. Students then explain why the revision is effective.</p> <p> Consider assessing these revisions using the Argument Writing Checklist.</p>
High Performance Response(s)
<p>A High Performance Response should:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Record the original passage (e.g., As a result, teens find it hard to look up from their phones because they need the feeling of getting a new e-mail or text. These teens become bored without the stimulation of digital media and that surge of dopamine (Richtel).). Revise the original passage, focusing on combining sentences using semicolons and/or colons or

splitting sentences (e.g., As a result, teens find it hard to look up from their phones because they need the feeling of getting a new e-mail or text: these teens become bored without the stimulation of digital media and that surge of dopamine (Richtel).).

- Explain why the revision is effective (e.g., I added a colon to join these sentences because the second clause emphasizes the first one.).

[See the Model WR.1 Revision Exit Slip: Varying Sentence Length for more examples.](#)

Lesson Agenda/Overview

Student-Facing Agenda	% of Lesson
Standards:	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Standards: W.9-10.5, L.9-10.1, L.9-10.2.a, b, W.9-10.1.c, W.9-10.6, SL.9-10.1 	
Learning Sequence:	
1. Introduction of Lesson Agenda	1. 5%
2. Homework Accountability	2. 0%
3. Writing Instruction Options: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Combining Sentences Using Semicolons and Colons • Splitting Sentences 	3. 30%
4. Argument Writing Checklist	4. 5%
5. Individual Revision	5. 30%
6. Revision Discussion	6. 20%
7. WR.1 Revision Exit Slip: Varying Sentence Length	7. 5%
8. Closing	8. 5%

Materials

- Student copies of the up-to-date Argument Writing Checklist (refer to WR.1 Lesson D Model Argument Writing Checklist)
- Copies of the WR.1 Revision Exit Slip: _____ for each student (refer to WR.1 Lesson A)—students will need additional blank copies
- Copies of the Semicolon and Colon Handout for each student

Learning Sequence

How to Use the Learning Sequence	
Symbol	Type of Text & Interpretation of the Symbol
10%	Percentage indicates the percentage of lesson time each activity should take.
no symbol	Plain text indicates teacher action.
	Bold text indicates questions for the teacher to ask students.
	<i>Italicized text indicates a vocabulary word.</i>
▶	Indicates student action(s).
☞	Indicates possible student response(s) to teacher questions.
ⓘ	Indicates instructional notes for the teacher.

Activity 1: Introduction of Lesson Agenda

5%

Begin by reviewing the agenda. In this lesson, students learn how to combine sentences using semicolons and colons or how to split sentences to strengthen their writing. Students revise their own drafts before participating in a peer discussion of their individual revisions.

- ▶ Students look at the agenda.

Activity 2: Homework Accountability

0%

- ⓘ Students will be held accountable for homework during Activity 6: Revision Discussion.

Activity 3: Writing Instruction Options

30%

- ⓘ Based on student need, select from the two options below:
 - Combining Sentences Using Semicolons and Colons (See Appendix 1)
 - Splitting Sentences (See Appendix 2)

Activity 4: Argument Writing Checklist

5%

- ⓘ The following activity addresses the expectations of SL.9-10.1.

Instruct students to take out their copies of the Argument Writing Checklist.

- ⓘ Consider posting or projecting the Argument Writing Checklist.

Instruct students to Think, Pair, Share about the following questions:

Based on this lesson’s writing instruction, what items should the class add to the Argument Writing Checklist? In which categories do these items belong and why?

- ☞ Student responses will vary but should include points that address the following:
- Correctly incorporate semicolons and colons to make my writing clearer? This item belongs in the Control of Conventions category, because it is about proper use of punctuation.
 - Include sentences of varied length that contribute to the cohesion and clarity of my argument? This item belongs in the Coherence, Organization, and Style category, because varying sentence length affects both the coherence and style of an argument.

Lead a brief whole-class discussion of student responses. Guide students to a consensus on what items the class will add to the Argument Writing Checklist and in which category each item belongs. Instruct students to add the new items in the appropriate categories to their copies of the Argument Writing Checklist.

- ▶ Students add new items in the appropriate categories to their copies of the Argument Writing Checklist.

① Consider adding the new items in the appropriate categories to the displayed copy of the Argument Writing Checklist.

Activity 5: Individual Revision

30%

① The following activity addresses the expectations of W.9-10.1.c.

Instruct students to independently revise their drafts focusing on whichever of the following writing skills they learned in this lesson:

- Combining Sentences Using Semicolons and Colons
- Splitting Sentences

① For example, if students completed the writing instruction activity on Combining Sentences Using Semicolons and Colons, then their revisions will focus on using semicolons and colons to combine sentences rather than on splitting sentences.

Explain to students that they should revise at least three passages for effectively combining sentences using semicolons and colons or for splitting sentences. Remind students to refer to the Argument Writing Checklist as they revise their drafts.

Transition to individual revision.

- ▶ Students independently revise their drafts for effectively combining sentences using semicolons and colons or for splitting sentences.

🗨️ For sample revisions, see the Model WR.1 Revision Exit Slip: Varying Sentence Length.

Activity 6: Revision Discussion

20%

① The following activity addresses the expectations of SL.9-10.1.

Instruct students to form pairs or small groups to share at least one of the passages they revised during the previous activity and one passage they revised during the previous lesson’s homework assignment. Explain to students that in addition to receiving feedback on their revisions, this discussion is also an opportunity to consider how they can use similar revisions or try similar techniques as their peers in their own papers. In this discussion, students provide brief constructive criticism to their peers. Remind students that constructive criticism helps them share advice with their peers in a positive and academic manner.

① Refer to Lesson 8 for a discussion of constructive criticism.

Instruct students to follow these steps to complete the revision discussion:

1. Show your peers the original passage and the revised passage.
 2. Explain to your peers how the revision improves your draft.
 3. Ask your peers to provide brief constructive criticism on your revisions.
 - ▶ Students share and discuss with peers at least two effective revisions they made to their drafts.
- ① In lessons that include the Revision Discussion, consider maintaining the same peer pairs or small groups for several lessons, so that students can benefit from a reviewer who is familiar with their drafts.

Activity 7: WR.1 Revision Exit Slip: Varying Sentence Length

5%

Explain that for this lesson’s assessment, students record and explain one example of a successful revision. Distribute blank copies of the WR.1 Revision Exit Slip: _____ to each student. Instruct students to fill in the title “Varying Sentence Length” on their exit slips. Instruct students to complete the exit slip independently. Inform students that their revisions will be assessed with the Argument Writing Checklist.

🗨️ See the High Performance Response and Model WR.1 Revision Exit Slip: Varying Sentence Length for sample student responses.

Activity 8: Closing

5%

Display and distribute the homework assignment. For homework, instruct students to choose three different passages from their drafts. For each passage, students revise their drafts focusing on whichever of the following writing skills they learned in this lesson:

- Combining Sentences Using Semicolons and Colons
- Splitting Sentences

Instruct students to respond briefly in writing to the following questions for each revision:

Will you keep the revision you drafted? Why or why not?

Explain the impact of your decision on your argument.

① If an online writing community has been established for the class, instruct students to post their revised drafts for sharing with peers and/or assessment. (Students' use of the online writing community addresses the expectations of W.9-10.6.)

- ▶ Students follow along.

Homework

Choose three different passages from your draft. For each passage, revise your draft focusing on whichever of the following writing skills you learned in this lesson:

- Combining Sentences Using Semicolons and Colons
- Splitting Sentences

Respond briefly in writing to the following questions for each revision:

Will you keep the revision you drafted? Why or why not?

Explain the impact of your decision on your argument.

Model Argument Writing Checklist

Name:		Class:		Date:	
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Directions: Use this template to record the checklist items that convey the components of an effective argument established as a class.

Command of Evidence and Reasoning	Drafting	Finalization
Does my response...	✓	✓
Use relevant and sufficient evidence to support my claims?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Use valid reasoning to demonstrate clear relationships between claims and evidence?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Develop counterclaims fairly?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Integrate evidence (quotations and paraphrasing) to support claims and counterclaims?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Anticipate and address the audience’s knowledge level and concerns?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

Coherence, Organization, and Style	Drafting	Finalization
Does my response...	✓	✓
Introduce a precise central claim?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Develop supporting claims that reinforce or advance the central claim?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Adapt content and language to my specific audience?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Adapt style of writing to convince my audience of my central claim?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Arrange claims, counterclaims, evidence, and reasoning to create clear relationships among all the components of the argument?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Have an introduction that captures the readers’ attention and interest?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Have an introduction that establishes the topic and central claim of my argument?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Provide a conclusion that follows from and supports the argument?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

Establish and maintain a formal style and objective tone?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Use precise language to clearly explain the topic and claims?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Incorporate effective word choice to strengthen writing?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Include varied syntax to contribute to a cohesive and compelling argument?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Include transitional words and phrases that clearly show the relationship between sentences and paragraphs?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Include sentences of varied length that contribute to the cohesion and clarity of my argument?*	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

Control of Conventions	Drafting	Finalization
Does my response...	✓	✓
Cite sources using proper MLA style and formatting?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Use proper punctuation for quotations and citations?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Correctly incorporate semicolons and colons to make my writing clearer?*	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

*Asterisks indicate new items added in this lesson.

Model WR.1 Revision Exit Slip: Varying Sentence Length

Name:		Class:		Date:	
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Directions: In the first column, record the original passage from your argument. In the second column, record the revised passage. In the third column, explain why the revision is effective.

Original Passage	Revised Passage	Explanation
The act of checking e-mail or refreshing the mini-feed on Facebook gives people’s brains a jolt of dopamine. This is a reaction “researchers say can be addictive” (Richtel).	The act of checking e-mail or refreshing the mini-feed on Facebook gives people’s brains a jolt of dopamine; this is a reaction “researchers say can be addictive” (Richtel).	These independent clauses are connected ideas, so I combined them into one sentence using a semicolon.
As a result, teens find it hard to look up from their phones because they need the feeling of getting a new e-mail or text. These teens become bored without the stimulation of digital media and that surge of dopamine (Richtel).	As a result, teens find it hard to look up from their phones because they need the feeling of getting a new e-mail or text: these teens become bored without the stimulation of digital media and that surge of dopamine (Richtel).	I added a colon to join these sentences because the second clause emphasizes the first one.
Nevertheless, constant use of technology has its disadvantages, because screens limit face-to-face communication.	Nevertheless, constant use of technology has its disadvantages. Screens limit face-to-face communication.	I split these sentences, because the rest of the paragraph discusses more disadvantages than just in-person communication. I split the sentences to clarify that limited in-person communication is not the only disadvantage.

Appendix 1: Combining Sentences Using Semicolons and Colons

Explain to students that they can strengthen the clarity with which they communicate the claims, evidence, and reasoning in their arguments by using semicolons and colons properly and effectively. Varying sentence length by combining sentences with semicolons or colons contributes to an engaging, cohesive argument.

- ① **Differentiation Consideration:** If necessary, explain that *cohesion* in writing refers to how well the paragraphs and sentences link the claims and evidence of a text together into a coherent whole.
 - ▶ Students write the definition of *cohesion* in the appropriate section of their vocabulary journals.

Explain to students that they must understand what an *independent clause* is in order to use semicolons and colons properly.

- ① Students may be familiar with the components of an *independent clause*. Consider asking students to volunteer an explanation of what an *independent clause* is and provide an example before providing the definition of an *independent clause* to the class.

Provide students with the following definition: *independent clause* means “a clause that can stand alone as a sentence, containing a subject and a predicate with a finite verb.” An *independent clause* communicates a complete thought.

- ▶ Students write the definition of *independent clause* in the appropriate section of their vocabulary journals.

Post or project the following example of an independent clause.

- ① The following example is taken from section 1, paragraph 2 of the article “Attached to Technology and Paying a Price” by Matt Richtel (refer to Lesson 4).
- “He forgets things like dinner plans”

Ask a student volunteer to identify the elements of the independent clause given above.

- 🗨 Student responses should include:
 - The subject is “he.”
 - The predicate is everything following “he,” with “forgets” as the verb of the sentence.

- ① **Differentiation Consideration:** Students may need more support in understanding the components of a complete sentence in order to understand independent clauses. Consider reviewing and posting the definitions and examples of the parts of speech such as *subject*, *predicate*, and *verb*.

- ▶ Students write the definitions of *subject*, *predicate*, and *verb* in the appropriate section of their vocabulary journals.

Explain to students that semicolons are a type of punctuation that can be used to connect two independent clauses and show they are related. Post or project the following example for students:

① Example 1 is modified from paragraph 3 Model Argument. Example 2 is taken from paragraph 3 of the Model Argument (refer to Lesson 10).

- **Example 1:** However, it is not simply the addictive quality of digital media that is concerning. This kind of extensive use is actually harmful to the brain.

Then, post or project the following example of the two sentences linked with a semicolon:

- **Example 2:** However, it is not simply the addictive quality of digital media that is concerning; this kind of extensive use is actually harmful to the brain.

Explain to students that it is possible to keep two distinct sentences instead of joining the independent clauses with a semicolon, but when the ideas are closely linked, combining the sentences can contribute to the cohesion and flow of the passage.

Inform students that semicolons are just one way of combining sentences. Writers can use commas and conjunctions or transitional words or phrases to combine independent clauses (e.g., However, it is not simply the addictive quality of digital media that is concerning, because this kind of extensive use is actually harmful to the brain.).

- ▶ Students follow along.

① Lesson D and Lesson F provide instruction on transitional words and phrases and comma usage, respectively.

Post or project the following paragraph and instruct students to work in pairs or small groups to practice combining sentences using semicolons, conjunctions, or transitional words or phrases. Encourage students to vary their methods of combining sentences. Explain to students that they may want to leave some short sentences to vary the length of sentences throughout the paragraph and to emphasize certain ideas with short sentences.

① The following example is modified from paragraph 6 of the Model Argument Paper (refer to Lesson 10).

- The world is full of distractions. It is clear that our constant use of technology is doing actual damage to brains and communities. The use of various screens distracts people and causes stress. Evidence shows that the constant use of these devices is also eroding our interactions with others. A study by sociologist Matthew Brashears found that “Americans have fewer intimate relationships today than 20 years ago” (Hampton). This trend can be attributed to technology overuse. A single week without

screens is a small price to pay for better connections with other people and a better functioning brain. It is important to preserve the health of students’ young minds and social lives. [name of school here] should participate in “Shut Down Your Screen Week.”

Lead a brief whole-class discussion in which volunteers share how and why they combined sentences.

🗨 Student responses may include:

- The world is full of distractions; it is clear that our constant use of technology is doing actual damage to brains and communities. It is bad enough that the use of various screens distracts people and causes stress, but evidence shows that the constant use of these devices is also eroding our interactions with others. A study by sociologist Matthew Brashears found that “Americans have fewer intimate relationships today than 20 years ago” (Hampton), a trend that can be attributed to technology overuse. A single week without screens is a small price to pay for better connections with other people and a better functioning brain. In order to preserve the health of students’ young minds and social lives, [name of school here] should participate in “Shut Down Your Screen Week.”

① **Differentiation Consideration:** Some students may struggle to immediately grasp the proper use of semicolons. If students struggle, work with them individually to write out 5–10 examples of the proper use of semicolons.

Explain to students that a colon is another type of punctuation that is useful for combining related independent clauses. Post or project the following examples:

① The following examples can also be found on the Semicolon and Colon Handout.

- **Example 1:** Sociologist Matthew Brashears made a startling discovery: “Americans have fewer intimate relationships today than 20 years ago” (Hampton).
- **Example 2:** Teens today are more distracted than ever by online programs such as the following: e-mail, texts, Facebook, Instagram, Twitter, and Grand Theft Auto.
- **Example 3:** As a result, teens find it hard to look up from their phones because they need the feeling of getting a new e-mail or text: these teens become bored without the stimulation of digital media and that surge of dopamine (Richtel).

Instruct students to work in pairs or small groups to describe the three different uses for colons.

🗨 Student responses should include:

- In example 1, the colon links together one independent clause and a quotation that is a complete sentence. This suggests that a colon can be used to introduce a quotation after an independent clause when the quotation itself is also an independent clause.
- In example 2, the colon comes after an independent clause and before a list. This shows that a colon can be used to introduce a list.
- In example 3, the colon is between two independent clauses. The second independent clause seems to explain the idea in the first clause that teens “need the feeling of getting a new e-mail or text.” This suggests that a colon can be used to link two independent clauses when the second clause provides more detail about or emphasizes the first clause.

Lead a brief whole-class discussion of student responses.

Distribute the Semicolon and Colon Handout to each student. Encourage students to use this handout as a reference for proper and common uses of semicolons and colons.

- ▶ Students examine the handout.

① **Differentiation Consideration:** Some students may struggle to immediately grasp the proper use of colons. If students struggle, work with them individually to write out 5–10 examples of the proper use of colons.

Semicolon and Colon Handout

Remember that an *independent clause* “a clause that can stand alone as a sentence, containing a subject and a predicate with a finite verb.” An *independent clause* communicates a complete thought.

Common and Proper Uses of the Semicolon

- Use a semicolon to connect two independent clauses that are related to one another.
 - **Example:** The act of checking e-mail or refreshing the mini-feed on Facebook gives people’s brains a jolt of dopamine; this is a reaction “researchers say can be addictive” (Richtel).

Common and Proper Uses of the Colon

- Use a colon when introducing a quotation after an independent clause. The quotation must also be an independent clause.
 - **Example:** Sociologist Matthew Brashears made a startling discovery: “Americans have fewer intimate relationships today than 20 years ago” (Hampton).
- Use a colon when introducing a list.
 - **Example:** Teens today are more distracted than ever by digital programs such as the following: e-mail, texts, Facebook, Instagram, Twitter, and Grand Theft Auto.
- Use a colon between two independent clauses when the second clause provides more detail about or emphasizes the first clause.
 - **Example:** As a result, teens find it hard to look up from their phones because they need the feeling of getting a new e-mail or text: these teens become bored without the stimulation of digital media and that surge of dopamine (Richtel).

Further reference: The Purdue University Online Writing Lab (OWL): <http://owl.english.purdue.edu> (search terms: semicolons and colons).

Appendix 2: Splitting Sentences

Explain that often writers combine sentences to show connections between ideas and to make writing flow smoothly; however, sometimes writers split long sentences into shorter sentences in order to vary sentence length or make ideas stand out. Splitting long sentences can also help writers express complex ideas in a clearer way that may be easier to read and understand.

Post or project the following paragraph and instruct students to work in pairs or small groups to practice splitting sentences by replacing commas and conjunctions or transitional words and phrases with periods. Explain to students that they may not want to split all of the sentences in order to vary the length of sentences throughout the paragraph.

① The following example is taken from paragraph 3 of the Model Argument (refer to Lesson 10).

- However, it is not simply the addictive quality of digital media that is concerning; this kind of extensive use is actually harmful to the brain. Using technology frequently throughout the day often requires people to multitask, and excessive multitasking is dangerous for the brain, furthermore research has shown that “[h]eavy multitaskers actually have more trouble focusing and shutting out irrelevant information ... and they experience more stress” (Richtel). These effects continue even when people stop multitasking, effectively changing the way the brain works, according to brain scientist Nora Volkow (Richtel), as well as writer Sarah Perez who states in the article “Education 2.0,” that because of the overuse of technology, “sustained concentration” is a skill that is “fading away.” Ultimately, the long-term effect of excessive multitasking is the inability to give full concentration to whatever information is at hand, which inhibits intellectual development.

Lead a brief whole-class discussion in which volunteers share how and why they split sentences.

☞ Student responses may include:

- However, it is not simply the addictive quality of digital media that is concerning; this kind of extensive use is actually harmful to the brain. Using technology frequently throughout the day often requires people to multitask, and excessive multitasking is dangerous for the brain. Research has shown that “[h]eavy multitaskers actually have more trouble focusing and shutting out irrelevant information ... and they experience more stress” (Richtel). These effects continue even when people stop multitasking, effectively changing the way the brain works, according to brain scientist Nora Volkow (Richtel). In the article “Education 2.0,” writer Sarah Perez states that because of the overuse of technology, “sustained concentration” is a skill that is “fading away.” Ultimately, the long-term effect of excessive multitasking is the inability to give full concentration to whatever information is at hand, which inhibits intellectual development.