

Example Lesson Plan: Sentence Expanding

For Elementary School Students

As students become more adept at crafting clear, accurate simple sentences, educators may begin to identify ways in which students can expand these sentences by adding details and varying sentence structure. This allows students to add more detail to their writing and communicate more complex thoughts. For more information on explicit instruction in sentence expanding, see our blog post [“Sentence Expanding: Helping Students Build Stronger Sentences.”](#) by Jennifer Knight, Ph.D.

This example lesson plan models teaching students to expand simple sentences by answering the questions when, where, why, and how. It also includes a sample notes sheet and a sentence expanding practice activity.

The text of this lesson plan is intended to serve as an example of what a lesson on this topic might look like. It is not intended to be read to students verbatim. Rather, teachers should feel empowered to use the example plan as an outline for building their own unique lesson. That said, scripted explanations of terms, concepts, and activities can be used as desired.

Sentence Expanding Elementary School Example Lesson

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Materials: lesson plan, sentence expanding sentences for teacher and students, pencils, [Sentence Expanding Notes](#), [Sentence Expanding Words and Phrases Bank](#), [Sentence Expanding Practice](#)

Optional Materials: smartboard or whiteboard with projector

Additional Resource: For more on sentence expanding, read the Iowa Reading Research Center blog post "[Sentence Expanding: Helping Students Build Stronger Sentences](#)" by Jennifer Knight, Ph.D.

Set Goal and Purpose

Today, we are going to learn how to take our sentences and expand, or stretch, them by adding new ideas or details. Sometimes when we write, we forget to include important details that paint a picture for our readers to really see what is happening. When we expand or stretch our sentences out, we add in those missing details to make it clearer for our readers. Doing this will help us become stronger writers.

Our goal today is to expand simple sentences so they meet the following criteria:

1. *Our expanded sentence answers our four key questions (When? Where? Why? How?).*
2. *Our details allow readers to create a clear picture in their heads of the action in the sentence.*
3. *Our expanded sentence can be read fluently.*

Modeling

Let's start by reviewing what a sentence needs in order to be complete and make sense. If you don't remember, look at our sentence expanding notes to help you.

My turn first: [Write the sentence: "The boy played" on the board.] *I know this sentence [read it out loud] needs to start with a capital letter at the beginning.*

Now it's your turn: [Child's name], *what else does this sentence need to make it a complete sentence?* [Ask a variety of students for answers.]

If correct: *Excellent, you know what makes a complete sentence.*

If incorrect: *Stop. My turn. A complete sentence needs X. Say it with me. What does a complete sentence need?*

Optional answers: A capital letter at the beginning, punctuation at the end, a person, place, or thing (noun), an action word

<p><i>Great, we know what a sentence needs in order to be complete and make sense. Today we are going to take our sentences and expand or stretch them to make them stronger or more detailed so our readers can picture them in their minds.</i></p> <p>My turn first: <i>To make a sentence stronger, we need to add details that help our readers picture what we are saying.</i></p> <p>Say it with me. <i>To make a sentence stronger, we need to add details that help our readers picture what we are saying.</i></p> <p>Now it's your turn. [Child's name], <i>what makes a strong sentence?</i></p>	<p><i>If correct: Excellent, you know how to make your sentence stronger for your readers.</i></p> <p><i>If incorrect: Stop. My turn. To make a sentence stronger, we need to add details that help our readers picture what we are saying. What makes a strong sentence?</i></p>
<p><i>Today, we are going to practice one way to make our simple sentences stronger. When we have a short sentence like the one on the board [Display sentence on the board.]</i></p> <p>The boy played</p> <p><i>It doesn't tell us much about the boy. We need to stretch or add to our sentence to help our readers picture the boy.</i></p>	
<p><i>Remember our sentence on the board, let's read it together and find out who and what the sentence is about. [Read the sentence together.]</i></p> <p>Ask students:</p> <p>Q: Who is the subject of this sentence or the who or what that was doing something?</p> <p>A: <i>The boy</i></p> <p>Yes, the boy is the noun or subject of the sentence.</p> <p>Q: What did the boy do?</p> <p>A: <i>He played.</i></p>	

Yes, he played. This is the verb or action in our sentence. It tells us what the subject did.

Now that we know the who and what of our sentence, we are ready to expand it and add more details to help paint a picture for our readers about the boy.

One way we can expand our sentences and help our readers know more is to answer the following questions:

- When?
- Where?
- Why?
- How?

As I complete an example with you, today I will choose from our words and phrases bank to make sure my expanded sentence answers all of our questions. Remember, the words in our bank are only a few of the many choices we could use in our sentences. These words are just a starting point for us. There are many other words or phrases we could come up with to use. I will also decide the best place to put those words and phrases by thinking about the meaning of my sentence, what I want to say to my readers, and if my sentence makes sense and can be read fluently (or smoothly).

Guided Practice

1. As I read the sentence, I notice it doesn't tell me where, when, how, or why the boy played. I need to answer those questions to make my sentence paint a picture for my readers. First, I will answer the "**where**." Where did the boy play? I want to answer this first because when I read the sentence that was the first question I asked myself: "I wonder where he played?" To help my readers, I need to think of places where the boy could play. Let me make a list of places a boy could play on the board [write your places as you say them to the students]: At the park, on the playground, and in his room are all choices for where the boy could have played. I am going to choose "in his room."

Now that I know where the boy played, I need to decide the best place for "in his room" in my sentence. Let me start by putting it at the front of the sentence. [Put phrase at the start of the sentence.] Let's read it together. [Class reads: In his room the boy played.] Does this sentence sound correct? Could there be a better place to put this detail in our sentence? [Teacher solicits student responses.]

I am going to add that after "the boy played" in my sentence so it reads, "The boy played in his room." [Write this sentence under your sentence "The boy played."] I decided to put "in his room" at the end because it describes where the boy played, and if I put it at the front of the sentence, it didn't sound as good as at the end.

2. Now that we know where the boy played, we need to think about **when** the boy played in his room. I'm going to think of ways to describe when for my readers. When did the boy play? This

makes me think of times like yesterday, last night, and Saturday morning. [Write the different "when" phrases on the board as you say them to the students.] I think I will use "Saturday morning."

Let's read the sentence to decide the best place to put the phrase "Saturday morning." [Read the sentence aloud:] The boy played in his room. First I am going to add this detail after "The boy." Let's read the sentence together. [Class reads: The boy Saturday morning played in his room.] Does this sentence sound correct? Is there a better place for me to put the phrase so we can read the sentence fluently? [Solicit student responses.] Let's try adding "Saturday morning" at the end. [Class reads: The boy played in his room Saturday morning.] That could work. Let's try one more by putting our phrase at the start of the sentence. [Class reads: Saturday morning the boy played in his room.] I like having the phrase at the start of the sentence.

I'm going to add this to the front of my sentence "The boy played in his room" and expand my sentence. Now I will reread the sentence with our new phrase added to make sure it makes sense. [Write "Saturday morning the boy played in his room." under your expanded sentence "The boy played in his room."] [Teacher reads:] Saturday morning the boy played in his room. I like having "Saturday morning" at the start of the sentence. It helps the reader know when the boy is playing and reads fluently.

- 3. Next, I want to know **why** the boy was playing in his room on a Saturday morning. I need to think of a few reasons a boy would be in his room on a Saturday morning. The first thing that comes to my mind is he got in trouble, or maybe he is trying not to wake up his baby brother or sister. Why do you think the boy was playing in his room? [Solicit student responses.]*

I am going to use the phrase "didn't want to wake his baby brother" as the answer to my "why." I like this phrase because it helps me understand why the boy would be in his room on a Saturday morning instead of outside or at the park.

Now that I know why the boy is playing in his room, I need to decide where to put the phrase in my sentence. Let's read the sentence to decide the best place to put the phrase "didn't want to wake his baby brother." [Read the sentence aloud:] Saturday morning, the boy played in his room. When I think of the phrase "didn't want to wake his baby brother," it feels best to put it after "played in his room." Let's add it at the end and see if it makes sense. [Class reads: Saturday morning the boy played in his room didn't want to wake his baby brother.] Hmm, that doesn't sound right. I think my sentence is missing some words to make it complete. In a sentence when I am answering "why," I often use a key word like "because" to link my sentence together. Let me add that to my sentence right before our phrase to see if it makes more sense. [Teacher reads] Saturday morning the boy played in his room because didn't want to wake his baby brother. Hmm, I'm still missing something. Can you help me figure out what I'm missing? [Solicit student responses.]

That's right, I need to say who didn't want to wake his baby brother. I'll add "he" to my sentence. [Teacher writes new sentence and reads:] Saturday morning the boy played in his room because he didn't want to wake his baby brother.

4. *Now that I know where, when, and why the boy played, I want to answer the question “how.” How did the boy play? When I think of how, I want to come up with words that describe how the boy played in his room. I know he’s trying not to wake his brother, so I need to think about how he would play. Let me make a list of words that describe how the boy played. [Write your list on the board as you say them.] Words like “quietly,” “loudly,” or “rambunctiously” help create that picture of how the boy was playing. Because I know the boy is trying to keep his brother sleeping, I’m going to add the word “quietly” to the sentence “Saturday morning the boy played in his room because he didn’t want to wake his baby brother.”*

Now I need to decide where to add the word “quietly.” I’m describing the way the boy played, so I may want to put it near the word “played.” Let’s try that. Should I put it before or after the word “played?” [Solicit student answers.] Let’s try adding it before. [Class reads: Saturday morning the boy quietly played in his room because he didn’t want to wake his baby brother.] Does that read fluently? Let’s try it after “played.” [Class reads: Saturday morning the boy played quietly in his room because he didn’t want to wake his baby brother.] We could put “quietly” before or after “played.” I prefer after “played” as it helps me paint a picture of a boy playing in his room and trying not to wake anyone up.

5. *Now that we have expanded or stretched our sentence, we have provided more details and information for our readers. We have painted a picture for them to make in their minds as they read. We can continue to write more about why the boy was in his room playing quietly.*

Boys and girls, the one thing we don’t want to do with our expanded sentences is stretch them so much that they become long and have too many details. For example, what if I made my sentence like this. [Teacher writes new longer sentence on board and reads aloud:] Saturday morning, the tired, lonely, fidgety boy played quietly and angrily in his room, on the bed, and without any friends. What is wrong with this sentence? [Solicit student answers.] Right, it has too many details. When do I know if I have added enough details or not? Could I write different sentences about the boy being in his room playing that could add to my sentence instead of putting them all in one sentence? [Solicit student answers.] Right, we can have multiple sentences, some long some short, that help our reader paint a picture of what is happening in our story.

Optional: The teacher may ask students to provide examples for each question and write them on the board under the headings “**when, where, how, why.**”

Independent Practice

Now it's your turn. Working with a partner, I want you to work on expanding your simple sentences that have the "who" and "what" by answering our "when," "where," "how," and "why" questions to make them more detailed for your readers.

Your job is to expand these simple sentences so they meet our three criteria:

1. Our expanded sentence answers our four key questions: When? Where? Why? How?
2. Our details allow readers to create a clear picture in their heads of the action in the sentence.
3. Our expanded sentence can be read fluently.

As you work, refer to our sentence expanding notes, the posted steps titled "How to Expand a Sentence" and the expanded sentence checklist. These will help you make sure you meet our criteria.

Remember, when you add your details either from our word bank or of your own choice, it is important that you choose an appropriate place in the sentence for those details. There may be more than one place for you to put your new details. It is your job to read the sentence to make sure it can be read fluently and your details create a clear picture.

Provide a list of simple sentences for students to practice expanding. List options:

The girls sang songs.

The dogs chased the ball.

The man went outside.

My mom yelled.

I answered the phone.

I played a video game.

My dog jumped on the man.

I fell down the stairs.

The swimmer swam laps.

The jogger ran.

Today during our writing time, I will be conferencing with many of you. I will be asking you if you have looked over your own writing and found a simple sentence that doesn't provide much detail to the reader. I will ask you if you have worked on expanding that sentence for your reader to help them get a

better picture of what the text is saying. If I don't conference with you today, I want you to find a simple sentence in your writing and expand it.

Steps of Expanding Sentences

The following steps and student checklist may be used to help students complete this task in pairs or independently.

How to expand a sentence

1. **Read** the simple sentence.
2. **Choose** a key question to answer.
3. **Brainstorm** (or choose from the bank) a word or phrase that answers the key question.
4. **Place** the word or phrase in the sentence.
5. **Read** the sentence with your new detail.
 - If the sentence can be read fluently and has clear meaning, leave the detail there and go to your next key question.
 - If the sentence cannot be read fluently or does not have clear meaning, change the location of the detail and repeat steps 4 and 5.

Expanded sentence checklist

- o Sentence has a **where** detail.
- o Sentence has a **when** detail.
- o Sentence has a **why** detail.
- o Sentence has a **how** detail.
- o Readers can **visualize** what I wrote.
- o Readers can easily **understand** what the sentence means.
- o Sentence can be read **fluently**.

Assessment

Students may work cooperatively after initial instruction to expand simple sentences on chart paper by writing or pasting words and phrases together to meet the criteria for an expanded sentence.

To assess individual students, have each student complete the sentence expanding practice page independently.

Initially, teachers may decide to provide a words and phrases bank for students to use. As they improve, students may create their own words and phrases that answer the four key questions. Ultimately, application of the skill should move to student writing, with students finding simple sentences within their own compositions and expanding them to add details to their work.

To assess partners, set up chart paper where groups can show how they expanded each simple sentence by writing or taping their expanded sentences. The following rubric may be used to assess student work.

Developing	Needs Improvement	Sufficient
One or no key questions (when, where, why, and how) are answered through the addition of details.	Two or three of the key questions (when, where, why, and how) are answered through the addition of details.	All four key questions (when, where, why, and how) are answered through the addition of details.
Placement of details obscures the meaning of the sentence, making it difficult for the reader to understand what is taking place.	One or more of those details are placed in a way that obscures the meaning of the sentence.	Placement of details allows readers to construct meaning and create a clear visual of the action in the sentence.
Sentence fluency is absent due to misplacement of detail.	Sentence fluency may be absent due to misplacement of detail(s).	Sentence fluency is evident.
<p>Example: The boy played in his room.</p>	<p>Example: The boy played quietly in his room.</p>	<p>Example: Saturday morning, the boy played quietly in his room because he didn't want to wake his sister up.</p> <p>OR Last night, the excited boy played at the park for his birthday.</p>

Sentence Expanding Notes

Elementary School

Notes

Complete sentences start with a _____ letter and end with a _____ mark.

A **simple sentence** is a sentence with one subject-verb combination.

- Simple sentences tell _____ or _____ is doing something.
 - The subject tells _____ or _____ the sentence is about.
 - The verb tells us the _____.

Stretched sentences give the reader extra _____ by answering these questions:

- _____
- _____
- _____
- _____

Example

The boy	played.
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1. Who/what is the subject? _____
2. What did the boy do? _____
3. Where? (in his room) _____
4. When? _____
5. Why? _____
6. How? _____

Our expanded sentence:

_____, the boy played _____ in his room _____
_____.

Suggested sentence from lesson plan: *Saturday morning the boy played quietly in his room because he didn't want to wake his baby brother*

How to expand a sentence

1. **Read** the simple sentence.
2. **Choose** a key question to answer.
3. **Brainstorm** a word or phrase that answers the key question.
4. **Place** the word or phrase in the sentence.
5. **Read** the sentence with your new detail.

** If the sentence can be read fluently and has clear meaning, leave the detail there and go to your next key question.*

** If the sentence cannot be read fluently or does not have clear meaning, change the location of the detail and repeat steps 4 and 5.*

Expanded sentence checklist

- o Sentence has a **where** detail.
- o Sentence has a **when** detail.
- o Sentence has a **why** detail.
- o Sentence has a **how** detail.
- o Readers can **visualize or picture** what I wrote.
- o Readers can easily **understand** what the sentence means.
- o Sentence can be read **fluently**.

Sentence Stretching Words and Phrases Bank

Elementary School

HOW WORDS		
absentmindedly	happily	cautiously
irresponsibly	giddily	carefully
quietly	loudly	rambunctiously
quickly	lazily	effortlessly
soon	separately	twice
cheerfully	angrily	awkwardly

WHERE PHRASES	
outside the window	in the backyard
on the playground	in the hallway
under the table	behind the swing set
on the floor	in the bedroom
at the park	inside the closet

WHEN WORDS AND PHRASES

Saturday	last night
at noon	this morning
during recess	last Monday
during breakfast	last week
at bedtime	yesterday

WHY PHRASES

not to wake his sister	because he was disappointed
because they did not want to share	so I could escape
to get out of the rain	because of the heat and humidity
because he was in trouble	although he made a mistake
even though he was mad	to be with his friends

Simple Sentences

The girls	sang songs.
The dog	chased the ball.
The man	went outside.
My mom	yelled.
I	answered the phone.
I	played a video game.
My dog	jumped.
The swimmer	swam laps.

Sentence Expanding Practice

Elementary School

Name: _____ Date: _____

Teacher: _____ Period: _____

Directions

Expand/stretch the following sentences by adding details that answer each of the key questions. You may use examples from the Sentence Expanding Words and Phrases Bank, or you may make your own. Rewrite the sentence to include your new details.

1. **Simple sentence:** *My dad threw the ball.*

a. **Who/what (subject):** *My dad*

b. **Did what:** *threw the ball*

c. **How:** _____

d. **When:** _____

e. **Where:** _____

f. **Why:** _____

My stretched sentence: _____

2. **Simple sentence:** *The rabbit hopped.*

a. **Who/what (subject):** *The rabbit*



b. **Did what:** *hopped*

c. **How:** _____

d. **When:** _____

e. **Where:** _____

f. **Why:** _____

My stretched sentence: _____

3. **Simple sentence:** *The car drove.*

a. **Who/what (subject):** *The car*

b. **Did what:** *drove*

c. **How:** _____

d. **When:** _____

e. **Where:** _____

f. **Why:** _____

My stretched sentence: _____

4. **Simple sentence:** *The water spilled.*

a. **Who/what (subject):** *The water*

b. **Did what:** *spilled*

c. **How:** _____

d. **When:** _____

e. **Where:** _____

f. **Why:** _____

My stretched sentence: _____
