

use sentences from acknowledged great literary works, including Ancient Greece, medieval German, English, French. don't use short sentences

main rule & details (may 20, v1.1)

this is the main rule for meaning blocks:

in general, you want to make the meaning blocks longer. recognize where a meaning block needs to be longer. and recognize where a meaning block needs to be shorter.

the criterion for what goes into one meaning block is the semantic content that groups different meanings under one general topic or action.

don't think about images.

some details

you want to find balance.

Make your meaning blocks longer, so that you don't just separate where there is a comma, or a new clause. don't separate just because there is a dash or a slash or forward slash.

Make sure you think about what clauses are together expressing the same idea.

So if a clause expresses a completely new semantic content in the idea or action, it will be its own block. The key is: is there not just a new, distinct piece of meaning, but is the general semantic content different and a new general topic ?

Sometimes a new meaning is different, but still part of the same block.

Sometimes a new meaning is different, but is a new block, because it is starting a completely separate idea (i.e. different semantic content), and is not linked to the parts of the sentence that precede this new meaning.

in the past, you were making the meaning blocks too short.

so practice making each meaning block longer, to include different clauses of the sentence.

you are often separating a meaning block where there is a comma. don't use the comma as a guideline for dividing into two meaning blocks.

make sure you understand the holistic sense of one idea that links together two different clauses, because that one idea is the overall semantic content.

“In his blue gardens men and girls came and went like moths among the whisperings and the champagne and the stars.”

this is one meaning block. because the ‘men and girls’ is the primary semantic content, and the rest of the sentence (“came and went like moths among the whisperings and the champagne and the stars.”) all describes the actions of the “men and girls’.

“In his blue gardens men and girls came and went like moths” is not just the setting, but is the main subject (“men and girls”). Where it is that the “men and girls” are is explained by the clause “among the whisperings and the champagne and the stars.” The second clause (“among the whisperings and the champagne and the stars”) is the setting that explains where the “men and girls” are.

The two clauses are thus part of one single idea, having to do with the single semantic content of the ‘men and girls’.

Explanations

make your explanations very short like the explanation for Milton. Paradise Lost; and like the Victor Hugo explanation.

Don’t make the explanations so long like for the other sentences, unless the student asks you for further explanation. keep it short.

Do not use clip art icons or other images.

Do not use bold face.

You can use larger font size for a section heading.

Specific Sub-Types of the Main Rule

(18h, sun may 18. after v1.0)

look for linkages between clauses. this is the main idea of how you should divide a sentence into meaning blocks. and how to recognize when a clause is a separate idea and therefore a new meaning block.

here are some examples of how the ‘separate idea’ can be understood as the ‘unifying idea’.

to understand the unifying idea that constitutes the first meaning block, you need to see when a second ‘unifying idea’ (and a second meaning block) starts. You can study these examples:

Example no.1

This example is about a ‘unifying idea’ of a general topic.

original sentence: “This is the valley of ashes—a fantastic farm where ashes grow like wheat into ridges and hills and grotesque gardens; where ashes take the forms of houses and chimneys and rising smoke and, finally, with a transcendent effort, of men who move dimly and already crumbling through the powdery air.”

meaning block 1: “This is the valley of ashes—a fantastic farm where ashes grow like wheat into ridges and hills and grotesque gardens; where ashes take the forms of houses and chimneys and rising smoke”

meaning block 2: “and, finally, with a transcendent effort, of men who move dimly and already crumbling through the powdery air.”

in this sentence:

meaning block 1 is about the landscape, of the “ridges” and “hills” and “gardens” and “houses” and “chimneys” and “rising smoke”. Even though a semi-colon separates the two clauses, they are one meaning block, because of the unifying idea of the ‘landscape’.

the ‘landscape’ is the primary semantic content that determines the two clauses go together as one meaning block.

the second meaning block is about the people who inhabit this landscape. the “men” is the defining semantic content here.

so to understand what constitutes a separate idea, you need to understand the general topic that is being discussed in a sentence and notice when it shifts to a new general topic.

as here, the shift is from the way the “ashes” constitute the landscape, to the “men” who “move” and are “crumbling”.

Example no.2

This example is about a ‘unifying idea’ of when things happen. i.e. we divide a sentence into a different meaning block for things that are happening at same time

original sentence: “Then Achilles, weeping, left his companions and sat alone on the shore of the grey sea, gazing out over the boundless waters.”

Meaning blocks:

meaning block 1: (Then Achilles, weeping, left his companions)

meaning block 2 : (and sat alone on the shore of the grey sea, gazing out over the boundless waters.)

this is the right division into meaning blocks, because the “weeping” happens at same time as he “left his companions”. and Achilles “sat alone” at the same time as he is “gazing out”.

note that we end the first meaning block in the middle of a clause where there is no comma. sometimes this happens.

this is the defining semantic content here that determines the meaning block division:

the first things that Achilles did.

the second things that Achilles did.

original sentence: “He stretched out his arms toward the dark water in a curious way.”

original sentence: “He stretched out his arms toward the dark water in a curious way.”

this is one meaning block:

(“He stretched out his arms toward the dark water in a curious way.”)

this is a very important example, and will help you understand the basic rules of the meaning block.

None of those parts can stand alone as their own complete ideas without needing the others.

“He stretched out his arms”, “toward the dark water”, “in a curious way”—these are all part of a single idea, and that is why this sentence is one meaning block.

Victor Hugo, *Les Misérables* (translated by Isabel Hapgood)

This is an example from Victor Hugo, *Les Misérables* (translated by Isabel Hapgood)

Original sentence:

"He allowed himself to be led into the house, where, after having been tenderly cared for by the Bishop's sister, he sat silently in a chair, overwhelmed by a thousand confused feelings."

Meaning blocks:

1. (He allowed himself to be led into the house)
2. (where, after having been tenderly cared for by the Bishop's sister)
3. (he sat silently in a chair, overwhelmed by a thousand confused feelings)

Explanation:

Here, we have three separate actions, that are separated as different points in time. each separate action constitutes a meaning block

1. he enters the house
2. he is cared for
3. he sits in a chair

(don't think in terms of: “entrance, background event, and emotional result”. it's more simple than that. “first event, he enters; second event; third event, which includes emotional result”)

Original sentence: "He was no longer Jean Valjean, but No. 24601, a man who had been condemned to hard labor for stealing a loaf of bread to feed his sister's starving children, and who, after nineteen years of imprisonment and suffering, emerged into a society that rejected him, branding him forever as a criminal, despite his attempts to lead an honest life."

this is two meaning blocks

("He was no longer Jean Valjean, but No. 24601, a man who had been condemned to hard labor for stealing a loaf of bread to feed his sister's starving children,) (and who, after nineteen years of imprisonment and suffering, emerged into a society that rejected him, branding him forever as a criminal, despite his attempts to lead an honest life.")

Homer, Odyssey

This is an example:

Original sentence: "But when rosy-fingered Dawn appeared once more, they yoked the pair of mules and mounted the polished chariot, and drove it straight to the city through the echoing streets."

this is two meaning blocks

("But when rosy-fingered Dawn appeared once more, they yoked the pair of mules and mounted the polished chariot,) (and drove it straight to the city through the echoing streets.")

make your explanations shorter like this. this is good:

Meaning Blocks:

1. (But when rosy-fingered Dawn appeared once more, they yoked the pair of mules and mounted the polished chariot)

This block contains the setting of time ("rosy-fingered Dawn")

And a first set of actions (yoking and mounting the chariot).

These are closely linked — a single chain of events leading up to the departure.

2. (and drove it straight to the city through the echoing streets.)

This block contains the next step in the journey.

It's the motion — the chariot moving toward a destination.

Why This is Correct

The first block covers preparation and readiness.

The second block describes the execution of travel.

This split makes the sequence clearer and allows you to focus on each part during meaning reconstruction.

You're showing excellent progress in identifying how connected ideas can still be divided into blocks to allow deeper analysis. Great work!

(Milton. Paradise Lost)

Original sentence: “Him the Almighty Power / Hurl’d headlong flaming from the ethereal sky, / With hideous ruin and combustion, down / To bottomless perdition, there to dwell / In adamant chains and penal fire, / Who durst defy the Omnipotent to arms.”

(Milton. Paradise Lost)

two meaning blocks:

(“Him the Almighty Power / Hurl’d headlong flaming from the ethereal sky, / With hideous ruin and combustion,) (down / To bottomless perdition, there to dwell / In adamant chains and penal fire, / Who durst defy the Omnipotent to arms.”)

make your explanations very short like this explanation for Milton. Paradise Lost, and not so long as in the other cases.

explanation:

1. (“Him the Almighty Power / Hurl’d headlong flaming from the ethereal sky, / With hideous ruin and combustion”)

– This whole block is about the act of expulsion: the Almighty casting someone down violently and in fire.

2. (“down / To bottomless perdition, there to dwell / In adamant chains and penal fire, / Who durst defy the Omnipotent to arms.”)

– This block gives us the destination, punishment, and the reason: this figure is sent to Hell for defying God in battle.

Homer, Iliad

Original sentence: "Sing, O goddess, the anger of Achilles son of Peleus, that brought countless ills upon the Achaeans, and sent many valiant souls of heroes

down to Hades, and made their bodies a prey to dogs and birds, fulfilling the will of Zeus.”

(“Sing, O goddess, the anger of Achilles son of Peleus, that brought countless ills upon the Achaeans, and sent many valiant souls of heroes down to Hades,) (and made their bodies a prey to dogs and birds,) (fulfilling the will of Zeus.”)

make your explanations shorter like this, and not so long as above.

and don't use a lot of extra formatting, keep it simple.

1. (“Sing, O goddess, the anger of Achilles son of Peleus, that brought countless ills upon the Achaeans, and sent many valiant souls of heroes down to Hades,”)

→ This block contains the invocation and the main consequences: the wrath and its human cost.

2. (“and made their bodies a prey to dogs and birds,”)

→ This is a separate, focused image: the fate of the bodies after death. A distinct, horrifying detail.

3. (“fulfilling the will of Zeus.”)

→ A self-contained causal frame: all of this happened because Zeus intended it.

Rule: here are examples of how to break a sentence into meaning blocks

sentence:

“If [Tom] left the room for a minute [Daisy would] look around uneasily, and say: ‘Where’s Tom gone?’ and wear the most abstracted expression until she saw him coming in the door.”

this is two meaning blocks:

(“If [Tom] left the room for a minute [Daisy would] look around uneasily, and say: ‘Where’s Tom gone?’) (and wear the most abstracted expression until she saw him coming in the door.”)

rule: an “if... then...” construction is one meaning block

sentence:

“The father of Keesh had been a very brave man, but he had met his death in a time of famine, when he sought to save the lives of his people by taking the life of a great polar bear.”

(“The father of Keesh had been a very brave man,) (but he had met his death in a time of famine, when he sought to save the lives of his people by taking the life of a great polar bear.”)

note – the second meaning block is one meaning block, because the fact of his death is connected to the specific details and cause of his death.

sentence:

“It is not often that someone comes along who is a true friend and a good writer.”

this is one meaning block.

(“It is not often that someone comes along who is a true friend and a good writer.”)

“A few miles south of Soledad, the Salinas River drops in close to the hillside bank and runs deep and green.”

this is one meaning block.

(“A few miles south of Soledad, the Salinas River drops in close to the hillside bank and runs deep and green.”)

sentence:

“People generally see what they look for, and hear what they listen for.”

this is one meaning block.

(“People generally see what they look for, and hear what they listen for.”)

sentence:

“I resisted all the way: a new thing for me; and a circumstance which greatly strengthened the bad opinion Bessie and Miss Abbot were disposed to entertain of me.”

this is two meaning blocks:

(“I resisted all the way: a new thing for me;”) (and a circumstance which greatly strengthened the bad opinion Bessie and Miss Abbot were disposed to entertain of me.”)

sentence:

“Fog everywhere. Fog up the river, where it flows among green aits and meadows; fog down the river, where it rolls defiled among the tiers of shipping and the waterside pollutions of a great [and dirty] city.”

this is two meaning blocks:

(“Fog everywhere. Fog up the river, where it flows among green aits and meadows;”) (fog down the river, where it rolls defiled among the tiers of shipping and the waterside pollutions of a great [and dirty] city.”)

sentence:

“I had worked hard for nearly two years, for the sole purpose of infusing life into an inanimate body; but now that I had finished, the beauty of the dream vanished, and breathless horror and disgust filled my heart.”

this is two meaning blocks:

(“I had worked hard for nearly two years, for the sole purpose of infusing life into an inanimate body;”) (but now that I had finished, the beauty of the dream vanished, and breathless horror and disgust filled my heart.”)

sentence:

“She had an immense curiosity about life, and was constantly staring at it and turning it over, with an interest in it that was as fresh as it was untiring.”

this is two meaning blocks:

(“She had an immense curiosity about life,”) (and was constantly staring at it and turning it over, with an interest in it that was as fresh as it was untiring.”)

sentence:

“Her full nature, like that river of which Cyrus broke the strength by diverting its course, spent itself in channels which had no great name on the earth.”

this is two meaning blocks:

(“Her full nature, like that river of which Cyrus broke the strength by diverting its course,)
(spent itself in channels which had no great name on the earth.”)

sentence:

“She had been bored all the afternoon by Percy Gryce — the mere thought seemed to waken an echo of his droning voice — and now she had to go and listen to George Dorset, who had nothing to say and yet contrived to say it in a way that made her wonder how she could ever have thought him clever.”

this is two meaning blocks:

(“She had been bored all the afternoon by Percy Gryce — the mere thought seemed to waken an echo of his droning voice —) (and now she had to go and listen to George Dorset, who had nothing to say and yet contrived to say it in a way that made her wonder how she could ever have thought him clever.”)

original sentence: “She laughed again, as if she said something very witty, and held my hand for a moment, looking into my face.”

this is two meaning blocks

(“She laughed again, as if she said something very witty,) (and held my hand for a moment, looking into my face.”)