

TRAIT FOCUS: SENTENCE FLUENCY

Lesson Objective

Students complete a writing prompt in order to practice adding rhetorical style to their writing.

The Stylistic Use of Rhetorical Repetition

After years of practicing the writing traits and completing pages and pages of writing assignments, advanced writers become sophisticated enough to add a new element to their writing—style. They turn from merely wishing to communicate ideas to attempting to have an impact on their readers.

Experimenting with sentence fluency is an excellent way for a skillful writer to add style to his or her work. For instance, it is common for speech writers to employ repetition as a way of emphasizing a message or driving a point home. Such rhetorical repetition of words, phrases, and sentence structures highlights similarities and differences in the content, creates suspense, and packs more of an emotion impact on the audience.

The speech “I Have a Dream” by Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. is an excellent mentor text with vivid use of rhetorical repetition. Integrate the following Literature/Writing Connection lesson into your writing curriculum as a way of illustrating the use of style in the trait of sentence fluency.

Story Overview

Delivered on August 28, 1963 from the steps of the Lincoln Memorial, King’s speech was a defining moment in the Civil Rights Movement. It is often hailed as a rhetorical masterpiece for its style and beauty. It employs the rhetorical device anaphora, which is the practice of emphasizing words by placing them at the beginnings of clauses and sentences.

But beyond that, the impact of King’s speech is enduring in its vision for the hope of racial harmony in America. Over 250,000 people were in attendance as it was delivered, but countless more in the following generations also know his words by heart.

Know the Rules to Break the Rules

1. First, remind your students that the trait of sentence fluency is about adding variety and flow to writing. You want to vary the lengths and types of sentences you use. Those are the “rules” of sentence fluency that your writers have learned.
2. Now tell your students that sentence fluency is more than just smoothing out rough edges. It also includes adding style to sentences so they pack extra impact as they’re read.
3. It may sound contrary to the rules, but rhetorical repetition is a useful stylistic writing tool. For instance, consider the opening of Charles Dickens’s *A Tale of Two Cities*: “It was the best of times, it was the worst of times, it was the age of wisdom, it was the age of foolishness.”
4. Ask your students how this breaks the rules of fluency. (begin the same way, all are same length) And yet, how does this opening work stylistically? (emphasizes similarity and contrast, lyrical cadence to lines)
5. Move on to the speech “I Have a Dream.” Call attention to the beauty of the style crafted from the repetition of the phrases “I have a dream,” “let freedom ring,” and “free at last.” How does the speech seem to break the rules of sentence fluency and yet still add emotional impact?
6. Assign the following writing prompt, allowing your students plenty of time to write: *You travel into the future in your time machine and witness the devastating effects of Global Warming on the environment. Once back in your own time, you deliver a speech urging everyone to take action now before it’s too late. Write a few paragraphs of that speech, employing what rhetorical styles you can to inspire your audience into action.*
7. Once they’ve finished their paragraphs, give your writers the opportunity to read their speeches to the class. Oral delivery will help bring their rhetorical styles to life.