



Classroom Diversions:

Exercises, Games and Writing Tips
for Advanced English Language Learners

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Barbara Braid, Anna Cedro, Urszula Chęcińska, Rafał Klóska
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Reviewer

Paul Wilson, PhD

Technical proofreading

Paulina Iwan

Desktop publishing

Karolina Janiak

Cover design

Raraku.pl

Andrew Simon Tomlinson ORCID 0000-0003-4520-2012

Patrycja Marta Kamińska ORCID 0000-0002-5586-088X



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Introduction

We hope the exercises in this book bring you more pleasure than pain.

You may have found over the years that your fluency in English has been boosted by enjoyment as much as by hard-nosed study. Anglophone films, TV series, sitcoms, music, the whole gamut of English-language products meant to entertain – these strengthen your ability to understand and speak the language, with none of a classroom’s dry instruction. Because of their immersion in online gaming, some students have a lightning-fast English fluency before they even begin university. Our job as teachers is then to help the student add depth and range to this quickness. Other students fell in love with a certain English-language author when they were still in high school, whether this is a Victorian or present-day novelist, or a creator of graphic novels.

As much as we can, we have tried to make this book fun, and to instruct with a light touch. There are all sorts of games and quizzes here, testing your English vocabulary and grammar. With luck, you will finish the book with quite a few new words under your belt, more confidence in the language, and some tips that will help you write better essays and dissertations.

Two tips to give you here, now. They will stand you in good stead, no matter if you are in the first year of your BA or last year of your MA.

One: use a dictionary. A lot. Get in the habit of looking up words that are new to you or whose meaning you are unsure of. We do *not* recommend that, when you are enjoying a book or film, you break off to open a dictionary every damned time a new word appears. That is a miserable way to live. But there is a middle ground. You can note the word in passing so you can look it up later. Or, when a particular word pops up in your memory once you have finished reading or listening, look it up then. The important thing is to bolster the habit.

Two: a few times a week, take just *one* page of something that is well-written and that you enjoy, and make sure you understand *everything* happening on that page. Every word, every grammatical structure, every punctuation usage, every trick with syntax, metaphor, idiom, and so on. Just one page. Make it yours. And if something simply doesn’t make sense despite your puzzling, ask one of your teachers. We are

pleased to help. It can be depressing when a student puts grades before real engagement with a topic. It can be uplifting when a student shoves a book in my face, points at a sentence, and says, 'What the *hell* does this mean?'

There should be plenty of puzzling for you in this book.

That is why we left the answers out.

Thank you to our students at the University of Szczecin. You have been guinea pigs for many of the exercises here.

Eviction

I lost my house.

It wasn't a matter of drinking it away. It wasn't a matter of not keeping up with the mortgage payments or my wife wanting half. None of these apply, because I don't drink, mortgages are a distant memory, and my wife Jenny died four years ago. No, I mean I *lost* it. As you do your glasses.

But I never lose my glasses. I'm all there. A sharp, clear fact, as sharp and clear as my own mind: I went to the shop on Sunday morning, and when I came back, my house was gone.

*

I pulled the door to behind me and set off at just gone nine. In the night, someone had left an empty beer can on my gate post, but that was nothing. The grass was wet with dew. My roses looked lovely. The birds sang as normal.

It's a short walk down the road to the shop where, every Sunday, I buy the Telegraph. I passed Ellen Wattling putting out her laundry, and we gave each other our customary unsmiling nod. She and Jenny didn't get on, and, even if that was a long time ago and Ellen has mellowed with age, we keep it to a nod, my loyalty intact. Further down the road I got a wave from Ryan Foley, heading off for bowls in his clapped-out Nissan. Then Mary Wilson, on a stepladder to clear leaves from her garage rain-gutter, called out hello. Ordinary things. Normal. One Sunday no different from all the others.

The road is steep and on the way back I don't rush. The corner shop had sold out of Telegraphs. If I had known that, I could have gone to Ganston's instead, and now, coming up the hill with the Observer under my arm, I was pissed off. It's not the same. The wrong paper, the wrong crossword can take the shine off a day. I wondered who had nabbed the last Telegraph, and if the bastards even bothered with the crossword.

I passed Number 11, then 13, 15, 17, reached my own garden gate, opened it, shut it behind me, saw, halted, and dropped my Observer.

When I left Number 19, Wyedale Road, it was a three-up, four-down semi-detached house. My house. The house I had spent half my life in. When I returned, my house was gone, and another stood in its place.

These things take a bit of time to absorb.

A girl and a boy who had been playing on the front lawn (*my front lawn*) watched me. I looked at the house in a daze. It no longer adjoined number 17, but stood apart, a pretentious, red-brick, four-square monstrosity. It seemed to fold its arms with self-satisfaction. A trumped-up portico sheltered a large front door, and it was through this that the children ran when I just stood there saying nothing. The boy called out to his mother. The girl stopped and looked back at me from the doorway, her face bright, excited, as if this were some playground game, then she disappeared inside too, passing under a chandelier in the hallway.

My legs shook. I turned, reached for something I didn't know I was reaching for and found it: the beer can still on the gatepost.

So I'm sure I looked a sight when the woman came out with her yellow rubber gloves on. Her hair had a prim hairdressed look, and her skirt and top were smart, Sunday smart, even though she must have been cleaning. She stood in the portico, the boy on her right, the girl on her left, and I stood by the gate, the empty beer can in my hand, my newspaper on the grass, its pages turning over methodically in a curious morning breeze.

'Can I help you?' she said, staying where she was.

I couldn't speak. I gestured at the monstrosity of pillar and brick, but the can was in my hand. I must have looked like an old wino after a night on the town.

'Timmy, Rebecca,' she said. 'Inside.'

She watched them as they sloped into the hallway, under that hideous chandelier. When she faced me again, I had already gone.

Ex. 1: Find 10 words that appeared in the text. They can go horizontally, vertically or diagonally.

B	G	Y	Q	N	K	M	I	D	X	C
O	S	A	F	A	Z	Y	N	W	O	L
W	D	Q	T	B	V	R	T	S	P	A
L	G	H	Q	E	C	J	A	W	O	P
I	Y	O	T	M	P	P	C	Z	R	P
N	X	J	Z	F	K	O	T	Y	T	E
G	E	Q	U	X	Y	P	S	U	I	D
T	S	L	O	P	E	R	L	T	C	O
M	E	L	L	O	W	I	R	H	O	U
Q	Z	B	X	Y	A	M	Y	I	Q	T
M	O	N	S	T	R	O	S	I	T	Y

Ex. 2: Fill in gaps a-e with the words from the exercise above. Next, use the same words to complete sentences 1-5.

- a) A structure to which a gate is fixed, or to which it fastens when closed:
a _____
 - b) To become more relaxed, easy-going, or less severe over time; to soften in character or temperament: to _____
 - c) To catch or seize someone or something, especially suddenly or unexpectedly; to apprehend or capture: to _____
 - d) Worn-out, dilapidated, or in a very poor condition due to long use or neglect; typically used to describe machinery, vehicles, or other objects:

 - e) Not damaged or impaired in any way; complete, whole, or undamaged; remaining in its original condition: _____
1. Despite its _____ appearance, the vintage car had an undeniable charm, evoking nostalgia for a bygone era of automotive craftsmanship.
 2. After years of intense rivalry, their relationship began to _____ , gradually transforming into a profound friendship marked by mutual respect and understanding.

3. Despite facing numerous challenges, her unwavering determination and resilience left her spirit _____, shining brightly amid adversity.
4. The detective managed to _____ the elusive suspect just as he was attempting to flee the scene, bringing an end to the months-long investigation.
5. As she walked down the path, she couldn't help but notice the intricate carvings on the old _____, hinting at the rich history of the estate.

Ex. 3: Deduce the meaning of the expressions containing the word "sight" in PART A. Next, match the sentences in PART A to their more elaborate equivalents in PART B.

PART A

- a) He wouldn't want to buy something sight unseen.
- b) He's a sight better than he was yesterday.
- c) You're a sight for sore eyes!
- d) The bill read "30 days after sight."
- e) He had hoped to become a doctor, but he had to lower his sights after his disappointing exam results.
- f) He has set his sights on winning the competition.
- g) Make sure you line up the sights before you fire the gun.
- h) He had a very enjoyable week in Florence, soaking up the sights and sounds.
- i) He was a real sight in his old clothes.

PART B

1. Initially aspiring to pursue a career in medicine, he was compelled to adjust his ambitions following his unsatisfactory examination outcomes.
2. His condition has significantly improved since yesterday.
3. Ensure that you properly align the aiming mechanism before pulling the trigger of the firearm.
4. It's truly delightful to see you!
5. He is determined to emerge victorious in the competition.
6. He was quite a spectacle in his worn-out attire.
7. He would not be inclined to purchase an item without having had the opportunity to inspect it firsthand.
8. He had an immensely pleasurable week in Florence, immersing himself in its visual and auditory treats.
9. The invoice stipulated a payment term of "30 days after visual confirmation."

Ex. 3A: Answer these questions:

Would you adopt a pet sight unseen?

What are you a sight better at now than when you were a teenager?

Is there anything or anybody you find a sight for sore eyes?

When was the last time you had to lower your sights?

What have you set your sights on in the near future?

The sights of which city would you like to experience?

Have you ever received a bill that said "payable at sight"?

Ex. 4: Divide these words into four groups. Can you give each group a name that would be a commonly used synonym for all the words in it?

maven, prohibitionist, wino, apprentice, tosspot, greenhorn, abstainer, fledgling, sot, rummy, teetotalist, teetotaler, shark, neophyte, connoisseur, virtuoso

Ex. 5: Fill in the gaps with the nouns from exercise 4:

1. He proudly identified as a ____ o _____, believing in the benefits of a sober lifestyle.
2. His skill on the piano marked him as a ____ t _____, captivating audiences with his brilliant performances.
3. The ____ u ____ sat at the bar, nursing his drink as he regaled anyone who would listen with tales of his glory days.
4. The _____ o ____ stumbled through his first day on the job, but he was determined to prove himself worthy of his position.
5. The ____ p _____ eagerly soaked up knowledge from his mentor, eager to master the craft.
6. As a ____ n _____ of art, she could easily distinguish between the works of masters and mere imitations.
7. The ____ r ____ of the stock market, he made savvy investments that consistently yielded high returns.
8. The ____ s ____ was often the life of the party, but his excessive drinking was a cause for concern among his friends.
9. As a ____ h ____ in the field of gourmet cooking, she approached each recipe with enthusiasm and a willingness to learn.

10. The _____ i _____ advocated for a society free from the influence of alcohol, promoting healthier alternatives for socializing.
11. Despite being a _____ d _____ in the world of entrepreneurship, she had big dreams and a drive to succeed.
12. The _____ b _____ politely declined the offer of champagne, citing personal reasons for avoiding alcohol.
13. Known as a _____ a _____ in the world of fine wines, he could discern the subtlest flavors with a single sip.
14. Despite his reputation as a _____ t _____, he still managed to hold down a high-paying job.
15. The _____ o _____ stumbled down the alley, clutching a half-empty bottle of cheap liquor.
16. As a _____ e _____, she never touched a drop of alcohol, preferring to savour life's moments with a clear mind.

Ex. 6: Match the expressions in bold to their definitions (which, here, are not the kind of *full* definitions one might find in a dictionary). Think of their Polish equivalents.

on the house, go (all) round the houses, an empty house, get on like a house on fire, out of house, house of cards, a full house, get/put your own house in order

1. A precarious or unstable situation, system, or organization that is delicately balanced and easily disrupted, often with severe consequences.
2. To address and resolve one's own issues, problems, or shortcomings before attempting to criticize, advise, or intervene in the affairs of others.
3. To establish an instant and exceptionally strong rapport or friendship with someone.
4. To take a lengthy, indirect, or unnecessarily complicated route or approach to reach a destination, goal, or conclusion. This expression implies wasting time doing or asking something in a very complicated way, but it can also refer to literally taking a route that is much longer than necessary.
5. This phrase is used to indicate that the cost is being covered by the establishment as a courtesy to the customer.
6. In a business or organizational setting, it typically refers to activities, services, or resources that are sourced or acquired from external sources or third-party providers rather than being produced or managed internally.
7. In a card game such as poker, it describes a hand consisting of three of a kind and a pair (for example, three kings and two tens).

8. In real estate, it refers to a property that is unoccupied by tenants or residents. In a theatrical or entertainment setting, it may refer to a show with no audience or very few spectators present.

Ex. 6A: Complete sentences with the correct expressions containing the word “house” from the definitions above. There are two sentences per expression.

- a) She realized that to effectively lead her team, she needed to _____, addressing personal weaknesses before guiding others to success.
- b) The stand-up comedian felt disheartened as she performed to _____, her jokes falling flat without the laughter and energy of a responsive audience.
- c) The bartender decided to put the customer’s drinks _____ after hearing about their special occasion, ensuring they had a memorable evening.
- d) With the project deadline looming, they brought in additional expertise from _____ to ensure timely completion.
- e) The company opted to outsource its marketing efforts, hiring an agency to handle promotions and advertisements _____.
- f) The fragile coalition government teetered like _____, each decision threatening to bring the entire structure crashing down.
- g) The politician’s speech seemed to _____, touching on various issues without ever providing concrete solutions.
- h) The new colleagues hit it off immediately, _____ and forming a bond that promised collaboration and camaraderie.
- i) Hosting a family reunion, their home was _____, bustling with laughter, conversations, and the aroma of home-cooked meals.
- j) His elaborate scheme to deceive investors was built upon a foundation as precarious as _____, ready to collapse at the slightest scrutiny.
- k) Before criticizing others’ work ethics, it’s imperative to first _____ and ensure your performance meets the highest standards.
- l) The theatre boasted _____ for the opening night of the highly anticipated play, with every seat occupied by eager patrons.
- m) From the moment they met, they _____, sharing endless laughter and effortlessly understanding each other’s quirks.

- n) As a gesture of goodwill, the restaurant manager offered dessert _____ to apologize for the delayed service.
- o) After the children moved out for college, the once-lively household became _____, echoing with memories of their laughter and footsteps.
- p) Instead of addressing the issue directly, he _____, circling the topic with irrelevant anecdotes and avoiding the core problem.

But where do you go?

It's like a power cut. The television switches itself off, and after the surprise you say, 'Well how about a nice cup of tea?' But of course that's out. Idiot, you say, but then you go to boil water on the electric hob, and so on, and that's how it was. I walked away from what was my home, telling myself I needed to go home for a good lie down. I rounded the corner on to Baxter Street, aching for my kitchen to think in. And it was only when I turned left on to Lower Wyedale Road and again caught myself at it (saying I should get straight back to my phone and call someone, my sister in Halifax, my son in London, an old friend, anyone), that the shock of it, the shock of what was no longer there, really hit me. My God. I've got nowhere to go.

But if my mind led me in circles, so did my legs. They had, if you like, a mind of their own, for they had taken me down Baxter Street and Lower Wyedale Road, along Petrie Lane, and thus back on to Wyedale Road proper, my own street. I passed the forties and thirties, praying that my old house would be waiting for me at number 19. Please, God, let it be so. I'm no believer, but please. As I got closer, I didn't look up. I couldn't face it. I recognised the base of 21's garden wall. And now my old gate. Number 19. I stopped. I looked up. And the new house was there, as real as the day around me.

Through a window to the left of that ridiculous portico I saw the woman again. She was washing up dishes, staring blandly into the front garden. Then she saw me, and at once her face was territorial, lips tight, nostrils flared. This was her house; the strange old man was back. She snapped off her yellow gloves and turned and away I went again, down my street for the third time that morning.

I heard a man's voice behind me. I don't understand why I scuttled away as I did, shoulders hunched, head ducked, like some town councillor who's just been charged for shoplifting or wanking behind a bus stop. I had never willed harm to anyone else, or not for long. I believe that the balance of my life tells for me, not against me, and that any wickedness I have committed is vastly outweighed by good deeds and good

thoughts. But I scuttled away from that man as if I had earned whatever was happening now.

'Excuse me, mate?' he called out. 'Oi! Mate!'

I didn't look back.

The last shout, competing with a van as it revved up Petrie Lane: 'You stay away! You hear me?'

*

And you see, still, *still*, I hurried away as though I were hurrying home, as though my old house were just around the next few corners. Live in the same place for thirty-five years and it becomes part of your body. I was like those amputees who swear they can wriggle their missing fingers.

Down to the end of my street again. I passed Ellen Wattling's laundry for the third time. Then left again on to Baxter Street. Then Lower Wyedale Road. Everything else was the same. It was the same orange towel on Ellen Wattling's line. It was the same minicab badly parked on Baxter Street. It was the same tatty Lower Wyedale Road. I realised I was still carrying the empty beer can. I dropped it in a bin. Then I remembered how I had reached for it on my gatepost and I went back to the bin – the can lay in a nest of chip-shop papers, transparent with fat. I turned it to see the brand. Stella Artois. I walked on, slower. What had taken my house but spared the can? If the can were alive, what would it have seen?

I had a coffee near the dry cleaners. When the waitress gave me my change I somehow managed to squeeze out a smile for her. As I drank, I watched the world go on as it always has. There was no comfort in this. Life is a clock, doing what it has to do for itself. It seemed a brutal fact now. Cars passing outside, the coffee machine rasping, the door announcing customers with an old-fashioned bell. At another table, a man about my own age sipped his tea, enormous jowls wobbling when he swallowed. Maybe he had thyroid trouble. But thyroid trouble or not, the chances were that his morning tomorrow would feel little different from his morning today. I felt that shame building up inside me, as if everyone in the coffee shop knew I had lost my house and understood why. I drained my cup, then I was out. I headed straight up Lower Wyedale Road. Left on to Petrie Lane. Left on to my own street.

And again, the red-brick house was there.

This was how the day went. It was the pattern till nightfall. Another coffee or tea (each time in a different place), another walk, the same red-brick house. Hour after

hour. The marrow in my legs ached as it used to when I was a teenager, but now I was going down, not up.

So yes, you lose your glasses. You can't believe they're not where you looked a minute ago. You keep looking. For the tenth time, you lift the same cushion.

By six-thirty, it was dark. Car headlights showed drivers from their work to their homes. Streetlamps came on. Buses stopped at bus stops. Sainsbury's glowed inside and would be open till midnight. I knew that my house was gone.

I sat on a bench in the park. I shrivelled down into my coat, fists clenched in my pockets. Cold feels different, it picks deeper at your skin, when it knows you have nowhere to run. I closed my eyes. It was too cold to sleep, but I tried. I thought that if could only manage it, I might wake up to something else. Except I knew that was impossible. I knew I was here, now. It – whatever it was – had got me.

This was the bench where the down-and-outs would sometimes gather, with their layers of greasy clothing, their broken faces and wet eyes. How can the homeless laugh as much as they do? A solitary bottle in a paper bag lay on the grass, the paper ironed to the neck where the drinker had held it. They were elsewhere tonight, this bench just one of their available homes. Some teenagers – with all that life to go – whooped and screamed far away, on the other side of the ponds. The cold slithered around my ankles and up my shins. It reached down my collar for my back. I struggled to keep my eyes closed. I began to shiver. I felt the shame closing in on me. Walking down the same streets, drinking one coffee after another with no house to return to – people must have noticed. There must have been more than one pair of eyes on me today. Each time I had confirmed that the red-brick house was still there, I turned into a trespasser again. Everything about the woman, the children, the man's voice, smelt of ownership. And I had slunk by, hoping no one saw.

Ex. 7: In the text, the last shout competed “with a van as it revved up Petrie Lane.” *To rev up* is an unusual verb in English that ends in “v” not followed by a vowel. It does, however, double the “v” in the past simple tense and in the gerund. Here are some other exceptional words that contain double “v” letter:

civvy, skivvy, navyy, chavvy, divvy, savvy, chivvy, bevvy, bivvy, luvvy, flivver

Read these sentences, deduce the meanings of the words and match them to their definitions.

1. As a seasoned civvy, she effortlessly transitioned from military life to civilian pursuits, embracing new challenges with grace.
2. After a long day of hiking, we decided to bivvy under the stars, enjoying the simplicity of sleeping out in nature.
3. His savvy in financial matters allowed him to navigate the complex world of investments with confidence and success.
4. Let's meet at the pub tonight and have a bevvvy to celebrate your promotion!
5. He was a farm boy who drove a flivver through fields of mud every day to medical school.
6. The flashy gold jewellery and designer tracksuit gave him a chavvy appearance.
7. Despite her modest upbringing, she insisted on hiring a skivvy to handle menial tasks around the house, a decision that raised eyebrows among her peers.
8. The impending deadline forced the team to chivvy through the project, working tirelessly to ensure its completion ahead of schedule.
9. Although he started as a navy with no formal qualifications, his dedication and hard work propelled him to the top of the construction industry.
10. With his remarkable talent and stage presence, he captivated audiences worldwide, establishing himself as a luvvy of unparalleled charisma.
11. It was time to divvy up the resources amongst the group, ensuring each member received their fair share of the profits.

Definitions:

1. _____ : (adjective) – British slang term meaning characteristic of a certain type of young person, often of working-class background, who dresses in flashy or casual clothing and may be associated with antisocial behaviour.
2. _____ : (noun) – Informal term, primarily British, referring to someone who is affectionate, sentimental, or overly expressive. It can also refer to someone involved in the theatre or film industry.
3. _____ : (noun) – A colloquial term, often used humorously or nostalgically, to describe a small, cheap, or old-fashioned car, typically one that is unreliable or in poor condition.
4. _____ : (noun) – Informal term, often used in British and American English, referring to a share, portion, or division of something, especially when distributing resources or responsibilities among a group. It can also be used as a verb meaning to divide or distribute.

5. _____ : (noun) – Originally a term for a domestic servant, especially one who performs menial tasks such as cleaning, cooking, or laundry. In contemporary usage, it can refer to any subordinate or low-ranking worker who performs tedious or unskilled labour.
6. _____ : (noun) – Historically referred to a labourer, particularly one employed in construction or excavation projects, such as building railways or digging canals. In modern usage, it may still mean someone who does hard manual labour.
7. _____ : (adjective) – Having practical knowledge, understanding, or shrewdness, especially in dealing with practical matters or people. (noun) Acumen, expertise, or understanding, particularly in a specific field or domain.
8. _____ : (verb) – To harass, nag, or urge persistently or repeatedly, often in an attempt to encourage action or speed up a process.
9. _____ : (noun) – A colloquial term, mostly British, referring to a drink, especially an alcoholic one. It is often used informally to describe a round of drinks or a drinking session.
10. _____ : (noun) – Short for civilian, referring to someone who is not a member of the military or police force. It is often used in military contexts to distinguish between military personnel and civilians.
11. _____ : (noun) – Short for bivouac, a temporary shelter or encampment used by soldiers or outdoor enthusiasts, typically consisting of a simple tent or sleeping bag.

Ex. 8: Match the words to their definitions: rasp, jowl, tatty, whoop, slither, slink, shrivel, chip-shop, wobble. If unsure, refer to the story before looking them up in a dictionary.

_____ : To become smaller, wrinkled, and desiccated, typically due to loss of moisture or vitality, as does old fruit or vegetables, or parts of our body as we age.

_____ : To move stealthily or furtively, or with a loose-limbed sensuousness. A burglar might do it through your living room, a model might do it down the catwalk, and a cat does it all the time, except when fleeing a deranged Labrador in the park.

_____ : The lower part of a person's or animal's cheek, especially when it is fleshy or drooping, commonly associated with older individuals or certain breeds of dogs known for their loose facial skin.

_____ : To move unsteadily from side to side with a slight shaking motion, often implying a lack of balance or stability, as with a table that has uneven legs, or a human body that has absorbed twelve pints of lager and still thinks it can cycle home.

_____ : Showing signs of wear and tear, often used to describe something that is shabby, frayed, or in poor condition, such as a piece of clothing or furniture that has become worn out over time.

_____ : To utter a loud, enthusiastic cry or shout, often expressing excitement, triumph, or joy. American audiences do this for no reason whatsoever.

_____ : A casual dining establishment, typically found in the UK, that specializes in deep-fried fish and chips, and has provided gainful employment for British cardiologists since 1860.

_____ : To emit a harsh, grating sound, usually produced by rubbing two rough surfaces together or by the vibration of certain musical instruments, such as that of a rough file or a cabasa.

_____ : To move smoothly and gracefully with a twisting or undulating motion, often associated with the movement of snakes or other serpentine creatures.

Ex. 9: Replace the Polish words with their equivalents from exercise 8:

In the heart of a forgotten town stood a **zaniedbany** old house, its once-grand facade now weathered and worn. It loomed over the cobblestone streets like a relic of another era, its windows boarded up and its roof sagging with neglect. Nearby, the aroma of fried food wafted from a **bar szybkiej obsługi**, the only sign of life in the desolate neighbourhood. The patrons whispered tales of the house's mysterious past, claiming it was haunted by restless spirits and guarded by unseen forces.

One stormy night, as the wind began to **hałasować** against the decaying walls, a group of adventurous teenagers dared each other to explore the abandoned house. With nervous laughter and pounding hearts, they approached the creaking front door. As they entered, a chill ran down their spines, and they felt the weight of centuries-old secrets pressing down upon them. Shadows danced in the dim light, and the floorboards creaked with each uncertain step, **chybocząc się** beneath their feet.

Suddenly, a **okrzyk** of excitement echoed through the house as one of the teenagers stumbled upon a hidden passage concealed behind a **pomarszczony** tapestry. With a mixture of fear and curiosity, they descended into the darkness below. But as they ventured deeper into the labyrinthine corridors, a sense of unease settled over them like a heavy fog. Strange sounds echoed through the tunnels, and they felt unseen eyes watching their every move.

Then they heard a low **ślizgający się** sound, causing the bravest among them to freeze in terror. Something unseen brushed against their legs, sending a shiver down their spines. They wanted to **wymknąć się** away, but the passage seemed to shift and twist behind them, leading them further into the depths of the haunted house. With each step, they could feel the darkness closing in around them, and they knew they were not alone.

As they finally emerged into the moonlit night, breathless and trembling, they swore never to speak of their harrowing ordeal. For they had glimpsed the true nature of the mysterious house, and they knew its secrets were best left undisturbed.

Ex. 10: Improve the machine translation

Ale jeśli moje myśli prowadziły mnie w kółko, to również robiły moje nogi. Miały, jeśli chcesz, własny umysł, bo zabrały mnie w dół ulicy Baxter i Lower Wyedale Road, wzdłuż Petrie Lane, a potem z powrotem na właściwą ulicę Wyedale, moją własną ulicę. Mijałem czterdziestki i trzydziestki, modląc się, że moje stare domostwo będzie na mnie czekać pod numerem 19. Proszę, Boże, niech tak będzie. Nie jestem wierzący, ale proszę. Kiedy zbliżałem się, nie podnosiłem wzroku. Nie mogłem tego znieść. Rozpoznałem podstawę ogrodzenia numeru 21. A teraz moja stara furgonka. Numer 19. Zatrzymałem się. Podniosłem wzrok. A nowy dom był tam, tak realny jak dzień wokół mnie.

Poprzez okno po lewej stronie tego absurdalnego portyku znowu zobaczyłem tę kobietę. Zmywała naczynia, obojętnie patrząc na ogród przed domem. Potem mnie zobaczyła, i od razu jej twarz stała się terytorialna, wargi zaciśnięte, nozdrza rozszerzone. To był jej dom; dziwny stary człowiek wrócił. Szybko zdjęła swoje żółte rękawiczki, odwróciła się i znowu ruszyłem w dół mojej ulicy, po raz trzeci tego ranka.

Usłyszałem męski głos za mną. Nie rozumiem, dlaczego uciekłem tak, jak to zrobiłem, zgarbione ramiona, skulona głowa, jak jakiś radny miejski, który właśnie został oskarżony o kradzież w sklepie lub masturbację za przystankiem autobusowym. Nigdy nie życzyłem nikomu zła, przynajmniej nie na długo. Wierzę, że równowaga mojego życia przemawia za mną, nie przeciwko mnie, i że wszelka nikczemność, którą popełniłem, jest znacznie przewyższona przez dobre uczynki i dobre myśli. Ale oddaliłem się od tego człowieka, jakbym zasłużył na to, co teraz się działo.

But the little girl saw me.

The second from last time I went by, she was sitting on the steps under the portico. The last, I had looked up, and she had looked down from a bedroom window, her head tipped on its side with blank curiosity, as if I were a beast in a zoo whose name she should be able to recall.

*

I don't know what possessed me to go to Ellen Wattling's. The cold drove me out of the park, but I could have gone elsewhere: to Ryan's, for example, or the Owens', John and Maxy Davidson's, Mary Wilson's. It was the least suitable, least likely place for me to fetch up. But it felt inevitable. It was like saying You've won. To whom? Well there you have it. I'm the puzzle man, I'm the one who's supposed to love his cryptic crossword. Maybe I was telling myself how low I had come, how bad things must now be to cross to Jenny's old foe. I walked up her short garden path, past the bare washing line, and after a good minute's hesitation knocked on her door. A light came on in her hallway. I felt I had spun round and round like a ball in a funnel and that gravity had at last worked me into the spout.

You've got to give it to Ellen, she was civil enough not to ask straight out what had brought me here. I saw the surprise in her face, brought swiftly under control, then she nodded as if we were again separated by a stretch of lawn and her garden wall. All that trouble with her and Jenny, all those short nods and not talking since then, and now here I stand.

And then: 'I see you've brought your washing in.' (How was that for an opening?)

Arms folded, she looked at her washing line. Then she looked at me, her eyes widening.

'Which is a good thing,' I added. 'I mean on a night like this. I mean I just thought I'd say. You know.'

I smiled, I think like a lunatic.

We kept staring at each other. Then something changed in her face, a kind of subsidence under the skin that made her look older than she already was, and the eyes changed focus, as if from an object far behind me to me myself. She reached out, put her hand on my forearm, and that's when I cried.

*

So I ended up in Ellen Wattling's living room, with a cup of tea in my hand, and her sitting bolt upright on the edge of her sofa, watching me, and for a long time there was no sound but the trickle from a fish tank next to the television, until at last she said, 'Jack, is there something you want to tell me?

When she said that, I saw Jenny, shaking her head, her mouth pinched in hatred for the woman whose teacup I was now raising to my lips.

'Ellen. Maybe I shouldn't be here.'

'I'm not stopping you. But you knocked on my door, Jack. You can't knock on my door and say nothing.'

Well, it took a bit of nerve, but I told her. It seemed that she neither believed nor disbelieved, listening as if this was a tale she might later be asked to repeat to another person. But as I went on, she became stiller and stiller. When I finished, she sat there, motionless for another half minute or so, then suddenly stood up. I thought she was angry. She went into the hallway, came back thrusting her arms into the sleeves of a coat, and said, 'Are we going?'

*

Fair play, her shock almost matched mine. She stood there, her mouth hanging open as she stared at the red-brick house, by night a miniature palace with its chandelier twinkling through the semicircle above the door, its spotlights on the lawn washing the front into pink and shadow.

She looked at me. 'Is it real?'

'The people are real.'

Her astonishment helped. Whatever had encircled me in the park now moved back, just a step, but it helped. As we stood there looking at the house, I thought again about the way homeless people laugh. How do they do it when their lives are such a mess?

*

A mug of Ovaltine. Biscuits on a plate on Ellen's coffee table. I wolfed them down.

'When did you last eat?'

'Today?' I stuffed another biscuit into my mouth and through it said, 'I haven't.'

She went into the kitchen. Saucepans clattered, cupboards banged, then a frying pan sizzled. The smell of bacon reached me and my stomach growled.

'This can't be, it's just impossible!' she called out.

I nodded though she was out of view. The bacon crackled as she flipped it over, then came the whoosh of an extractor fan above the hob. I looked around, at Ellen's life, the fish tank, the magazine rack, the television, the comfy sofa, a bean bag for putting your feet up, the Constable print on the wall. Now, I thought, if I were only somebody else.

She called me into the kitchen.

She sat facing me across the table while I began eating a plate of bacon and eggs she had put before me. She looked down, eyes moving from one patch of linen tablecloth to another as she thought. She shook her head to herself. The eggs were delicious, yellows and whites sliding down my throat, so something was real.

'Jack, I don't want you to get angry, all right?'

'Why should I get angry?'

'Because I don't know.' She looked away from me, uneasy. 'Because I haven't been up the street for about three months.'

'I'm sorry, I'm not with you.'

'Down, yes, but not up,' she explained. 'Not past your house.'

I was about to ask what she was saying, but then I realised. When she had stared at the house, then looked at me with wonder: she had been wondering about me, not the house.

'But you didn't know the new house was there?'

'No,' she said. 'That was a surprise.'

'And you're sure that's what the surprise was?'

She didn't answer.

'Ellen, I've seen you several times over the last few months. When I'm going down the road. I've *seen* you see me.'

She nodded, wary, silent.

We kept staring at each other. That chance of comfort I had felt in her living room, however provisional, slipped even further away.

Half a minute later, when I had begun eating again, she said, 'I want to ask something.'

'Ask away.'

'And if you just walk out of here, I'll understand.'

I stopped chewing.

'But we have to be logical, don't we. I mean we have to eliminate everything.' She leaned her chin on her fists, an attempt to look businesslike that didn't quite come off. 'I mean you didn't see any builders.'

'You what?'

'I don't know. Jack, you've got to *help* me here. When you left for the shop: you didn't see any big lorries or men in hard hats, that sort of thing?'

I swallowed what I'd stopped chewing. 'You mean, sort of waiting around?'

'Yes.'

I looked thoughtful about this myself, though of course really I was thinking about her. 'Afraid not,' I said.

She looked at the window behind me and frowned. 'Then we have to think.'

*

The next thing I heard was, 'Jack, come on,' gentle, close to my ear.

I couldn't remember falling asleep, there at Ellen's kitchen table. My gammy hip ached. The tiredness from a day of pavements was like the soft thud of a cricket bat on the crease. She was helping me to my feet, her hand under my arm. The plate was gone, the linen tablecloth crumbless again.

She led me to the spare bedroom. From the street, I must have seen through its window hundreds of times, but I'd never been inside. There was a dressing table, a pine cupboard, a wicker armchair, and a single bed, whose counterpane had been folded down to reveal fresh white sheets. The furniture was new. You could still smell the shop on it. It was strange to realise that Ellen had been moving on, keeping up with the world, while I had held the same version of her in my mind for years. Though she and I had nothing to do with each other, that shop smell was a taunt.

She looked at me, then away fast with some embarrassment that she hid by checking over the room again.

'Do you need another pillow?'

'One's fine. Ellen, I'm so grateful.'

'That's enough of that.' She turned for the door. Before closing it and leaving me alone in her spare bedroom, she looked at me steadily and said, 'You'd do the same for me.'

Ex. 11: Which of the sentences below mean the same as "You've got to give it to Ellen"? What do the others mean?

1. Ellen deserves acknowledgment.
2. Put the blame on Ellen.
3. Ellen merits recognition.

4. Ellen is to be held accountable for it.
5. Ellen is the one to blame for it.
6. Credit must be given to Ellen.
7. The fault lies with Ellen.
8. Ellen deserves commendation.
9. It's Ellen's responsibility to take the blame.
10. It's only fair to acknowledge Ellen's contribution.

Ex. 12: Here are eighteen expressions; can you put them in 9 pairs in which one expression is matched by its antonym? (E.g., "bold-fearful.")

depart	fair
inlet	tip on the side
foul	remain stationary
bolt upright	sane
balance	fetch up
avoidable	increase
spin round	slouched
lunatic	spout
subsidence	inevitable

Ex. 13: In the text, "Saucepans clattered, cupboards banged, then a frying pan sizzled. The smell of bacon reached me and my stomach growled". Four words from this excerpt are needed to complete the sentences below.

1. The dishes _____ loudly as they fell from the cabinet, shattering the silence of the kitchen.
2. The steak _____ enticingly on the hot grill, releasing mouthwatering aromas into the air.
3. A sudden _____ echoed through the house, causing everyone to jump in surprise.
4. From the depths of the forest, a low _____ could be heard, sending shivers down the spines of the hikers.
5. As the fireworks exploded in the night sky, they filled the air with a cacophony of _____ and pops.
6. The old pipes groaned and _____ as the water pressure increased, signaling a potential plumbing issue.

7. With a loud _____, the metal gate swung open, welcoming visitors to the grand estate.
8. Lightning streaked across the sky, followed by a deafening _____ of thunder that reverberated through the valley.
9. The _____ symphony of the frying pan greeted each droplet of water.
10. The hungry lion began to _____ menacingly as it stalked its prey through the tall grass.

Ex. 14: Out of the following 20 sentences, five misuse words that refer to sound. Which ones are they? And what would the correct words be? (With the right grammatical form here, too.)

1. The old windows would rattle in the wind.
2. The frying pan began to hiss as the water droplets hit the hot surface.
3. The wooden floorboards would roar with each step.
4. The refrigerator would hum softly in the background.
5. Outside, birds chirped merrily in the trees.
6. The lion let out a mighty crack, echoing through the savanna.
7. As the kettle boiled, it would whistle sharply.
8. The heavy book fell to the ground with a loud thud.
9. Bees buzzed around the flowers in the garden.
10. The tree branch whirred under the weight of the snow.
11. The phone rang incessantly, disrupting the quiet afternoon.
12. Leaves rustled in the breeze, creating a soothing sound.
13. The car screeched to a halt as the driver slammed on the brakes.
14. Raindrops splattered against the windowpane.
15. The keys jingled in his pocket as he walked.
16. Wind chimes tinkled melodically in the gentle breeze.
17. The balloon creaked suddenly, startling everyone in the room.
18. The door slammed shut behind her, echoing through the house.
19. The curtains swished as she drew them closed.
20. The fan blades popped quietly overhead, providing a cool breeze.

Ex. 15: Which of the five meanings provided below corresponds to “crease” in the sentence “The tiredness from a day of pavements was like the soft thud of a cricket bat on the crease”? How would you translate all 5 homonyms into Polish?

1. **A fold or wrinkle.** In the context of clothing or fabric, a crease refers to a line or fold formed when material is folded or bent, sometimes intentionally for the purpose of neatness or storage. For instance, “She ironed out the creases in her dress before the important meeting.”
2. **A mark or line on the skin.** In a medical or anatomical context, a crease can refer to a permanent or semi-permanent line or indentation on the skin, often due to repeated movement or age. An example could be, “He had deep creases around his eyes from years of laughter.”
3. **A fissure or crack.** In a broader sense, crease can also refer to a narrow opening or gap, such as a crease in the earth’s surface or a crease in a rock formation. For instance, “The hiker carefully navigated the creases in the rocky terrain.”
4. **A rigid division or separation.** Figuratively, crease can signify a distinct boundary or separation, often used metaphorically to describe divisions in society or opinions. For example, “There was a crease between the two factions, making compromise difficult.”
5. **A defined area of a playing field.** In sports, particularly cricket and baseball, crease refers to a marked line or boundary on the field that players must adhere to during play. For instance, “He stood ready at the crease as the bowler began his run.”

A hinge squeaked in a dream, then the dream was over and I was awake. I looked up at a strange ceiling then at a window in the wrong place. I lay still, searching for the reason. Then, as it came to me, I sensed that I wasn’t alone.

‘Ellen?’

A shadow stood by my bed. No answer. The silence went on. The hair rose on my scalp.

Then at last Ellen’s voice went: ‘Sorry for intruding.’

‘Ellen.’

‘Jack.’

‘How are you intruding? It’s your house.’

And by saying just that I felt the loss of my own house so badly I couldn’t breathe. It was as if this cosy bedroom had turned into a vast chimney, with me at the bottom

of it, looking up into a blackness hiding god knows what. Ellen put her hand on my shoulder, and kept it there.

'That's it,' she said. 'Easy now, Jack, you're all right.'

My heart slowed down. She took her hand away.

'I shouldn't have woken you. But I had to say something. And I felt saying it now was best.' She kept her voice low, a voice for night, as if Bill were still alive in the next room. 'I think we should go up there tomorrow, Jack. To number 19. We should go together and find out what's going on.'

'Yes, OK.'

'Good. Then that's what we'll do. We've decided. I hope you didn't mind me coming in to say that.'

'Not at all.' My answers were short, polite smiles in the dark.

'I felt it was important.'

'No, you're right, it is.'

'So that's that, then.' When she spoke next, she was near the door. 'Goodnight, Jack.'

'Goodnight, Ellen.'

But she stayed there. I didn't know what to say, so I said nothing. A night bus, way off, set a window pane throbbing for a few seconds.

'I get lonely, too, Jack.' Her voice was even lower now. 'Sometimes I wonder if I can go on. I still miss him. I still miss Bill.' She stopped there. I heard a wet swallow.

'He was a good man, your Bill.'

'*Wasn't* he. Oh, Jack, he *was*, wasn't he.' She came right up to the bed. 'He was a fine man, a lovely man, don't you think?' She was crying now, tears without sobbing.

'Yes he was.'

She sniffed back the tears. 'Please,' she said. 'Please, Jack, it's been so long.' She pulled up the sheet and counterpane. 'Forgive me.'

She slipped in beside me, her movement nimble for someone so old. We lay there without speaking, on our backs side by side like a marble king and queen in a cathedral. She sniffed again. Then she pushed my shoulder and I turned on my side as she wanted, facing away from her so she could lie with her front against my back. She put her arm around my chest.

'We're doing nothing wrong,' she whispered. 'We can sleep like this. Sleep now. Just go to sleep.' A minute or so later she murmured, 'Just promise you don't hate me.'

'Of course I don't hate you.'

And that was the last thing I said before she fell asleep. I was coiled up inside, though, god, I did try to relax. Such a long time since I had lain next to a woman! But for her, I seemed just the drug she needed. Her breathing slackened, night sighs as her unconscious took hold of her. She spoke, the words indecipherable, slurring to somebody at a dream's start. Then her hand made a tiny electrified jolt, and she was gone.

It was cruel. She slept, I couldn't. And then, though I was exhausted, another thing began.

I prayed that Ellen's hand would stay on my chest and not wander down in sleep. I had to think about something else. I thought about the horror I had been through since morning – and about what tomorrow might bring. I thought how appalled Jenny would be to see me now. But here is the strangest part: it only made the problem worse. What little I had was gone. Everything I held dear had been shattered. The fragments spun off into space, and here I was, feeling lecherous for the first time in years.

Ex. 16. In the text, Jack *heard a wet swallow*, and Ellen *sniffed back the tears*. Can you imagine what these actions looked and sounded like? In the sentences below, the verb “sniff” has been used in different contexts. Match each of its uses to the appropriate definition.

1. The dog sniffed around the yard, searching for any traces of the elusive squirrel.
2. He sniffed disdainfully at the menu, unimpressed by the selection.
3. With a cold, she constantly sniffed, trying to clear her congested nose.
4. The detective sniffed out the clue, leading him closer to solving the mystery.
5. As he walked past the bakery, he couldn't help but sniff the enticing aroma of freshly baked bread wafting through the air.

Which kind of “sniff” is meant – a, b, c, d, or e – in each of the sentences above:

- a. metaphorically convey a gesture of contempt or disapproval
- b. indicate metaphorically someone's ability to discover or detect a clue or evidence through careful investigation or intuition
- c. use the sense of smell to investigate or explore by taking in the scents in the environment
- d. draw in air audibly through the nose, typically to detect or enjoy a pleasant smell
- e. reflexively and sharply inhale through the nose when trying to clear the nasal passages

Ex. 17. Choose the correct word for each definition. If unsure, refer to the text above.

1. **Showing a strong sexual interest in someone:**
 - a. Slackened
 - b. Coiled up
 - c. Lecherous
 - d. Nimble
2. **Flexible either in movement or thoughts:**
 - a. Coiled up
 - b. Nimble
 - c. Slurring
 - d. Slackened
3. **Twisted into a more compact shape:**
 - a. Spun off
 - b. Coiled up
 - c. Slackened
 - d. Slurred
4. **To become less strong or slower:**
 - a. Slacken
 - b. Slur
 - c. Spin off
 - d. Coil up
5. **To pronounce the sounds of a word in a way that is wrong or unclear:**
 - a. Nimble
 - b. Spin off
 - c. Slur
 - d. Lecher
6. **Move rapidly away in unexpected directions:**
 - a. Slacken
 - b. Coil up
 - c. Slur
 - d. Spin off

Which of the following is most closely associated with a slur? Elastic. A river. Crockery. A long-distance run. Vodka. Skiing.

Have you ever experienced something you desperately hoped would slacken? What was it?

Which of these dangerous creatures is most and least likely to coil up? Grizzly bear. Killer whale. Python. Siberian tiger. Hornet. Tarantula. Father Rydzyk. Rhinoceros.

Have you ever witnessed something unexpectedly spin off? What was your reaction?

What film or TV character strikes you as lecherous? Why? Can you think of three other adjectives to describe that character? And what film or TV character strikes you as the opposite of lecherous?

Name four situations where nimbleness is an advantage. And one where it might be a disadvantage.

I woke at dawn, for the second time surprised that I had even been asleep. Maybe a car had gone down the road. Maybe Ellen had moved (her arm was still around my chest). I saw a face in the fern-pattern wallpaper and it made me think about the little girl in the red-brick house, how she had watched me from that upstairs window.

When I was young, in bed with a childhood sickness, I'd see faces in the wallpaper. Tucked up by my mother, a glass of water or cordial on the bedside table, the curtains drawn on daylight. Nothing to do but stare at the wallpaper, out of which your nausea conjures an eye, a nose, a chin. The sicker you are, the clearer the face. You come out of the sickness because you're young. But maybe there are faces in the last mess too.

*

I pressed the doorbell of Number 19: two metallic tones echoed inside the house. Ellen straightened the back of my collar as we waited. (I was wearing one of Bill's old suits. Before we left her house, Ellen had looked me up and down, tucked the front of my shirt more neatly into the trousers as if I were Bill himself, and said, 'Very smart.')

The woman opened the door. No yellow gloves today. She recognised me, and her face clenched.

Ellen was first: 'We're sorry to bother you, but we wondered if it's possible to have a word.'

Behind her mother, the little girl sat down on the stairs to watch us.

I said, 'You see, what it is, Mrs...?'

'Burton,' she said.

'Mrs Burton. What it is, is...'. And there I fluffed it, even though Ellen and I had planned what we were going to say.

'This is Mr Hoffman,' Ellen said. 'I know this sounds a bit funny, Mrs Burton, but I think you saw him yesterday?'

I glanced at the girl on the stairs then said to her mother, 'I must apologise if I gave you the wrong impression.'

'What we were wondering, Mrs Burton, is if it's at all possible to have a look inside your house. Just a short one.' Mrs Burton's hand rose to her throat as though to protect it. 'You see, Mr Hoffman used to live here.'

Mrs Burton's head twitched left and right like a bird's as she looked at Ellen and me.

Ellen was quick. 'It's for sentimental reasons, really.' She wrinkled her nose and smiled as if the three of us were in on some harmless scam. 'You know how attached you get to a place.' Mrs Burton kept her hand over her throat. 'You can trust us, Mrs Burton. I live at number 7. Ellen Wattling.'

I said, 'May I ask how long you've lived here?'

'What?' Mrs Burton said.

'I mean how long you've lived in this house.'

'Eight years this December.'

Ellen stared at me, her face going white, and this time I knew it was definitely about the house, not me.

A sudden vacuum behind my eyes, balance gone to pot. I swayed. 'Is he all right?' Mrs Burton asked, in a tone meaning that she would prefer me to be ill somewhere else. I put my hand on one of the portico pillars to stop the ground moving.

Ellen's arm went around me. 'Would you mind if Mr Hoffman sat down?'

*

Neither Mrs Burton's kitchen, in which we now sat, nor the hall through which we had passed, nor the stairs I had glimpsed up (to a half-landing lighted by a stained-glass window of red fishes in a stylised sea) bore the slightest resemblance to what had once stood on this ground.

She and Ellen watched me as I sipped the water. So did the girl, standing in the kitchen doorway. The sweat on my forehead was oily. There was a stink about my body I didn't even recognise. But then, Ellen wasn't looking so great herself.

'You go upstairs now, Rebecca,' Mrs Burton said. 'Go and play.'

The girl didn't move.

'Rebecca, it's rude to stare.'

'Is he sick?'

Ellen put her hand on mine. 'No, love. He's just had a bit of a turn, that's all. He'll be fine in a minute.'

Rebecca smiled at me, I thought a touch ironically for such a little girl. Mrs Burton sent her away with a glower.

'You said you wanted to see the house,' Mrs Burton said, when her daughter had gone upstairs.

I looked at the stretch of room behind her, the row of walnut kitchen-cabinet doors, the double sink, the crayon drawings stuck to the fridge with magnets. I knew that the rest of the house would reveal nothing but this obliteration of my old world.

'No,' I said.

Ellen squeezed my hand. 'Jack?'

'I don't want to see it, not any more.'

'But it's why we came.'

'But it isn't my old house, is it.'

Ellen turned to Mrs Burton. 'And that's correct, is it? You've lived here, in this house, in this very house, for eight years?'

Mrs Burton nodded, still confused, but getting cross now, too.

Ex. 18: In the above excerpt, find the words that match the following definitions:

- a. a sweet drink made from fruit, to which water is usually added: _____
- b. to make a picture or idea appear in someone's mind: _____
- c. to close or hold something very tightly, often in a determined or angry way:

- d. to fail at something or do it badly: _____
- e. a brief spasmodic muscular contraction: _____
- f. to be damaged or spoiled through negligence, illness, shock, etc.: _____
- g. to see something or someone for a very short time or only partly: _____
- h. to experience a sudden change in one's physical or mental condition, often for the worse: _____
- i. a little; a small amount: _____
- j. a sullen brooding look of annoyance or anger: _____

- k. a certain length of time or space: _____
- l. the action of removing all signs of something: _____

Ex. 18A: Now use the words identified above in the sentences below:

1. Sarah _____ her fists in frustration as she listened to the unfair criticism, determined to remain composed.
2. His _____ conveyed his annoyance at being interrupted during his work.
3. Every time he heard a sudden noise, his eye would _____ involuntarily.
4. The magician began to _____ up images of mystical creatures in the minds of his audience, captivating them with his illusions.
5. The conference room was a vast _____ of space, accommodating the large gathering comfortably.
6. She served a refreshing lime _____ to her guests, adding just the right amount of water for the perfect balance of flavours.
7. Despite studying hard, he _____ the exam and failed to achieve the grade he needed.
8. After running for miles, she felt dizzy and nauseous, experiencing a bit of a _____ in her physical condition.
9. He added just a _____ of cinnamon to the recipe, enhancing the flavour without overwhelming it.
10. The neglected garden had _____, its once vibrant flowers withered and its paths overgrown with weeds.
11. The artist's deliberate strokes of paint resulted in the _____ of any previous marks, leaving a clean canvas ready for his next creation.
12. As the train sped through the town, she _____ chimneys, gardens, greenhouses and back alleys.

Ex. 18B: Ask and answer your friend:

1. Could you share a favourite recipe for a homemade cordial?
2. How do you typically conjure up inspiration when facing a creative block?
3. What makes you clench your fists in frustration?

4. Have you ever fluffed an important presentation or interview? How did you recover from it?
5. Do you ever experience a twitch in your eye or another part of your body? What usually triggers it?
6. Have you noticed any areas in your community that have gone to pot due to neglect?
7. Have you ever caught a glimpse of something unusual or unexpected?
8. Can you recall a time when you experienced a bit of a turn in your health or mood? How did you handle it?
9. Do you prefer your food with just a touch of spice, or do you like it fiery hot?
10. Have you ever been on the receiving end of a glower from someone? How did you resolve the situation?
11. What's your favourite way to unwind and relax after a long stretch of work or study?
12. Have you ever witnessed the obliteration of a historical landmark or cultural site? What was your reaction?

'I don't know what I wanted,' I said. 'It sounds stupid, but somehow I thought my house might be...*inside* this one.' Mrs Burton's face was a real picture. 'Yesterday morning, I left for the Sunday papers. I left this house. What I mean is I left *my* house, a three-up, four-down semi-detached. The *real* number 19. And when I got back...' I made a sweep with my arm. 'This was here.'

Mrs Burton stood up so quickly she looked like a plucked elastic band. 'This is insane.'

'No, Mrs Burton, you're a liar.'

Ellen said, 'Jack, this isn't helping.'

'We built this house eight years ago.'

'*Liar*,' I said. Though I knew she was telling the truth. The one I was stuck in. It was awful.

'I'd like you to leave my house now, please.'

'Not until you start telling the truth.'

'You want me to call my husband?'

'Do what the hell you like, I want the *truth*.'

'I'm *calling* him.'

'*Good*.' I barked it at her, and she actually stomped out of her own kitchen, leaving us there. 'And while you're about it you can tell him what a fucking monstrosity his house is. I mean, Jesus. *Look* at it. All this marble veneer, all this plastic shit and ponced-up

twaddle.' By now she had picked up the phone in the hall. I said to Ellen, 'I mean Jesus, Ellen, just look at it.' But she was quiet, drawn. 'That didn't go very well, did it.'

'We'd better leave, Jack.'

In the hall we saw Mrs Burton waiting for her husband to answer. Ellen said to me, 'Let me speak to her.'

'About what?'

'I just want to have a word, that's all.'

'Have a *word*? There *are* no words.'

'My husband, yes,' Mrs Burton said into the phone, then, 'I don't care what he's doing.'

*

I waited on the other side of my old garden gate, scuffing at the pavement with my shoes. I heard a pointedly audible cough and looked around: Rebecca was standing under the portico. She came towards me across the lawn. 'Are you better now?' I turned my back on her and the house. Instead of taking the hint she leaned over the wall by my side, so we faced the road together. She began to hum to herself. Sweet and horrible. I had an idea.

'Do you like living here?' She stopped humming. 'I mean do you prefer it to the last place?'

She gave me a puzzled look.

'The house you lived in before,' I said. 'Was it nicer than this one?'

'I've always lived here.'

'Have you.'

'Yes.'

'That's nice,' I said, and I presented my back to her.

'Apart from right at the beginning.'

I looked at her.

'At the hospital,' she said. 'Where I was *born*.' She gave me a gormless expression, throwing back an exaggerated version of my own. God, it doesn't take long to hate some people. The younger they are, the worse it is.

I faced the road again.

She hummed again for a bit, then said, 'Are you ill?'

I focused on a chipping near the kerb.

'It's all right,' she said, 'you can tell me. It's nothing to be ashamed of. Dad was ill. Then he got better. It was something to do with his kidneys.'

I didn't even look at her. Seconds ticked by. I thought she'd given up.

She leaned right in front of me, belly on the wall, almost toppling on to the pavement. 'So are you?'

I turned on her. 'No, I'm not ill, I'm fit as a bloody fiddle. I *lost* something. Now why don't you sod off?'

She was as cool as a cucumber. 'There's no need to be rude. I was only being very nice.'

I know my face went red with anger, I could feel it, but still she went on.

'If you lost something, I could help you find it. When Mum loses things, I always find them first.'

'Ok then, Miss Smarty Pants, so what did I lose?'

She squinted at me, as though she could guess from my appearance.

I heard voices behind us – Ellen and Mrs Burton were coming out of the house. As Ellen spoke she caught my eye and flashed a smile that was meant to reassure me.

'I know what you lost.' Rebecca was pointing at me. 'I can see what it is. I could be nice, I could help you, but you've been so rude I don't see why I should even bloody well bother.'

'Rebecca,' her mother called. She began striding over the lawn towards us, high heels slowing her as they sank into the earth.

In a whisper that came out as a gnome's growl, Rebecca said, 'Mum goes out at four.'

'What?'

'When Mum goes out. She goes at four, to pick up my brother.'

Mrs Burton was almost here.

'What are you *saying*?' Now I was whispering too.

Rebecca said, 'But I'm not supposed to touch the kettle if...' then her mother had scooped her up and was walking away, past Ellen to the front door. Rebecca looked at me over her mother's shoulder with a cheeky face and sang, 'Bye-eeeeee.'

Ex. 19: In the text, "Mrs. Burton stood up so quickly she looked like a plucked elastic band." How do you imagine her movement?

Deduce the meaning of "pluck" in the following sentences:

1. He plucked a stray thread from his impeccably tailored suit, a small gesture indicative of his meticulous attention to detail.

2. As the sun dipped below the horizon, the hiker stood atop the mountain, plucking a wildflower and inhaling its delicate scent, a moment of serene solitude amid nature's grandeur.
3. In the bustling market, the street performer plucked the strings of his guitar, filling the air with sounds that captivated passersby.
4. After years of hesitation, she finally plucked up the courage to quit her stable job and pursue painting full-time.
5. During the chaotic brainstorming session, she startled her colleagues when she suddenly plucked an ingenious idea out of thin air.

Ex. 19A: Discuss some of these questions with a partner:

1. Have you ever plucked fruit or vegetables from a garden or orchard? What was the experience like?
2. Have you ever been in a situation where you had to pluck up the courage to face your fears, and how did you overcome them?
3. Can you recall a time when you had to pluck an idea out of thin air to solve a problem?
4. In your opinion, what does it mean to pluck someone's nerves, and have you ever experienced it?
5. What do you think motivates people to pluck up the courage to pursue their dreams despite the risks involved?
6. Have you ever plucked up the courage to speak out against injustice or wrongdoing? What inspired you to do so?
7. Do you believe it's easier to pluck an idea out of thin air when you're under pressure, or when you have time to reflect and brainstorm?
8. What do you understand by the term "to pluck low-hanging fruit"? And in what situations do you think it's a good strategy?

Ex. 20: In the text, Ellen "was quiet, drawn." What do you think she looked like? Match the terms in bold to the gaps in the definitions/descriptions below that explain various expressions containing the word "drawn". Next, provide Polish equivalents of the expressions.

be at daggers; bill of exchange; to scale; against somebody; ox; butter; cold; down; feel; deed of agreement; well; thread work

1. Drawn _____ : This is a certain dairy product that has been melted and clarified, often used as a dipping sauce for seafood or as a topping for dishes like lobster or crab.

2. _____-drawn: This expression typically refers to something that has been portrayed or depicted skilfully, accurately, or in a detailed manner.
3. _____-drawn: This phrase describes something that is pulled or driven by a beast of burden, a task now taken over by the tractor in most developed nations.
4. Drawn _____ : This is a type of embroidery technique where threads are pulled or drawn out of the fabric to create decorative patterns, often used in fine needlework or lace-making.
5. _____ drawn: A term used in metallurgy, meaning a process where metal is drawn or stretched at room temperature to improve its strength, durability, or other properties.
6. _____ drawn: This idiom means to be in a state of intense hostility or conflict with someone.
7. Credit partially drawn _____ : This phrase relates to financial transactions, indicating that only a portion of the available credit has been utilized or withdrawn from an account or line of credit.
8. Drawn _____ : This term refers to a financial document, such as a check or promissory note, that has been written and signed but not yet presented for payment or redeemed.
9. _____ drawn to somebody: This expression describes a sense of attraction, affinity, or connection towards someone.
10. Drawn _____ : This expression is commonly used in relation to maps, diagrams, or architectural drawings to indicate that the depicted elements are accurately proportioned relative to each other and to real-world dimensions.
11. _____ drawn up and authenticated by a notary: This phrase denotes a legal document outlining an agreement between parties, which has been drafted and certified by a notary public to ensure its legality and authenticity.
12. Be drawn _____ : In the context of finance or credit, this expression means to use funds or resources that are available from a specific account or source, often implying the borrowing of money against a pre-established credit line or collateral.

Strain. That was the 'word' Ellen wanted to have with Mrs Burton. I got it out of her as she walked me away from number 19. She'd done what you do when you sweep up broken crockery for somebody else. 'You'll have to forgive him,' you say (speech low, the words mouthed as if for the deaf, because the person who broke the crockery is in the next room,) 'but he has been under a lot of strain lately.' That, more or less, is what she'd said to Mrs Burton.

When she told me I came to a stop – just beyond the gate of Number 11, whose lawn, garden path, plastic windmill and house were just the same today as last week and last year.

'You what?' She tried to walk me on, gripping my elbow, but I didn't budge. 'I'm under strain because I've lost my fucking *house*.'

'Jack, I'm trying to help.'

'Who, for god's sake? Me or her?'

'Jack, please.'

'Why did you *say* it? She's going to think I'm mad.'

She didn't answer. The skin under her eyes went papery and taut.

'Ah, I see.' I think if there'd a been a bed, right there on the pavement, I'd have got in it, closed my eyes, and waited for them – whoever they are – to take me away. 'I've got it. It's all right, Ellen. You think I'm mad too.' My voice had turned smooth and cold.

She looked away. Number 11's hydrangeas scratched against the garden wall in a breeze.

'It's all right,' I said. 'You can say it.'

'Then what am I? Didn't you think about that?' She looked up the road, back to number 19. She seemed as exhausted as I was, drained by daylight.

'So you agree my house has gone.'

'I do,' she said, yet to say it seemed to bewilder her.

'But what? *Tell* me.'

'I'm trying to buy time. I'm trying to find a way to *think*.'

'But there's something else.'

It was a while before she answered. 'You weren't with me, Jack. You weren't there. You didn't see how she put her hand on the banister when we talked. She knew the shape without looking. Her *hand* knew.'

'Which tells us nothing.'

'But it's not even that. I looked at her hand, and I felt this...*weight* coming down on me.'

Now it was my turn to say nothing.

'And if you want to know the truth, I'm so frightened by all this I think I'm the one who's going mad.'

Her eyes filled up.

I said, 'Then we can be frightened together.'

I touched her arm, just as she had touched mine on her doorstep last night. Then I felt it again myself, fear like an offshore swell. It lifted me in its silent green hump, pressing cold into my body from the ocean floor, then passed, leaving me to shudder in its trough. There was a trick in all this. Somehow, I didn't know how, fear was part of it, there to stop me seeing the trick for what it was. And then I felt that Ellen's own fear was part of the trick, too, though I could see that her fear was real. I took my hand off her arm.

And we walked on.

And when we got to Ellen's we had a strong cup of tea, saying nothing. Then I went for a lie down, not having told her what Rebecca said to me over my old garden wall.

Ex. 21: Find words in the excerpt above that mean the following (the definitions follow the order of appearance of the words you are searching for):

1. the emotional or mental pressure experienced as a result of demanding circumstances or stressors.
2. to move slightly or to change position
3. stretched, pulled tightly; figuratively: intense, or characterized by emotional or mental tension
4. popular ornamental plants prized for their large and colourful flower heads, which typically bloom in shades of blue, pink, purple, or white. *Hortensje* in Polish.
5. to confuse or perplex someone completely
6. handrail that runs along the side of a staircase or balcony
7. a rounded protuberance or raised area
8. to suddenly and involuntarily tremble, often in response to fear, cold, disgust, or strong emotion
9. lowest point in a wave, or the portion of the wave below the average water level.

Ex. 22: In the text, Jack confesses: "Then I felt it again myself, fear like an offshore swell." Look at the sentences below containing the word *swell*. As what parts of speech can it function? How many Polish equivalents of *swell* do you need to translate the sentences?

1. As the orchestra's performance reached its crescendo, there was a swell of emotion in the audience.
2. The gentle swell of the ocean lulled me into a peaceful state of mind.
3. With each passing day, there was a swell in the number of visitors to the exhibition.
4. He swelled with pride as he watched his daughter receive her diploma on stage.
5. The chef used a pinch of baking powder to help the cake swell as it baked.
6. After the heavy rainfall, there was a swell in the river, making it dangerous for boating.
7. The captain warned the crew about the swell of the approaching storm.
8. She noticed a swell in her ankle after twisting it during her morning run.
9. The politician's speech caused a swell of controversy among the constituents.
10. Despite his attempts to remain calm, he could feel a swell of anxiety building within him.
11. The party was in full swing, and everyone was having a swell time.
12. Despite the swell in prices, he managed to find a good deal on a used car.

Ex. 23: Discuss these questions with a partner:

1. Have you ever tried to move a heavy object that just wouldn't budge? Did you find a way to move it?
2. What activities or practices help you relieve the strain of a stressful day?
3. Have you ever felt a shudder of excitement when embarking on a new adventure or opportunity? What was it about?
4. Can you recall a time when you encountered a problem that completely bewildered you? How did you eventually solve it?
5. Have you ever felt a shudder of fear while watching a horror movie or reading a suspenseful book? What was it about?
6. In your opinion, what factors contribute to the strain between different generations in a family? It isn't enough to just say 'Christmas.'
7. Have you ever encountered a hump in your career or personal life that seemed insurmountable? How did you overcome it?
8. Can you think of a time when you were amazed by someone's ability to remain calm and composed under pressure?
9. How do you avoid being overwhelmed by the constant swell of information from online media?
10. How do you think society can work together to overcome the troughs of economic downturns and foster recovery and growth?

Number 19, five past four, that doorbell again and those two nauseating chimes inside.

Ellen had gone for a lie down herself. I had sneaked off, leaving her lock on the snib, killing the time between then and four by taking a long route to the place where my house had once been.

It was a hard walk. It would have been easy to turn back for Ellen's. I felt it slowing me down like a harness. A widow, a widower. Company. Words. Meals without the rut of flavours I have fallen into since Jenny's death. Another night in the same bed under those differently-laundered sheets – and, for all I knew, many more. To turn back would have been the easiest thing in the world. But that is the point: in *this* world. My own was gone. I felt that, if I had lain front to front with Ellen in the night, I would have signed for the loss.

I gave the bell a second push. Perhaps Mrs Burton had taken Rebecca with her. It would make sense with a strange old man hanging around. But then I heard a squeaky laugh. The lock was fumbled from the inside, the door opened and there stood Rebecca.

'I was watching you.' She pointed at a spyhole in the door; behind her was a chair on which she had stood to see through it. 'Your nose was *huge*.' She spread her arms as if holding a sack.

I had to be fast. You can do it when you're desperate. I showed her my profile. 'Well it's a big nose anyway, don't you think?'

Rebecca frowned, grave all at once. 'Yes, it is, isn't it. I'm sorry.'

'No need to be sorry. You see, it's a magic nose. I can smell things from miles away.'

'No you can't.'

'You've got an ordinary nose, which is a great thing to have. But with this...' I tapped it, 'I can tell if someone's buttering hot toast on the other side of town.' Her face was now like her mother's, moody and suspicious.

I leaned down. 'Rebecca, I want to ask you something.' I attempted a warm smile. 'Do you remember what you said to me this morning? When your mother was talking to my friend?'

Her thumb went to her mouth, which reminded me that I was dealing with a little girl.

'You said you knew what I'd lost.' The thumb went right in. 'And is that right?'

She nodded.

'And do you want to tell me what it is?'

She rocked from side to side. She took her thumb from her mouth. 'Your house.'

It was like a punch in the stomach. I crouched down, short of breath, my face close to hers. 'Your mother told you.'

She shook her head.

'After I left, she told you, didn't she.'

'It's the truth.'

'Please, Rebecca, I'm begging you: just tell me she told you.'

'She didn't say anything. She just said you're not well.'

I stood up straight, bracing myself. Then I said, 'So how do you know?'

She didn't answer.

'Please,' I said.

'You weren't nice to me,' she said, and, like a princess, as if the audience was over, she stepped backwards into the house. She stopped at the foot of the stairs, the door between us still open. I looked across the front lawn, at the road. A car went by. Mrs Burton would be back soon. I looked at Rebecca again.

'I'll be nice to you.'

'Will you now,' she said. She smirked.

That smirk, that's what really got to me. I said, 'It makes you happy, does it? That I've lost everything?'

She burst into a laughter. Then, hand over her mouth, snorting, she ran up the stairs.

*

I know it was rage. But I do not think I intended to *act* on it. I do not think I meant literally to *harm* anyone. I think I just wanted to show it. That's what made me not do what I should have done – which is to have closed that door from the outside and walked away from number 19, back to Ellen's and the new bargain that had been made for me and that I did not understand.

I closed the door from the inside and stood there, my blood pressure like a cistern in my head. Then I went up the stairs.

I passed the stained-glass window with red fishes. I reached the top of the stairs and a broad landing. I saw two open doors. One revealed a child's mobile hanging from the ceiling, and the window through which Rebecca must have peered down at me in the street last night. I looked right. I could smell privacy – unfamiliar soap and lotions, a boy's socks, something adult, male and female mixed – telling me to keep out.

Rebecca popped her head out of a doorway at the end of the landing. I got a flash of her grin before she ducked back. It astonished me that this was all a game for her.

I walked towards that door – expensive carpet underfoot, concrete under the carpet, you could feel it, the lack of give, so much quieter than my own creaking floorboards that had gone forever.

I entered the room.

Ex. 24: In the following sentences, some words and phrases from the excerpt above have been used correctly, but some of them have been misplaced. Identify the misplaced ones and insert them in the correct spaces.

1. In the dimly lit hallway, she fumbled with the key, struggling to find the right one for the door.
2. He cautiously approached the door and peered through the child's mobile to see who was outside before opening it.
3. Startled by the sudden noise, the rabbit quickly ducked back into its burrow, seeking safety from potential danger.
4. The boxer took a deep breath and braced himself for the opponent's next powerful punch, determined to stay in the fight.
5. He decided to sneak off from the party early, feeling overwhelmed by the crowd.
6. He couldn't hide his smirk of satisfaction when he realized he had outsmarted his opponent.
7. When she heard his feeble excuse, she couldn't help but smirk loudly.
8. Despite the boring lecture, Sarah managed to duck back to grab a coffee without the professor noticing.
9. The restaurant's menu seemed stuck in a rut of flavours, offering the same dull dishes week after week.
10. The child's mobile gently rotated above the crib, captivating the baby with its colourful shapes and soothing melodies.
11. He braced himself behind the bushes, trying to remain unseen by the approaching strangers.
12. The spyhole hung above the crib, spinning gently and playing a soothing lullaby to help the baby drift off to sleep.
13. As the rain began to pour, they sneaked off into the shelter of the doorway to avoid getting soaked.
14. Despite her effort to maintain a serious demeanour, a snort of laughter escaped her when she heard the ridiculous joke.
15. Before jumping off the diving board, she crouched down for the cold shock of the water below.

16. Before the roller coaster plunged down its steepest drop, riders braced themselves, gripping the safety bar tightly.
17. With the gusty winds picking up, the trees began to sway wildly, prompting the campers to crouch down and secure their tents.
18. She felt a grave responsibility weighing on her shoulders as she prepared to deliver the difficult message to her team.
19. The teacher's snort of disbelief was visible from the other side of the room.

Ex. 25: Discuss some of the questions below:

1. Can you recall a time when you had to brace yourself for a difficult situation, such as unpleasant conversations or unexpected developments? How did you handle the situations themselves?
2. Have you ever found yourself in a rut of habits or routines that you couldn't break out of? How did you overcome it?
3. Have you ever had a moment when you had to duck back from a situation or conversation because you felt uncomfortable or overwhelmed? What prompted that reaction?
4. What role do you think humour plays in communication, particularly when it comes to reactions like snorting or stifled laughter? How do you perceive the difference between a genuine snort of amusement and a mocking snort of derision?
5. Have you ever felt stuck in a rut of negative emotions or thought patterns? How did you break free of it?

She stood facing me, a window behind her, my old back garden behind that. I looked around. One wall was all shelves, holding ring binders, box files, loose papers, novels, old biscuit tins. There was a desk and a computer. There was a swivel chair, a waste-paper bin, a steel filing cabinet. A complicated year planner was stuck to the cabinet's side.

Rebecca gave me a shrug, as if to say, Well, here we are, then. I closed the door and faced her again.

'So what did your mother tell you about me?'

I got another smirk. I wanted this little girl scared. I think I wanted someone else, someone I didn't know but who stood high above us looking down, to see what I could do.

'She didn't say, "Watch out for that old man"?''

'No.'

'She didn't say, "Whatever you do, don't let him in the house"?''

She considered this with a child's cute, insincere impression of thought, eyes looking up, forehead creased. 'No,' she said.

'Because here I am, Rebecca. I'm in your house. You and me. Alone. And now you're going to tell me – how do you know I lost my house?'

'You have to guess.' She said it as though this was a joke she loved hearing again and again, with a punchline that would come to me if I just thought about it hard enough.

That's when I came towards her. I snarled: 'You can stop this fucking game right now.'

She took a step back, eyes wide. 'You stop it.'

So I'd scared her. But to actually see it took the wind out of me.

I turned away. I was spent. Weak in the legs, heart misbeating and sore. An exhaustion behind my eyes dulled the colours in the room like night coming on. Wanting everything to stop, which I'd felt again and again since yesterday morning, was stronger now than ever. I leaned on the desk, palms flat on it, my head bowed. A thread of dribble escaped my lips and I didn't even wipe it away. It reached the desk, and, safely there, detached its tail from my mouth. I thought, Time to let go. Whoever you are, you can have me now.

'Cold,' Rebecca said.

I looked at her. She was staring at me, serious, not scared now.

'What?'

'Cold,' she said.

I wiped my mouth with my sleeve. 'Which means what, exactly?'

In answer, she looked around the room in one slow, actorly sweep. She meant that I should look too. So I did. It told me nothing. I moved away from the desk.

'Colder,' Rebecca said.

And then I decided that that really was it, and I walked to the door.

'Warmer,' she said. I looked back at her, then opened the door, and as I stepped out she said, 'Hot!'

From the landing I said, 'You're a nasty little girl, do you know that?'

She stayed where she was, on the other side of the room, her head tucked in as if to charge at me. She said, 'I'm trying to help.'

And then downstairs the front door opened – a tiny rise in air pressure, a muffled thump as it closed. Rebecca heard it, too. She appeared to glance at the sound rather than hear it, as if the return of her mother was a minor detail in the right place. Downstairs, Mrs Burton called out an easy, 'Rebecca?'

I came back into the room. I closed the door.

'Oh, what a clever little girl you are.'

'I said I'm good at finding things, didn't I.' She was still looking at me with her head lowered, like a miniature bull. 'But you know what your trouble is? You don't pay attention.' Then she came to the door, unafraid to brush against me as she passed, and opened it. She listened. I heard her brother and her mother talking, the rustle and thump of groceries unbagged on a table.

'Becks?' her brother called.

Looking straight at me, her face neutral, Rebecca shouted, 'Coming!'

She shut the door again. Then she put her hand around my back, under Bill's old jacket. I felt her pulling at the shirt, tugging it up, out of the trousers, and then her little hand, hot and clammy, was on my skin.

'You've got to listen now,' she said.

I just gaped at her.

'Are you listening?'

I nodded. Mute.

'Good.' She stood as tall as she could, self-important, proud, but with her hand still on my back. She coughed once, clearing her throat in a way children never do. 'Somebody,' she said, 'somebody special – wants to tell you that everything's going to be all right.'

She raised her eyebrows at me once, import driven home. Her hand stayed there for a moment longer. Then she stepped away to the door.

She opened it, went through, and before closing it behind her she looked at me, her finger to her lips, her eyes cheeky and young again. 'Shhh,' she went.

I gazed at that door.

I heard the voices downstairs, then Rebecca's mixing in with them. The voices were everyday, casual. That's how they stayed. I was ready for someone to shout any second now, for a sudden silence, for the noise of a scrambled evacuation, or for Mrs Burton to call up the stairs trying to sound strong, not afraid, but it didn't happen. A television came on, a remote control popping through channels till a children's cartoon blared out slapstick music. How long was that little girl not going to tell her mother I was up here?

And then I saw it. Right in front of me.

The shock of it matched the shock when I returned from the newsagents yesterday.

It was a crayon drawing, taped to the back of the door. A drawing of a house, through a child's eye. Four windows. Two window boxes. A porch to the side.

An H-shaped chimney cowl. The drainpipe that went diagonally from the guttering to the ground. The tiled roof, the light outside the porch, the yellow burglar alarm, everything. My house.

Except that it was standing not in a garden but on a vast plain. And there was a man and a woman, simplified figures of circle and line, standing in the bedroom window that was once ours. They were waving at me. They looked like the captains of the house, and that house was sailing away, towards the horizon through an endless sea of grass.

'Eviction' written by Andrew Tomlinson. First published as 'Hoffmeister' in issue 26 of the *Berkeley Fiction Review*.

Ex. 26: In the final excerpt of the story above, find the sentences or expressions that mean the same as the following:

1. She looked at me, raising her eyebrows, and I got the message.
2. She approached the door, not minding if she touched me as she went by.
3. The sound of a hurried escape.
4. The sound of groceries being taken out of bags and placed on a table.
5. I was exhausted. My legs felt feeble, and my heart was beating irregularly and aching.
6. I simply stared at her with my mouth wide open.
7. A remote control flicking through channels until a children's cartoon came on with loud, funny music.
8. A protective chimney cover shaped like the letter H.
9. It left me exhausted and speechless.
10. A thin line of saliva dripped from my mouth.

Ex. 27: Look for the expressions from exercise 26 in the story "The Unexpected Visitor." Decide if replacing them with their alternatives would improve the quality of the story, and justify your opinion.

The Unexpected Visitor

As the storm raged outside, I sat by the crackling fireplace, trying to find solace in the warmth of the flames. The wind howled through the chimney, causing the H-shaped cowl to rattle ominously. Suddenly, there was a sharp knock on the door, interrupting the tranquillity of the evening.

I rushed towards the door, startled by the unexpected interruption. She stood there, rain-soaked and shivering, her expression unreadable. She looked at me, lifting

her eyebrows in a silent question, and I understood immediately. Without a word, I stepped aside, allowing her to enter.

She entered rapidly, not hesitating to brush against me as she passed. Her presence filled the room, bringing with it a sense of urgency. I couldn't help but wonder what had brought her here on such a stormy night. I watched in silence as she removed her coat, the rustle and thump of groceries unbagged on the table breaking the stillness of the room.

I felt a wave of exhaustion wash over me, my legs weak and my heart pounding erratically. It was as if the events of the evening had drained me of all my energy. I was spent, unable to muster the strength to speak or move. I simply gaped at her, my mouth hanging open in disbelief. Her presence was unexpected, yet strangely comforting amidst the chaos of the storm. She seemed unfazed by my reaction, busying herself with the task at hand.

As she turned on the television I couldn't help but smile. Despite everything, she had a knack for bringing lightness to even the darkest of moments. I watched her, mesmerized by her presence, until a thin line of saliva escaped my lips, breaking the spell. Embarrassed, I quickly wiped it away, hoping she hadn't noticed. But she did, and a soft chuckle escaped her lips, breaking the tension between us. Then I realized that, no matter what the storm may bring, we would weather it if we faced it together.

Ex. 28: In this exercise, each category (I to V) has four sentences that are missing the same word. Identify the missing words. It may be necessary to adapt their form (e.g., to use a plural form of a noun or apply the correct tense of a verb in context):

I:

1. The artisan chocolatier carefully tempered the rich, velvety cocoa mixture before pouring it into moulds to create delectable _____, each one a harmonious blend of indulgence and craftsmanship.
2. The pianist flawlessly navigated through the intricate passage, effortlessly transitioning from one _____ to the next, showcasing impeccable timing and mastery of the musical piece.
3. As a seasoned mixologist, I meticulously craft cocktails at the bustling _____, blending flavours with precision and flair to satisfy even the most discerning palates.
4. The majestic lion paced up and down in its enclosure, and visitors watched through the sturdy steel _____.

II.

1. In the heart of the city, the grand _____ serves as a central hub where multiple thoroughfares intersect then flow around it.
2. In the town square, crowds gathered around the tiny stage to witness the spectacle of the flea _____, marvelling at the miniature performers dancing and leaping.
3. The daring pilots of the flying _____ executed breathtaking aerial manoeuvres, captivating the audience far below.
4. The scandal unfolded into a frenzied media _____, as journalists swarmed the scene, clamouring for interviews and sensationalizing every detail.

III.

1. I placed the fabric on the corkboard, and secured it with a _____ to prevent it from shifting during the presentation.
2. The company's marketing strategy now took a completely different _____, targeting younger demographics with innovative advertising campaigns.
3. After carefully positioning the pieces of material, she began to _____ them together with small stitches.
4. The mountaineer decided to _____ a small emblem to his backpack to commemorate his successful ascent of the peak.

IV.

1. As we sailed through the calm waters, we spotted a massive _____ of fish swimming gracefully just beneath the surface.
2. Despite facing numerous setbacks, she persevered, viewing each challenge as a valuable lesson from the _____ of hard knocks, ultimately emerging stronger and more resilient than ever before.
3. Within the field of psychology, there are various _____ of thought regarding the nature of consciousness, with some emphasizing cognitive processes while others focus on behavioural patterns.
4. Despite his initial resistance, he soon realized the importance of being _____ in the art of negotiation, as it proved invaluable in navigating complex business deals.

V.

1. Despite the turmoil within, she put a _____ face on, and no one suspected how much she had to endure.
2. In the face of imminent danger, the _____ firefighter dashed into the burning building, displaying remarkable courage and selflessness.
3. The _____ tapestry woven with vibrant hues and intricate patterns adorned the walls of the grand hall.
4. Undeterred by the daunting challenges ahead, she resolved to _____ the storm and pursue her dreams.

Ex. 29: Match the definitions to the words in bold, e.g. a – 1.

a. a person who loves cats, b. nice, c. direction, d. unemotional, e. contravene, f. baby carriage, g. a person who is afraid of and hates cats, h. apex, i. a flat-box shaped string instrument, j. a fib

1. As an **ailurophile**, she surrounded herself with feline companions, finding solace and joy in their graceful presence.
2. With the baby securely strapped into the **perambulator**, the young mother set off for a leisurely stroll through the park.
3. Despite his penchant for **tarradiddle**, his charming anecdotes always entertained, weaving a tapestry of fanciful tales that captivated listeners.
4. The musician skilfully plucked the strings of the **zither**, filling the air with haunting melodies.
5. The elegant table setting featured an array of **dainty** teacups, delicate porcelain plates, and intricately folded napkins.
6. Despite the overwhelming evidence, she refused to **gainsay** her firmly held beliefs, steadfastly defending her convictions in the face of dissent.
7. In the face of adversity, she maintained a **glacial** composure, her stoic demeanour betraying no hint of the conflict raging within.
8. His palpable fear of cats betrayed him as an **ailurophobe**, causing him to avoid even the most docile of feline companions with an irrational dread.
9. The seasoned sailor deftly adjusted the **tack** of the sail, steering the vessel toward the open sea.
10. At the **apogee** of his career, the conductor stood before the orchestra, commanding the stage with a presence that had now become legendary.

Ex. 30: Read this text about some collective nouns. How would you translate them into Polish? Do you know any other collective nouns in English?

Origins of Collective Nouns in English: A Dive into Avian Lexicology

History, culture, and human imagination leave fascinating marks on language. In English, linguistic evolution has given us some quirky and poetic collective nouns for animals. Among the most iconic are those pertaining to birds, each evoking a vivid image of avian behaviour or character. Here are some of them, with explanations of their origin.

1. **A murder of crows:** The term “murder” in relation to crows dates back to the 15th century, appearing in texts like *The Book of Saint Albans* in 1486. It is believed to have originated as a poetic and imaginative expression rather than a literal descriptor of crow behaviour. The collective noun captures the dark and mysterious aura often associated with these intelligent and communal birds, tapping into the human fascination with their enigmatic nature.
2. **An exaltation of larks:** This elegant collective noun reflects the high-flying, melodious nature of larks. It first appeared in the 15th century in various medieval texts. The term “exaltation” suggests the joyful and uplifting sensation one might experience upon encountering a flock of larks ascending into the sky, their song filling the air with music.
3. **Flock:** Unlike the more fanciful collective nouns, “flock” has a straightforward origin, tracing its roots to Old English and Proto-Germanic languages. It simply refers to a group of birds, especially domesticated ones, like chickens (and it also pertains to sheep). Despite its simplicity, “flock” carries a sense of unity and cohesion, embodying the idea of safety in numbers among birds. But it can also be applied disdainfully to people, suggesting that they blindly follow each other rather than act individually. In this negative sense, it does the same job as ‘herd.’
4. **Paddling:** “Paddling” is a delightful term used to describe a group of ducks on water. Its origins are uncertain, but it probably derives from ducks’ characteristic motion of paddling their feet beneath the surface. When a British man rolls up his trouser legs and wades up to his shins in the sea, we call this ‘paddling,’ too, even though he is not actually floating. If he wades out to waist height and stays there for just 30 seconds, the chances are that he is ‘piddling,’ a word that does not apply to any bird group we have heard of.
5. **Gaggle:** When it comes to geese, we speak of a “gaggle.” This term likely originated from the Old Norse word “gagarr,” meaning to cackle or chatter, perfectly capturing the noisy and gregarious nature of geese when they congregate. It suggests a sense of conviviality and camaraderie among these social birds.

6. **Raft:** Similar to “paddling,” “raft” refers to a group of ducks on water, but it is typically used in the context of sea ducks. The term possibly grew from the image of ducks clustered together on the water, resembling a floating raft. Its origins are somewhat obscure, but it effectively communicates the dense and tightly packed formation of these ducks on the water’s surface.
7. **Bevy:** “Bevy” is a charming collective noun often used to describe a group of quails, larks, or swans. Its origins can be traced back to the Middle French word “bevee,” meaning a drinking bout or carousal. The term conveys a sense of conviviality and socializing among birds, reminiscent of a group of friends gathering for fun.
8. **Herd:** While primarily associated with mammals, “herd” is also used to describe groups of grazing birds such as pigeons or cranes. Its origins lie in Old English and Proto-Germanic languages, where it referred to a group of domesticated animals. The term emphasizes the communal and grazing behaviour of these birds, highlighting their reliance on each other for safety and sustenance.
9. **Game:** “Game” is a collective noun used for various birds, especially those hunted for sport or food, such as grouse or pheasants. Its origin is in Middle English and Old French, where it referred to wild animals or birds suitable for hunting. The term evokes the thrill of the hunt and the tradition of pursuing game birds for recreation or sustenance.
10. **Flight:** “Flight” is a versatile collective noun used to describe a group of birds in general, particularly when they are in the air. Its origins can be traced back to Old English and Proto-Germanic languages, where it denoted the act of flying or fleeing.
11. **Bank of swans:** The term “bank” in relation to swans probably stems from the birds’ habit of congregating along the banks of bodies of water. Swans are often seen resting or preening near the water’s edge, giving rise to the imagery of a “bank” of swans.

Ex. 31: Read about the differences between “relentless” and “unrelenting”:

“Relentless” and “unrelenting” are two adjectives that describe someone or something that persists in a particular course of action without stopping or giving up. While they are often used interchangeably, there are subtle differences in connotation:

1. **Relentless** implies a constant, determined, and persistent pursuit of a goal or action. It often carries a sense of determination and intensity. A relentless person or force may not necessarily be aggressive but is characterized by unwavering persistence: “Despite facing numerous setbacks, she was relentless in her efforts to achieve success.”

2. **Unrelenting** also denotes a continuous and persistent nature, but with a focus on not yielding or becoming less severe or intense. It often carries a sense of rigidity or inflexibility: “The unrelenting heat made it difficult to work outdoors for long periods.”

While both words describe actions or qualities that persist without stopping, “relentless” often emphasizes determination and persistence, while “unrelenting” underscores the lack of respite or relenting in intensity or severity. “Unrelenting” connotes less forgiveness, more punishment, than “relentless”. Even if one can “relentlessly punish” someone.

(Another, but related, issue here. When writing, you may be torn between one word or the other. Sometimes what can guide you is the *sound* of prose, and here we can pick up an idea from the novelist Martin Amis: it is better not to have more than one ‘-ing’ suffix in a sentence, unless it repeats because it is part of a list, as in “She adored walking, hiking, mountaineering, and wild-water swimming.” Compare “As she was driving over the Tallahassee Bridge she saw a man swimming in the brown water far below” with “As she drove over the Tallahassee Bridge she saw a man swimming in the brown water far below.” Notice how the second version has more sonic punch, and puts you more immediately in the moment. This rule is often hard to keep to, the ‘-ing’ ending often begging to be used a second or even third time in a sentence (and note ‘ending’ and ‘begging’ almost twinned in this very sentence, even if they are different parts of speech). But trying to keep to it can give more power to your prose. How might this rule concern our relentless/unrelenting question? Well, *if* you are writing a sentence in which you have already “inged”, and you are about to write “relentless” or “unrelenting”, and *if* in this instance they would function as synonyms, then go for “relentless.”)

Ex. 31A: Is it possible to use both adjectives interchangeably in these sentences?

1. The relentless rain poured down, soaking everything in its path.
2. Despite facing unrelenting challenges, she remained determined to succeed.
3. The relentless pursuit of excellence drove him to push beyond his limits.
4. His unrelenting commitment to his goals inspired those around him.
5. The relentless march of time stops for no one, urging us to seize each moment.
6. She faced an unrelenting barrage of criticism but remained steadfast in her beliefs.
7. In the face of relentless adversity, they found strength in unity.
8. His unrelenting passion for justice fuelled his tireless advocacy work.

9. Despite the unrelenting heat, they pressed on with their journey through the desert.
10. The relentless demands of his job left him little time for leisure.

Ex. 31B: Use “unrelenting” or “relentless” in the following sentences and justify your choice:

- 1) The exam session at the end of their third year in Oxford was stressful and _____ .
- 2) Her pursuit of the man who had once stalked her was _____ .
- 3) Westerners can find the Monsoon season _____ .
- 4) For Americans caught up in a UK defamation lawsuit, the British legal system can feel both arcane and _____ .
- 5) QC Mary Scanlon defended her client with a/an _____ focus.
- 6) One city after another fell to Genghis Khan in his _____ march west.
- 7) Genghis Khan was _____ to those cities that had refused to surrender.
- 8) The tide turned, the sea’s swamping of the beach _____ .
- 9) The king signed the death warrant, his reaction to the slightest betrayal _____ .
- 10) Some might argue that the school’s _____ code of discipline has given backbone and integrity to its upper-class students. Others might argue that it has produced some of the biggest misfits in modern British history.

Ex. 32: What colour is missing in each paragraph? What expressions helped you identify the colour in each case? Translate the names of shades/hues into Polish.

The spectrum of _____ hues spans a captivating array, each shade evoking its own distinct essence. Take, for instance, “Tiffany _____,” a delicate yet vibrant shade reminiscent of the iconic jeweller’s packaging—a blend of cyan and robin egg _____, exuding a sense of luxury and sophistication. In contrast, “baby _____” embodies a soft, serene quality, akin to the innocence of a newborn’s gaze, with its gentle pastel hue evoking feelings of tranquillity and purity. Transitioning to the depths of “navy _____,” we encounter a rich,

profound shade akin to the vast expanse of a moonlit ocean at midnight – a colour imbued with depth, authority, and timelessness. Conversely, “sky _____” mirrors the vast canopy above, with its light, airy tone reminiscent of a clear summer day – a hue that inspires feelings of openness, freedom, and boundless possibility. These diverse shades of _____ not only adorn our world but also stir the depths of our emotions, each imbued with its own unique allure and symbolism.

The spectrum of _____ hues is a symphony of warmth and intensity, each shade carrying its own unique character and allure. Beginning with the vibrant “scarlet _____,” a hue that commands attention with its boldness and passion, reminiscent of the rich tones found in ripe cherries or velvety roses. Moving to the deeper end of the spectrum, we encounter “burgundy,” a regal shade with undertones of purple and brown, evoking images of fine wines and luxurious textiles, exuding sophistication and elegance. On the softer side, “rose _____” blooms with a delicate charm, akin to the blush of a rose petal, offering a gentle yet enchanting presence that speaks of romance and tenderness. Transitioning to “crimson _____,” we delve into a realm of intensity and drama, reminiscent of the fiery glow of a sunset or the deep hue of freshly spilled blood, stirring emotions of passion and power. These various shades of _____ paint the canvas of our experiences, each one weaving its own tale of desire, strength, and allure.

The spectrum of _____ hues unfurls like a lush tapestry, each shade steeped in its own unique vibrancy and charm. Beginning with the vibrant “emerald _____,” a jewel-toned hue that impresses with its brilliance and depth, evoking images of lush forests and precious gemstones. Transitioning to the lighter end of the spectrum, we encounter “mint _____,” a refreshing and invigorating shade redolent of newly sprouted leaves and fresh spring mornings, offering a sense of rejuvenation and vitality. In contrast, “olive _____” exudes a sense of earthiness and maturity, with its muted tones evoking the rugged beauty of olive groves and ancient landscapes, symbolizing resilience and stability. Moving towards the deeper hues, “forest _____” envelops us in the rich, verdant embrace of dense woodlands, evoking feelings of tranquillity and connection to nature’s embrace. These myriad shades of _____ paint a portrait

of harmony and growth, each one weaving its own narrative of renewal, abundance, and vitality.

The spectrum of _____ hues dances with the vibrancy of a sunlit meadow, each shade painting its own unique story of warmth and radiance. Beginning with the luminous “sunshine _____,” a hue that embodies the essence of a cloudless sky on a summer day, radiating joy and vitality. Transitioning to the softer end of the spectrum, we encounter “pastel _____,” a gentle and soothing shade reminiscent of delicate wildflowers and the first light of dawn, offering a sense of calm and serenity. In contrast, “golden _____” exudes a sense of opulence and splendour, with its rich, lustrous tones evoking images of gleaming sunlight and gilded treasures, symbolizing abundance and prosperity. Moving towards the deeper hues, “mustard _____” envelops us in the cozy embrace of autumn foliage, with its earthy warmth and depth evoking feelings of comfort and nostalgia. These diverse shades of _____ illuminate our world with their radiant glow, each one adding a unique touch of brightness and optimism to our lives.

The spectrum of _____ hues unfolds like the rich tapestry of nature, each shade bearing its own unique depth and character. Beginning with the warm embrace of “caramel _____,” a hue that reminds us of golden syrup and toasted pecans, emitting a sense of sweetness and comfort. Moving to “chestnut _____,” we encounter a rich, reddish-_____ shade evocative of autumn leaves and rustic cabin walls, imbued with a sense of warmth and coziness. In contrast, “mahogany _____” brings an air of sophistication and refinement, with its deep, reddish-_____ tones echoing the lustre of polished wood and antique furniture, symbolizing elegance and tradition. Moving towards the lighter end of the spectrum, “beige” envelops us in a soft, neutral hue reminiscent of sandy beaches and sunlit deserts, offering a sense of calm and tranquility. These diverse shades of _____ paint a portrait of earthly beauty and resilience, each one weaving its own web of warmth, comfort, and timeless elegance.

Ex. 33: What animal is missing in most of these sentences? There is one sentence that requires a different animal just to distract you a bit 😊. Paraphrase the expressions. However many legs the animal has, write a short story using at least as many of the expressions.

1. After running the marathon, Sarah suffered from a painful charley _____ in her calf muscle, forcing her to limp back to the finish line.
2. Sarah's new car may look sleek, but it's really just a _____ of a different colour compared to her old reliable sedan.
3. As the meeting progressed, it became evident that the contentious issue was turning into a political _____ trade, with compromises being made left and right.
4. Despite his initial reluctance, Jack decided to take the _____ by the horns and face his fears head-on.
5. Emily's performance in the competition was a dark _____ victory, surprising everyone who had until then thought her a lightweight athlete.
6. Despite his scepticism, Peter couldn't refuse the opportunity to travel when it arrived unexpectedly, recognizing that you shouldn't look a gift _____ in the mouth.
7. John's tendency to flog a dead _____ in arguments often led to frustration among his friends, who wished he would move on to more productive discussions.
8. Despite his lack of experience in the field, Tom felt confident about his chances in the job interview, believing he had a _____ in the race due to his strong communication skills and relevant qualifications.
9. In her culinary class, Chef Lily emphasized the importance of using the right ingredients for each dish, reminding her students that it's all about _____ for courses.

Ex. 34: What single word is missing in all of these sentences? It may be necessary to use it as a noun or a verb in different forms.

1. To relax, Sarah indulged in a luxurious spa treatment involving a soothing body _____ infused with essential oils, leaving her skin rejuvenated and refreshed.

2. Before storing delicate items, it's essential to carefully enfold them in shrink _____ to protect them from dust, moisture, and damage during transit or long-term storage.
3. With a sense of anticipation, Sarah carefully _____ the package, revealing the surprise gift inside that brought a smile to her face and filled her heart with gratitude.
4. John meticulously covered his grandmother's antique vase with layers of bubble _____ before packing it into a sturdy box for shipping.
5. The team worked tirelessly to _____ up the project ahead of schedule, meeting all the objectives and delivering exceptional results to their client.
6. Despite his best efforts to remain impartial, Sarah had a remarkable ability to _____ her boss around her little finger, effortlessly persuading him to grant her requests and bend to her will.
7. The company decided to keep their latest product development under _____ until the official launch date to maintain an element of surprise and to prevent competitors from gaining insight into their innovative features.
8. As the temperatures dropped, the children bundled up in warm scarves and hats, _____ themselves tightly to shield against the biting cold wind.
9. It took me a while to _____ my head around the idea of living in a foreign country, but once I embraced the adventure, I found myself thriving in the new environment.

Another short story appears below. Unlike *Eviction*, this is presented as one continuous piece. Many of the exercises in this second part of the book use it as a springboard for questions about language. Here and there are questions about your own interpretation of the story; these questions are *open* – your own understanding may be just as valid as whatever the author intended.

With this in mind, read the story before attempting the exercises.

Among the Greats

A mobile phone rang. On it went, a dispiriting Nokia standard, as the shiftless waiter continued to read his magazine and the barman rearranged bottles on the top shelf and the several patrons sipped or didn't sup their drinks. When it stopped, the waiter sighed and turned a page. Two patrons resumed their quiet conversation, released from a spell.

It had come from this end of the restaurant, near the balcony. The only person there, a man in his early-sixties, hadn't even twitched at the sound. Perhaps he was deaf, thought Martin – who was also in his early-sixties, and also seated on his own, a few tables back. The man's gaze hadn't strayed from the windows overlooking the stairs. He had been nursing a cup of coffee for half an hour, no literature or papers on the table, his hands resting around the cup, his sight occasionally breaking out of stillness to follow a car or stroller then falling back into itself. His clothes were in unhappy dispute. Polished shoes with designer jeans. A glossy black blazer, and under it a buttoned-up cardigan in pastel blue.

The phone rang again. The waiter tut-tutted. As before, the man by the balcony did nothing, yet the phone could only be his, and Martin wondered if he *was* deaf, and if he should go over and tell him he had a call – but how could a deaf man converse on a phone? Then the man gave a start, rummaged through a small canvas rucksack (and that must have worked a *treat* with the blazer), pulled out a phone, found the answer button after two or three prods, and when he spoke Martin heard his own language.

'Hello?... Yes, I...No, it's...No I didn't, because it's...Yes of course I did...'

The caller was firing questions non-stop, the man's reverie now displaced by strained forbearance, worsened by the need to keep his voice down.

'It's not a key, and anyway...That's what I'm *saying*, it's not a *key*...I *will*, Jesus, it's not Afghanistan...I wasn't, I was just trying to tell you don't...Actually rather

comfortable, quiet, you know, and not too far to go from the centre...I keep it in my breast pocket, sticking out like a handkerchief...I *know* you do, I'm sorry.' He looked at his wristwatch. 'Nine, then?... All right, nine...You too.'

The call ended, and as he put the phone down he looked back up the long room and made eye contact with a man nearby. The man had red hair, a cream three-piece suit and what appeared to be a black T-shirt instead of a proper shirt and tie. The hair was a mass of curls, a shortened chevalier's mop over a wide, jowly face. This man – Martin – signalled collegiality to Alain by smiling, and turning the lift of his beer glass to his mouth into a toast with a slight jink of his hand.

Alain looked away, then felt that the haste with which he had done so was rude, and, by way of apology, he said to Martin – in English, not having the Dutch – 'My daughter.'

In French, Martin said, 'You're a lucky man.'

'You're French?' Alain asked, in French.

'Half and half.'

'Beg your pardon?'

'France, Belgium, a citizen of both.'

'I see.'

An unintended crispness in those two words left nowhere for the exchange to go. Alain raised his eyebrows in polite valediction, then, with some relief, turned towards the window.

It took him a while to settle down again. But settling down to what, he didn't know. Through the large windows he could see the canal and the houses on the other side. The water looked second-hand and oily, the traffic and pedestrians like a Monday anywhere. There was a hint of depth in the water, an incomplete opaqueness in the shadows cast by the lee of the opposite bank. Shimmers of yellow and green down there. People glued to their computer screens in a first-floor office. A café whose interior looked dark as a cave and a girl heedlessly entering and swallowed up. A tiny boat went by, the owner's eyes straight ahead and his chin up and the outboard motor pootling behind him, as if no one had told him he wasn't captain of a destroyer. It was a mistake to come, that he knew. Memory came between him and everything out there.

He heard footsteps close in, somebody leaving the restaurant and having to pass on the way to the stairs. He kept very still, willing them to be gone. The footsteps stopped. He looked around and up at Martin standing by his table.

'I was about to say "a citizen of the world," but these days who isn't, really who isn't?'

Before Alain could even imagine how to respond, Martin held out his hand and said, 'Martin.' After Alain had shaken it, Martin only added to the confusion by saying, 'This is just a pleased-to-meet-you and goodbye.'

'What?'

'I'm off.'

If Alain was confused, he also sensed that, though this man was overbearing, he was nervous, too. There was a shyness in those eyes. He didn't like it. He didn't like the claim it made on his own kindness. In a quieter voice, Martin said, 'I hope you don't mind me saying, and I'd hate to intrude, but from over there' – he leaned his head towards the table where he'd been sitting – 'you looked...a little sad. But I hope I haven't said too much.'

Alain didn't reply. Martin watched him like a melancholic dog waiting for its master to throw the stick. In a way any sane person would have understood as a closing of the topic, Alain said, 'Perhaps not *too* much.'

'So I wasn't entirely off the mark.'

All Alain did was shrug. Not even amicably. It wasn't an invitation to join him; Martin did just that, slumping down into a chair, the waistcoat bulging around his stomach, black diamonds of T-shirt appearing between strained buttons, and Alain was quietly stunned at the nerve.

'I *am* sorry to hear that.'

Alain widened the gap between himself and Martin by sitting upright, like a stoat on the lookout. 'As we should be for most people. It's hardly an uncommon feeling.'

'If only it were.' Martin looked gravely at the table top. 'And may I ask what...?' and left it there, prompting Alain to name the cause of the sadness.

Alain was on the point of freezing him out altogether. He took a breath, exhaled, but Martin was good at waiting.

'My wife used to like Amsterdam, that's all.'

'She did, yes?' A stillness in Martin's eyes. And more waiting.

'That's all,' Alain said.

'Oh,' Martin said. 'But not now.'

'That's correct. She finds it a bit difficult now.'

This meeting would soon end. Alain had the closing moves.

Martin said, 'Is she...I hope you don't mind me asking, but is she ill?'

'Dead.'

A long, pleasing silence from Martin.

'Nine months ago,' Alain said, without a hint of emotion. But he wondered why he had mentioned his wife at all.

His frostiness counted for nothing: like a swung ice-pick, Martin said, 'That is the saddest thing I've heard in a long time.'

'I seem to be coping, thank you.'

'Because you *decide* to.'

'Perhaps it's that, then.'

'Because one has to. Though, my word, that doesn't make it any easier, does it. I'm sorry. I've said too much. Now I really feel I am intruding.' (Alain thought the word order was interesting. He himself would have said, '...feel I really am intruding,' not, '...really feel I am intruding.') Then Martin's expression changed, as though he had been paid by an agency to lift Alain's spirits. 'So now you're travelling. Getting out and about. May I ask what your line is?'

'My line?'

'Your living. Not that it's compulsory.'

'I teach.'

'In a school?'

'In a university.'

'So you're a scholar.'

'I wouldn't actually-'

Martin interrupted: 'I knew it. You weren't buried in a book, but there's a way people carry themselves.'

Alain narrowed his eyes at Martin, and after a wordless stand-off he said, 'What I do is this. What I do is teach French literature to kids who couldn't give a monkey about any literature at all, not even their own, and who regard me with contempt. Because I teach them badly. Because they regard me with contempt.'

'I'm sure that's not true.'

'Come and join me in a class. Come and see all those sullen eyes.'

'Now you're laying it on.'

'I'm not, I'm just an obstacle on their path to wealth.'

'Wow,' Martin said, with a pursing of his lips. 'You're the real thing, aren't you.'

It was here that Alain could no longer suppress the thought that he was being chatted up. The reason for it was beyond him. It was unfair.

'Where did you study yourself, then?' Martin asked. 'When you were a student.'

'Paris.'

'Don't tell me the Sorbonne.'

Alain didn't.

'It was. It was the Sorbonne, wasn't it.'

'It's not the big deal some people think it is.'

'Oh my god.'

'No, I didn't go to the Sorbonne.'

For a few seconds Martin appeared to be rudderless. Then he said, 'Now I've got you here, perhaps I- But you live in Paris?'

'Yes.'

As if he and Alain were sat before a cosy tavern hearth after a long journey in winter, Martin leaned forward and folded his arms on the table. 'Oscar Wilde,' he said, and nothing more, smiling at Alain.

'Excuse me?'

'That's it, that's what I want to ask you.'

'Ask me *what?*'

'Where does he stand?'

'I'm not sure I know what you mean.'

'Is he among the greats?'

'I'm not qualified to say.'

'You're a Parisian.'

'He was Irish.'

'But he *died* there.'

'I'm a teacher, not a funeral director.'

Martin squinted at Alain. 'But you have read Wilde.'

'Yes, of course. In translation.'

With a subdued but unmistakable edge, which surprised Alain, Martin said, 'You've read everything, haven't you.'

Alain looked over the balcony for a moment. He folded his arms on the table like Martin.

'I haven't read the Bible or the Koran. I haven't read Ovid, Virgil or Horace. I haven't read Anna Karenina. I haven't touched Molière since I was twenty. I've read one volume of Proust and learnt the rest second-hand. Gide makes me want to put a gun to my head. And that's leaving aside the books about books. Even *within* my field, the books I should've read vastly outnumber the books I have.'

'Ok,' Martin said, uncomfortable with this onslaught.

'I used to be happy going into a bookshop. It used to give me a glow. Now it makes me ill.' His eyes moved away from Martin's as though collecting a thought from the wall behind him. 'But I'm sorry. Poor manners on my part, when all you're being is civil.'

Perhaps it was embarrassment that made Martin pick up Alain's empty cup and look into it. He put it down. 'Sorry,' he said. He folded his arms again. 'I was only saying, you know, that I like Oscar Wilde.'

'And why not?' Hearing the brassy twang in his own voice, Alain said it again, quieter. 'And why not? To like something. To simply enjoy it. If only my students would do that. If only they'd even argue with me.'

Martin nodded. The gesture didn't connect, it was out of pace, with what had just been said. There was, Alain also noticed, a glint of sweat on his forehead and cheeks.

Martin said, 'And when...when, if I may ask, did you know?'

'I'm sorry?'

Martin didn't answer.

'Are we talking about Oscar Wilde?'

'No. Not about Oscar Wilde.'

Then neither man spoke. Martin blinked a couple of times.

In a voice that was a mesh of question, disbelief and statement, and so low Alain only just caught it, Martin said, 'You *do* know where you are.'

Alain looked at the narrow room, then at Martin, and was about to speak, but he turned again, his sight guided by realisation.

Posters of James Dean, Montgomery Clift and Marlon Brando, the last a still from *The Wild One*, Brando astride a motorcycle in leathers and peaked cap. The only poster of a female, Marlene Dietrich in soft focus and top hat, smoke curling from a cigarette in a long holder. The gym-fit waiter in his tight T-shirt and how the other patrons didn't seem to resent his insouciance but quietly adore it. And how every patron was male. It wasn't much. You wouldn't have known. But he felt sure that his wife – so much quicker, so sharp with cues and hidden meanings – had known, had seen it in the blink of an eye. And she had not told him, and her not telling him then was the same as her speaking to him now. His heart clenched, the pain mocking all his relentless work since her death to find order, composure, agreement with fact.

He faced Martin and managed to say, carefully, 'I'm afraid you'll have to forgive me.'

'You didn't know.'

'No.'

'I take it you've never been here in the evening.'

'I'm afraid not. I thought it was just...' He dried up under Martin's stare.

'You've never even *heard* about Captain Peter's?'

Alain had to arrest and conceal a bolt of laughter. He made an odd jerk, as if a flywheel had come loose inside him, rocking his centre of gravity, and his face went taut. He held his coffee cup and bent his head forward. When he at last looked up, his eyes were moist.

'I'm a fool,' Martin said.

'You're nothing of the sort.' But Alain had to look at his coffee again for a short while. His arms and shoulders were shaking. He said, 'If anyone's a fool, I am.'

The animation had drained from Martin's face. He looked old. Wan skin pulled at by gravity, under that shock of red hair. 'I should have known.'

'How?'

'I should have read the signs.'

Alain said, 'But I was *in* here.'

'A complete failure of intelligence.'

Alain didn't know which of them he was referring to. Martin glanced at the table where he'd been seated before. On it was a newspaper. A soft leather briefcase lay against a chair leg. Alain realised that when he had come over and introduced himself with a goodbye, on the way, apparently, to the stairs, he had left them there.

Now Martin made a proper farewell. 'I hope you have a good stay in Amsterdam.'

'Thank you,' Alain said. 'You too.'

'Every couple of months, a long weekend, you know.' Martin got to his feet, and spoke down at Alain. 'It'll break your heart, though, if you're not careful. I just look.'

He walked to his table and got the briefcase, leaving the paper there. On the way out, he stopped by Alain once more.

'Do you rate Oscar Wilde?'

'I do,' Alain said. 'From what little I know.'

'Me too. Well, I have to.'

'Well he's quite something.'

Martin said, 'No, I mean I have to. But I prefer others.' Then he turned, and left.

*

It wasn't long before Alain also left. An appropriately timed exit; not too soon, he shouldn't make it too soon. He went to the bar and paid for his coffee after failing to catch the waiter's attention. Before setting off, he sat at the table to check the map in

his rucksack. He guessed which direction was north, turned the map so it was true to the ground and ran his finger along the route he would take to the middle of town, memorising the names of canals and streets, and it was as he did this that he heard trudging on the stairs, then he looked up: once again, Martin stood by his table, and now he appeared to be angry. Here comes the backlash, Alain thought, for my unwitting deception, for the laugh that almost broke free.

Martin said, 'So what's next for you, then?'

'Pardon me?'

'What do you do after this?' Martin waved his hand at the window over the stairs. Alain looked at the window. 'Yes I'm a butterfingers, I'm sorry,' Martin said. 'When did you get to Amsterdam, then?'

Alain just stared at him.

'All right, what did you do yesterday?'

'Look... ' Alain shook his head.

'Please, I've almost gone. So what did you do yesterday?'

'What does anyone do on a holiday?'

'That's what I'm asking. You go for a meal?'

'I have to eat.'

'Did you go for a walk?'

'I'm in Amsterdam.'

'Where?'

'What?'

'Where did you go for a walk?' No response from Alain. 'Where you *used* to go for a walk?'

'Now and then. Of course.'

Martin looked at the map on the table, the open wallet, the cup. That aggression ebbed. Then it surged back as he said, 'And how did that go?'

'I'm not sure this is any of your fucking business.'

'You're quite right, it's none of my fucking business. I'll just leave you to take your walks. Have a lovely day.' Martin shifted his weight to go, but his feet hadn't moved. His eyesight skittered with some thought.

Then, the asperity gone, he said, 'But what *were* you going to do this afternoon?'

Captain Peter's was now very quiet. Alain saw that the other patrons, and the barman, and even the waiter, were watching him. Under the burden of those stares, he said, 'I was going to see a synagogue.'

'A synagogue.'

'Yes.'

'To pray?'

'To see.'

'I've got nothing against the Jewish faith, if that's what you're thinking.'

'I'm not.'

'If you'd wanted to pray, I'd've given you space.'

Alain opened his mouth, but made no sound.

'So we can agree on that.'

'Excuse me?'

'I know the one you mean. At least I think I do. We can walk there. It's a nice walk, if you know what to avoid.'

'This is insane.'

Martin said, 'So are...So is everything.'

Then he faced the others at the end of the long room, and something in him made all of them look away.

'Among the Greats' written by Andrew Tomlinson.

Ex. 35: Meaning in order

'I'm sorry. I've said too much. Now I really feel I am intruding.' (Alain thought the word order was interesting. He himself would have said, '...feel I really am intruding,' not, '...really feel I am intruding.')

Alain is a pedant about language. (If your thesis supervisor orders you to follow MLA format in microscopic detail, you may regard her as pedantic; she may regard herself as simply responsible.) In this example from the story, what difference do you think it makes to Alain if 'really' comes before 'feel' or after 'I'?

And on the theme of weasel words and syntax, take the word 'only' and this short sentence:

He saw the ships on the horizon.

Put 'only' anywhere in that sentence – without changing the order of the other words, though you can add a comma, if you want – to give it the following implications:

A) We weren't the ones to see the ships, *he* was.

B) We saw ships everywhere, while his view was limited to the horizon.

C) We saw lots of things on the horizon; he saw just the ships.

D) There was just one horizon – the view behind us and to our sides concealed – and he was the one who saw the ships.

E) But he *did* see the ships, which defeats your argument.

Ex. 36: The problem is because

She did not like going to her brother's for Christmas because she hated her sister-in-law.

Can you see how this sentence could mean two contradictory things? And how might you rephrase the sentence to clear up the ambiguity?

Ex. 37: Press to answer

From page 64:

It was here that Alain could no longer suppress the thought that he was being chatted up. The reason for it was beyond him. It was unfair.

Suppress, oppress, repress, depress.

These words have different meanings, though the meanings can overlap. Three of them are often used as terms in psychology and therapy. Which of them goes where in the following piece of prose? They can be used in their various part-of-speech forms (e.g., depress, depression, depressing, depressive, depressingly). We have added 'press' as a root for another possible word, just for fun. If you think more than one of the words can fill a gap, say so, but explain their different meanings in that context.

And in light of another moment in this book where we discuss the importance of not repeating suffix sounds in a sentence, no one in their right mind would have this many 'press' sounds in such a short space.

It was one of those mornings when the _____ heat made him ache to emigrate. But overseas travel was impossible, for him, for anyone other than the Party elites under General Noriego. Better to _____ such dreams, he told himself. One day, perhaps under _____ of the Americans, Noriego would have

to step down. His abuses were already a _____ question in the United Nations. In May he had cruelly _____ a student protest, those who weren't killed now rotting amid the cockroaches and maggots of prison cells. To even imagine what they were going through brought on a wave of _____. He got out of bed. As he did so, a name popped up in his mind, and with it the face it belonged to. Manuela. Why had he thought this only now, how had he _____ even the image of her since the disappearance?

Ex. 38: Down the line

'Nine months ago,' Alain said, without a hint of emotion. But he wondered why he had mentioned his wife at all. p. 64

With this revelation, perhaps we understand the context of that phone conversation earlier, of which we heard only one side, Alain's.

How do you think Alain's daughter spoke in the phone call? Can you supply her words, filling in the blanks where Alain didn't speak? (This could be a two-handed class exercise.) And what do you imagine was running through her mind *after* the call?

Ex: 39: Being complete

This is the opening paragraph of Charles Dickens's *Bleak House* (1853):

LONDON. Michaelmas Term lately over, and the Lord Chancellor sitting in Lincoln's Inn Hall. Implacable November weather. As much mud in the streets as if the waters had but newly retired from the face of the earth, and it would not be wonderful to meet a Megalosaurus, forty feet long or so, waddling like an elephantine lizard up Holborn Hill. Smoke lowering down from chimney-pots, making a soft black drizzle, with flakes of soot in it as big as full-grown snow-flakes, gone into mourning, one might imagine, for the death of the sun. Dogs, undistinguishable in mire. Horses, scarcely better; splashed to their very blinkers. Foot passengers, jostling one another's umbrellas in a general infection of ill-temper, and losing their foot-hold at street-corners, where tens of thousands of other foot passengers have been slipping and sliding since the day broke (if the day ever broke), adding new deposits to the crust upon crust of mud, sticking at those points tenaciously to the pavement, and accumulating at compound interest.

After a brief discussion of some of the more difficult words and terms – e.g., implacable, newly retired, waddling, elephantine, gone into mourning, mire, tenaciously, compound interest – what strikes you about the style of this paragraph? Does it remind you of prose style from a genre other than the novel?

And what, if you were strict (or pedantic) about grammar, seems incorrect?

If Dickens had followed strict grammatical rules, the first two sentences after 'LONDON' (which is fine, as a kind of notice), should run

Michaelmas Term is lately over, and the Lord Chancellor sits in Lincoln's Inn Hall. It is implacable November weather.

We could also have written 'is sitting.'

As a spoken class exercise, or on your own, how would you rewrite the remainder of that paragraph with 'correct' grammar?

One prose style that this paragraph may remind you of is journalism. Longer articles in magazines and newspapers will sometimes begin by setting a scene like this, skipping main verbs for a few lines to convey colour, place, atmosphere, character. In fact Dickens's first real profession was journalism: he was a Parliamentary sketch writer, who had to write informative, entertaining pieces – to a strict deadline – about debates in the House of Commons.

You might recognise the style, too, if you have read a film script. Place is often established in a new scene with descriptions like 'Downtown, East Manhattan. Taxis passing. Gridlock half a block away, angry cars beeping in distance. A brownstone building straight ahead. Pigeons scattered around an unemptied garbage skip. Sunless sky. New York a tired headache in the run-up to five p.m.'

Now see if you can do things in *reverse*. Here is the opening of Orwell's *Animal Farm* (1945). Try to rewrite it in the style of the Dickens paragraph, without main verbs.

It is difficult!

Mr Jones, of the Manor Farm, had locked the hen-houses for the night, but was too drunk to remember to shut the popholes. With the ring of the light from his lantern dancing from side to side he lurched across the yard, kicked off his boots at the back door, drew himself a last glass of beer from barrel in the scullery, and made his way to bed, where Mrs Jones was already snoring.

As soon as the light in the bedroom went out there was a stirring and a fluttering all through the farm building.

Lastly, on page 62 of the story is a paragraph that begins, 'It took him a while to settle down again,' and on page 66, a paragraph that begins 'Posters of James Dean...'

In both paragraphs, distinguish those sentences that lack main verbs or are otherwise grammatically incomplete from sentences that a linguistic pedant would approve of.

Ex. 40: Intimations

What, for *you*, is the first clue in the story that Martin might not be looking for a woman?

If someone else in the class thinks your clue is nothing of the sort, or can see one earlier than yours, good.

Ex. 41: Class-clasp-clash-crash-trash

By either adding or subtracting or changing one letter at a time, you can turn the word 'shelf' into the word 'nearly':

shelf – shell – hell – held – head – hear – ear – earl – early – nearly

You can't change the *order* of letters in whichever word you are adjusting, so you couldn't, for example, change 'hear' into 'hare, or 'held' into 'deli.'

Divide the class into groups.

The first group to work out how to get from 'below' to 'cloud' is the winner. One team member must show the changes on the whiteboard.

And a second round: turn 'hump' into 'manor.'

And a third. This time you have three minutes to take the word 'brook' through as many letter-change stages as you can. After three minutes, each team says how many word-stages it has reached, and someone from the team with the highest number writes those changes down on the whiteboard.

Ex. 42: Cannibalism

Divide the class into three or four groups, physically separated so one team can't overhear another. The task is to get as many possible words as you can using the letters from a certain word; no letters can be used twice.

So, if the word is 'apple,' for example: leap, peal, app, pap, plea, pea, ale, pal, lap, ape, pale, and so on.

Given word: shoulder.

Three minutes. The team with the highest number of words wins. Abbreviations are not allowed, but contractions in everyday use, like 'app,' above, are. Perhaps slang should be allowed, too, as long as it is listed in a reputable dictionary (albeit under the rubric of 'informal').

Ex. 43: One word to change everything

An unintended crispness in those two words left nowhere for the exchange to go.
p. 62

First of all, paraphrase that sentence.

Discuss how each of the following nine words, if used instead of 'unintended,' subtly or unsubtly changes the meaning of the sentence. Use a good online dictionary, such as Merriam-Webster, to nail the meaning of words you're not sure about; connotations are what matter here. You will find that the meanings of several words overlap; where they do, say why you might prefer one word over another. (The replacement word would of course need the appropriate indefinite article, 'A' or 'An,' before it.)

- 1) arbitrary
- 2) willed
- 3) characteristic
- 4) suffocating
- 5) withering
- 6) opportune
- 7) regal
- 8) adamant
- 9) forced

And the same exercise using a different part of the story.

Alain didn't reply. Martin watched him like a melancholic dog waiting for its master to throw the stick. p. 63

As before, paraphrase this moment.

Then explain how the following words in place of "melancholic" might change the meaning of the moment.

- 1) embittered
- 2) sprightly
- 3) wistful
- 4) discombobulated
- 5) crestfallen
- 6) pensive
- 7) pugnacious
- 8) restive
- 9) apprehensive

Ex. 44: On the the

In the sentence quoted above – ‘Martin watched him like a melancholic dog waiting for its master to throw the stick’ – ‘the’ is used before stick. Grammatical common sense suggests that, since no stick was mentioned earlier, ‘the’ should be an ‘a.’ So why ‘the’ here?

The common-sense rule is, well, usually good common sense. If we tell a friend that we met a stranger yesterday in the train station, and we introduce the whole topic with, ‘Guess what happened to me at the station last night; I was just getting on to the platform when the man in a brown coat bumped into me,’ we instantly wonder if you have mentioned this man before. If you haven’t, it should be ‘a man.’

But the rule has many exceptions. ‘The’ is a swine. In the story, after Alain has had his first, embarrassing exchange with Martin, he turns back to the window, and, ‘Through the large windows he could see the canal and the houses on the other side,’ but neither the canal nor the houses have been mentioned before. Can you explain why ‘the’ comes before either of them?

Imagine a friend starts telling you the following story. You haven’t met her for ages. Once she has greeted you, she launches in with:

‘Guess what? I was walking down the street last night when I saw this house with all its lights on, but the front door wide open. I hung around for a while, wondering if the owners would come and close it. But they didn’t. Eventually, I got up the nerve to knock on the door. No one answered. So I went in, calling out ‘Hello’ like some idiotic burglar. I went through the hallway, and into the living room. No one. Not a soul. I looked around, at the sofa, the television, the armchair. And it was then that I saw something sticking out under the sofa. I reached down, and pulled out the flat blue box.’

Where is ‘the’ incorrectly used here?

Ex. 45: Understand

Alain narrowed his eyes at Martin, and after a wordless stand-off he said,... p. 64

Like many English words, ‘stand’ can team up with a preposition, with and without a hyphen, to make a noun or phrasal verb. What ‘stand/...’ terms would you use with the following? (‘Stand’ here could also take the ‘stands,’ ‘stood’ or ‘standing’ forms.)

- 1) He met her after she had been cruelly _____ by her previous boyfriend on a supposed date.

- 2) At midnight the enemy withdrew, and the colonel _____ those soldiers who had been in the battle longest.
- 3) She got her big break on Broadway when she was a _____ for Melanie Griffith in *Angels in America*.
- 4) Her role in the sitcom made her rich, but it was her _____ routine in the comedy nightclubs of New York that made her name.
- 5) For me, the _____ feature of Venice is the Bridge of Sighs.
- 6) It's a horrible political party. And its leader? I hate everything he _____
- 7) I _____ from him in the church, and was able to watch him during the service.
- 8) The emergency services _____ as the stricken jet came in to land.
- 9) If you don't _____ for your beliefs, you might as well be a sheep.
- 10) He's always loyal to his friends; he's a _____ guy.
- 11) Thanks for making me wait. I've been _____ for the last two hours.
- 12) He's just a bully. _____ to him and he'll crumple like a paper bag.

Ex. 46: Tricked into waiting

- A) If Alain was confused, he also sensed that, though this man was overbearing, he was nervous, too. p. 63
- B) As if he and Alain were sat before a cosy tavern hearth after a long journey in winter, Martin leaned forward and folded his arms on the table. p. 65

What is it about the structure of those sentences that makes them different from most others? If you consider how you might naturally write about these moments, you get an inkling.

You might write A as:

Alain was confused, but he also sensed that, though this man was overbearing, he was nervous, too.

And B as:

Martin leaned forward and folded his arms on the table, as if he and Alain were sat before a cosy tavern hearth after a long journey in winter.

The first versions are examples of a periodic sentence – a sentence whose grammar is not complete until the end of it. If, in the first sentence, you replace the comma after 'confused' with a full-stop (or period in US terminology), what comes before

that comma is grammatically incomplete. Replace the comma with a full-stop after 'winter' in the second sentence, and again, what comes before is incomplete.

The second versions are loose sentences (though there's a complicating parenthesis with 'though this man was overbearing'). We instinctively speak in loose sentences. Most writing consists of them, from a Facebook post to prize-winning literary fiction. If we had to speak or write in periodic sentences all the time, we would probably go insane. So what purpose do they serve?

Among other things, they add variety to our sentence structures – and they can give prose an interesting tension.

Take this moment from a story:

When a police car came down the road, and the driver turned his head and looked at him as he passed, then made a U-turn and came back, stopped by him, got out, and put on his peaked cap as he approached, Charlie felt his whole world was about to fall apart.

If the sentence began with 'A police car came down the road,' we could, grammatically, at least, have put a full-stop after 'road.' That 'When' at the start makes us wait, and hopefully wonder what the word applies to, which we discover by reading to the end.

Turn the following loose sentences into periodic sentences:

- A) I saw my ex when I was driving into the city yesterday.
- B) I found myself face to face with my friend's killer when I opened the door.
- C) They reached the fort without the loss of a single man, despite the mountain range, and the hunger and thirst they suffered once they had descended to the plain on the other side, many of them now little more than skin and bone.
- D) Margaret will be in charge of the editing process, because she has already edited two journals, can handle essay rejections diplomatically, and is great with the language.
- E) He understood that he had made a false move only after seeing the results.
- F) I am unlikely to be in the best of spirits after all these lawsuits, police interviews and news stories.

Ex: 47: The danger of being loose

Loose sentences echo the way we talk, and are less demanding to listen to than periodic sentences, but sometimes, when we are writing, they can lead us into a particular

kind of error. Read the following carefully and ask yourself what feels wrong. *Sound* here will be a better guide than content, word-choice, argument, etc.

Many viewers enjoyed *Breaking Bad*, but some found the plotting contrived, and the story incredible. Perhaps we can take this criticism seriously yet still enjoy the flair of the series and its undoubted originality. And perhaps an ordinary man can indeed become a master criminal, given the right circumstances, along with strong motivation to succeed. Walter White meets both conditions, having the chemistry skills to manufacture drugs and the urgent need to make money. His ascent to drugs king-pin feels believable, his setbacks realistic, his flaws deeply human.

Spotted it yet? How about this, another extract with the same error:

Charles Dickens's *Bleak House* is engrossing, though it soon grows wearisome, and can eventually feel like hard work. The descriptions are dazzling, but details begin to overwhelm the reader, who can become lost. The characters are amusing, then the amusement wanes and is replaced by irritation. London is itself a character, as much as the people who appear in the novel, and suffers the same fate. Dickens's world may be richly embroidered, but it is hard to take breath, or to feel real ease in reading.

If you don't yet know, read the extracts aloud. If this still doesn't reveal the error, read out the *first* clause of every sentence in an animated voice, and the others in a bored voice.

Now you'll be aware of a repetition of rhythm. Every sentence, in both extracts, has a three-part structure: clause – link – clause – link – clause. It gives the prose a monotonous predictability, robbing it of the power to surprise us.

Beware repeated sentence structures, which loose sentences can tempt us into – unless they are deliberately constructed as a rhetorical effect. Vary your sentence lengths. Vary your sentence structures. Build a paragraph as you would build a wall of rough stones: smaller stones locked into larger ones give the wall its strength.

As an exercise, rewrite the *Breaking Bad* extract to remove that error, while keeping most of the original language.

Ex. 48: Two-timing little words

Guess the words below. Each of them is in the story, and each of them can be used to mean different things (not only the meanings hinted at in the clues).

- 1) ___ r ___ r Monks and nuns belong to this. It's also a good thing to do in a pub.
- 2) ___ i ___ How you earn money. Or what you form at the supermarket check-out, or snort.

- 3) ___ ___ t Americans don't call it this. And coffee can give you one, too.
- 4) ___ ___ k An idiot or a sharp pull?
- 5) ___ u ___ ___ n ___ How can hair doing this also be a slippery sport?
- 6) ___ ___ l ___ An image that is also a place to make whisky?
- 7) ___ n ___ A great one is four aces. A stuck one can make you late for a meeting.
- 8) ___ y ___ ___ / ___ t / ___ Exaggerating about how you did the cake icing?
- 9) ___ r ___ ___ You do this when you're looking down the sights or cutting staff.
- 10) ___ r ___ ___ Good in the summer, bad for an arm.
- 11) ___ ___ The actors who keep a bone together?
- 12) ___ o ___ v ___ ___ To talk, but also the opposite?
- 13) ___ ___ n ___ What you take when you're determined. What you can't do with an unbearable thing.
- 14) ___ l ___ ___ He did it when the bet was too high. And after the ironing.
- 15) s ___ ___ For a while. A wand helps with this.
- 16) ___ b ___ u ___ A policeman did it to a hooligan. Grey paint did it to a room's atmosphere.
- 17) ___ ___ To jump in surprise, at the beginning.
- 18) ___ ___ t You can do this with food, or a door, or your legs.
- 19) ___ ___ Priests conduct it, physicists measure it.
- 20) ___ a ___ You can do it up and down the room. Or keep it to win a prize.

Each time a student guesses the right word, discuss the two meanings referred to in the clues, including the part of speech it takes here – *and* discuss the other meanings the word may have.

Ex. 49: Squiggles, lines, spots

Martin sits down at Alain's table without being asked:

All Alain did was shrug. Not even amicably. It wasn't an invitation to join him; Martin did just that, slumping down into a chair, the waistcoat bulging around his stomach, black diamonds of T-shirt appearing between strained buttons, and Alain was quietly stunned at the nerve. p. 63

Below is a longer version of that moment, which would make sense if it didn't lack punctuation and sentence-start capitals. Insert the capitals and punctuation that would make this segment work.

Alain didnt smile his body language his expression telling anyone with a brain that he did not want company even of a man with the benign appearance of this stranger Martin however seemed to be mentally deficient because instead of politely leaving he sat down at the table his waistcoat was too small the buttons almost breaking as his stomach pressed against it were these his best clothes twenty years ago Alain wondered what he was like in his prime thinner yes but perhaps just as much of a shambles then as now and perhaps just as presumptuous too knocking on doors gatecrashing parties sitting down with people who clearly wanted to be left alone

Ex. 50: And running on

Alain didn't smile, his body language told everyone to stay away.

This sentence doesn't appear in the story. But if it did, it would be a mistake called a run-on sentence or comma splice – which is the running together of clauses that could function as complete sentences on their own, and need some kind of conjunction if they are joined.

(If you change 'told' to 'telling' in the above sentence, it would *not* be a run-on sentence. Can you say why?)

Another comma-splice example:

We went to the play, Benedict Cumberbatch was in the main role.

To correct this, you should write something like, 'We went to the play, and Benedict...' – anything that correctly joins what could also function as two grammatically complete sentences.

Correct these run-on sentences (there are several ways of correcting each one):

- A) He put testosterone in his grandmother's tea, she wasn't pleased about her new beard.
- B) I quite like physics, making bombs is the best bit.
- C) We went to London, I'm pleased we left my little brother behind at the airport.
- D) I felt that something was missing in this film, my friend pointed out what it was.
- E) After reading a chapter of the book he went out into the garden, there were leaves on the trees now and it was nice in the shade.

However, much great writing contains occasional run-on sentences. The trick is to use them with style, not through clumsy accident.

Ex. 51: Commas as angels and muggers

What is wrong with this sentence?

He saw the dog kicked the cat and married the sheep.

As it stands, it suggests that the subject saw a dog kicking a cat then marrying a sheep. But if it means that he saw the dog, then kicked a cat, then married a sheep (let's assume he is Welsh), the punctuation would go 'He saw the dog, kicked the cat and married the sheep.' One comma clears up the mystery.

'I visited my brother, drove back to Leicester, packed for my flight next day and went to bed,' would be standard punctuation in a list like this. Note, though, that those last four words could also be punctuated '...day, and went to bed.' A comma that separates the last from the previous item in a list is a serial comma or Oxford comma. Some people swear by it, and some people don't.

Look at these examples of English that would have benefited from an Oxford comma (and even another comma, in one case). First explain what the problem is and what it accidentally suggests, then fix it.

- A) Eat, Ray, Love: Rachael Ray finds inspiration in cooking her family and her dog.
(From a book cover title)
- B) It was always difficult being Harry Potter and it isn't much easier now that he is an overworked employee of the Ministry of Magic, a husband and father of three school-age children.
- C) Highlights of his global tour include encounters with Nelson Mandela, an 880-year-old demigod and a dildo collector. (from *The Times*, London)

But beware those cases when extra commas get you in trouble.

Lynne Truss's useful and funny book on punctuation, *Eats Shoots and Leaves: The Zero Tolerance Approach to Punctuation*, gets its title from a story about a bear.

A panda bear enters a restaurant. He orders a fine meal. When he has finished eating, he takes out a pistol and shoots everyone in the restaurant. The police catch him, and ask why he did it. He says, 'But I'm *supposed* to do it.' He takes them to his enclosure in the city zoo, and there, attached to the bars, is a sign that says, 'Panda bear. Indigenous to south-east Asia. Eats, shoots and leaves.'

There should be no commas in the last segment. Without them, it means the bear feeds on bamboo shoots and leaves. With merely one, it suggests the bear likes to eat, then fire a gun at other people, then depart.

Ex. 52: Mrs Malaprop

When we use wrong words that may *sound* like the ones we need but have a very different meaning, and if the result is comical, it is a malapropism. Mrs Malaprop was a character in a 1775 play by Sheridan, *The Rivals*. She continually misuses words in this way. So does the character Dogberry in Shakespeare's *Much Ado About Nothing*, written almost two centuries earlier, but it is from Mrs Malaprop that the mistake gets its name.

Here are two of her mistakes. 'He is the very pineapple of politeness.' She meant 'pinnacle.' And 'She's as headstrong as an allegory on the banks of the Nile.' She meant 'alligator.'

Below are 34 malapropisms. Some of them are anonymous or written as examples. Some of them are beautiful errors by politicians or sports figures who realised too late what they had just said. And some of them were scripted for film or television comedies. Most have been embedded in or put next to text that we have created, to make the solution less obvious.

With each one, spot the mistake, say what word or words the speaker was probably looking for, and give a definition of both the wrong and the right words.

- 1) 'He hits from both sides of the plate. He's amphibious. Most hard-hitters are right-handed. With him, you don't know which direction the ball's gonna go.'
Yogi Berra, baseball player
- 2) 'I might just fade into Bolivian. Then again, never say never. It was a tough fight, but I've still got some gas left in the tank.'
Mike Tyson
- 3) 'Swimming is good for cardiovascular health, no two ways about it, but I took up aerobics to help maintain my well-propositioned figure.'
Anonymous
- 4) 'We've passed some progressive legislation before now, on worker's rights, discrimination in universities, and health care, but this is unparalyzed in the state's history.'
Gib Lewis, the Texas Speaker of the House from 1983 to 1993.
- 5) 'She's just a pigment of your imagination. That doesn't mean you're nuts. It could mean you have a busier imagination than most people.'
Example
- 6) 'It's got a fleece hood. It's got deep pockets. It's got lots of installation, and I've never worn anything better for winter.'
Mike Smith (on his new coat)

- 7) 'We cannot let terrorists and rogue nations hold this nation hostile. We are a superpower, and as a superpower, we are no one's prisoner.'
George W. Bush
- 8) 'I am surprised, frankly, at the amount of distrust that exists in this town. And I'm sorry it's the case, and I'll work hard to try to elevate it. A president's job is to bring people together.'
George W. Bush
- 9) 'The law I sign today directs new funds... to the task of collecting vital intelligence... on weapons of mass production.'
George W. Bush
- 10) 'Who do you think you are, some kind of hexagon of virtue? The next thing, you'll be telling me you're about to be canonized by the Pope.'
Anon.
- 11) 'Too much drinking, and you can get sea roaches of the liver. Not to mention all the other problems it can cause in your career and your private life.'
Example
- 12) 'No one compared to him. He was a man of great statue. Without him, this city would be just another humdrum name on a map of the United States.'
Thomas Menino, Mayor of Boston
- 13) 'There's hardly anyone in Iceland per square mile. Compared to, say, the UK or Holland. But this city has one of the highest population densities in Europe.'
(I said this. I wouldn't have known if someone hadn't choked on their tea.)
- 14) 'The argument's over. I've said what I want to say. It's my last will and testament.'
Archie Bunker (sitcom character)
- 15) 'You're out of control. You should be locked up in a penitentiary. I ain't a man of carnival instincts like you.'
Archie Bunker
- 16) 'In her elastic stockings, next to her very close veins.'
Archie Bunker
- 17) 'Move on. Ascend above the fray. Illiterate him quite from your memory. Better men await.'
Mrs Malaprop
- 18) 'If we're going in a boat, I'd like one with a steel hull, please. The ocean is infatuated with sharks, and the jellyfish aren't all smiles, either.'
Stan Laurel (in film comedy)

- 19) 'He tries to come across as some kind of genius. I don't buy it. No one is the suppository of all wisdom.'
Tony Abbot, Australian prime minister
- 20) 'The states are lavatories of innovation and democracy.'
Rick Perry, governor of Texas
- 21) 'We take family matters seriously. Republicans understand the importance of bondage between a mother and child.'
Dan Quayle, US Vice President
- 22) 'We have never strayed from our vows to each other. My husband I are monotonous, and will be faithful to each other till we die.'
Example
- 23) 'The only sure-fire way to avoid teenage pregnancy is through obstinance.'
Anon.
- 24) 'Too many Americans lead a sedimentary life. That, and diet, largely accounts for the high incidence of heart disease.'
Anon.
- 25) '...their due process rights are being so fragrantly and horrifically violated.'
Marjorie Taylor Greene
- 26) 'Bill Gates wants you to eat his fake meat that he grows in a peach tree dish. The tech billionaires want to take over the whole world and turn us into their pawns.'
Marjorie Taylor Greene
- 27) 'The weatherman said there was a 90% chance of participation this afternoon, but that the eastern part of the country should escape the worst of it.'
Example
- 28) 'To all intensive purposes, this new system is the same as the old one, and we can't see why it was instituted by the board.'
Example
- 29) 'If you want to submit a recipe for publication in the cookbook, please include a short antidote about it.'
Anon.
- 30) 'The mountain is named after the Reverend Starr King, who was an invertebrate climber. He was also a founding member of the first mountain-rescue team in the Rockies.'
Anon.
- 31) 'He died interstate. This left his relatives in a quandary, who eventually went to court to resolve the issue of inheritance.'
Anon.

32) 'The fire took hold, and they had to evaporate the city.'

Example

33) 'He had extra-century perception, a gift that can be unsettling.'

Example

34) 'It's pandemonium here. We seem to have unleashed a hornet's nest.'

Valerie Singleton, TV presenter

Ex. 53: Separations are so hard

What is wrong with this sentence?

When I visited him and saw the state of his house which smelt like a dead man's armpit I knew he was unmarried.

It's crying out for commas to signal a parenthesis. It should run 'When I visited him and saw the state of his house, which smelt like a dead man's armpit, I knew he was unmarried.'

Another:

He fell in love with her on their first date a meeting over coffee and cakes in a nice Italian cafe and he saw that she always carried lipstick, contraceptive pills and a chainsaw.

If the last one was crying out of parenthesis markers, this one is screaming. It should run 'He fell in love with her on their first date, a meeting over coffee and cakes in a nice Italian cafe, and he saw that she always carried lipstick, contraceptive pills and a chainsaw.'

If we wanted, we could mark out that parenthesis even more strongly with long dashes; i.e., 'He fell in love with her on their first date – a meeting over coffee and cakes in a nice Italian cafe – and he saw that she always carried lipstick, contraceptive pills and a chainsaw.'

In the following fiction excerpt, the long dashes give us room to briefly imagine the observed woman's life in a different setting, before returning to the 'now' of the story.

He had thought her hair was straight, but saw now that it was made so by her ponytail and without it must hang thick and coiled. Her hairline was exactly that, a precise edge of dense roots. There was a sallowness about her skin, the look of vitality struggling against a recent illness or too much time indoors – the hothouse residue of windows shut, meals skipped, cigarettes, coffee after coffee, sitting, brooding – and under her eyes were the distinct beginnings of bags, dark that might fade with

a return to health, but not completely. It was the eyes that got him. Deep brown, steady on him yet fluid.

Getting parenthetical punctuation right entails careful attention to the meaning of the prose. Take these three sentences:

- A) The listeners who had at been bored at the start of the concert became excited.
- B) Dublin where James Joyce set his novel *Ulysses* is on the east coast of Ireland.
- C) In 1940 when John Lennon was born Liverpool was still a cultural backwater.

If we assume that the authors meant these sentences to have no commas, their meaning gets stranger the more we look at them. The first one, for example, suggests that only *some* of the listeners were bored at first – when we guess that the author probably meant not some of, but the whole, audience.

With correct punctuation, clearly marking off the parentheses, the meaning becomes clear and precise.

Say where the commas should go.

The parenthetical parts here are non-restrictive clauses. They give us more information, but they don't grammatically limit or define what comes before or after them. You could remove them, and the grammar of what remains would still hold up.

One way to test if you are dealing with non-restrictive clauses is to see if you can write the original idea as two separate sentences (with a few minor adjustments); if you can, then they are non-restrictive.

Try it with A, B and C.

What about the sentences below? Say where you think the punctuation is correct and incorrect.

- A) People, who play loud music, shouldn't complain about noise.
- B) People, standing behind the pillars, couldn't see the stage.
- C) Student theses, that are AI-written, give universities a bad name.
- D) Pharmaceutical corporations, that hugely overprice their drugs, are basically criminal.
- E) My sister, Anna, is a meteorologist.

Though we don't know the context for the sentences, we can guess that there should be commas in *none* of them. Or put another way, they don't really contain real parentheses. The segments between commas above *do* limit or define what becomes before and after them. They are restrictive clauses.

What are the sentences implying when they *do* have commas?

Understanding that we are dealing with restrictive clauses, the five sentences should be:

- A) People who play loud music shouldn't complain about noise.
- B) People standing behind the pillars couldn't see the stage.
- C) Student theses that are AI-written give universities a bad name.
- D) Pharmaceutical corporations that hugely overprice their drugs are basically criminal.
- E) My sister Anna is a meteorologist.

Ex. 54: Colonic irrigation

Would you change anything – apart from the content – in the following sentences?

- A) We went to the funfair, where there were: a helter-skelter, bumper cars, a merry-go-round consisting of real dead horses, and terrified children.
- B) He suddenly turned and stared at the window: where a cat stood on the sill, looking in. He opened the window and pushed the cat off the sill, pleased that he lived on the 25th floor.
- C) New weapons of mass destruction, cyberwarfare, growing Chinese nationalism and a mentally-unstable president in the White House mean that: the future is looking bleak.

You can use a colon to introduce a list or indicate a consequence of what comes before. But you shouldn't use it if the sentence functions grammatically with no colon, or with a comma instead of a colon.

So how would you fix the sentences above?

And how would you write those sentences if you do want to use a colon?

Notice that, if you remove the colons in the fixed sentences above, the grammar would not be correct.

And by the way, notice, too, that comma after 'horses' in sentence A. This is an Oxford comma. Why is it there?

Ex. 55: Being specific

In 1946, George Orwell wrote 'Politics and the English Language,' an essay that attacks the way some politicians and professors of the day expressed themselves. He hated the deliberate over-complication of English. He also hated euphemisms when used to disguise something morally questionable or wicked – a theme played out in *Nineteen Eighty-Four*, published three years later.

The essay concludes with six rules. How do they fit in with what you have learned about writing – and academic writing – so far?

- 1) Never use a metaphor, simile, or other figure of speech which you are used to seeing in print.
- 2) Never use a long word where a short one will do.
- 3) If it is possible to cut a word out, always cut it out.
- 4) Never use the passive where you can use the active.
- 5) Never use a foreign phrase, a scientific word, or a jargon word if you can think of an everyday English equivalent.
- 6) Break any of these rules sooner than say anything outright barbarous.

It may seem that Orwell wants us to adopt a plain English with a limited vocabulary. In fact he is asking us to be more reflective, to ask ourselves why we are using a particular word, metaphor or expression as we write. By questioning ourselves and not automatically writing constructions we have heard before, our language becomes richer, not poorer.

Euphemism, as noted, was one of his pet hates. It camouflages all sorts of things that the speaker might prefer the listener not to picture clearly. At the benign end, we can use the polite word ‘bathroom’ or ‘restroom’ (the latter an American term, not a British one) instead of ‘toilet.’ At the malign end, leaders might say ‘collateral damage’ instead of admitting that they have dropped on women and children, or ‘optimising welfare policy,’ when they mean they are cutting benefit payments for the homeless.

Orwell preferred the specific, the concrete and the direct to abstract vagueness. We need a fat vocabulary in order to find the right words for something, rather than pepper-spraying it with grand yet blurry polysyllabic terms. In his essay he quotes a part of Ecclesiastes, from the King James Version of the Bible:

I returned and saw under the sun that the race is not to the swift, nor the battle to the strong, neither yet bread to the wise, nor yet riches to men of understanding, nor yet favour to men of skill; but time and chance happeneth to them all.

Then he recasts it in the kind of language he abhorred:

Objective considerations of contemporary phenomena compel the conclusion that success or failure in competitive activities exhibits no tendency to be commensurate with innate capacity, but that a considerable element of the unpredictable must invariably be taken into account.

The first version conveys meaning through powerful images – images that veer towards metaphor yet are also precise. In the second version, we have no images to hold on to, and though the language sounds impressive, it is actually vague. We don’t

know, for example, what 'innate capacity' means *exactly*, nor 'considerable element,' nor 'objective considerations.' We can guess, but our guesses could be wide of the mark.

Orwell thought that authors of this sort of prose often don't *want* to be understood, because they are hiding something, or because they don't understand the topic well themselves, disguising their ignorance with high-flown language. It has the whiff of bullshit. The philosopher Harry G. Frankfurt wrote a bestselling book on this very issue in 2005. It was titled *On Bullshit*.

Imagine you are George Orwell – with a suspicion of certain euphemisms and an inbuilt bullshit-detector – and look at the following pieces of English. Which would you leave as it is? Which would you change, and how would you change it?

(Different settings usually demand different language, so context is given for each piece.)

- 1) An extensive period of examinations took place.
(newspaper article)
- 2) She was well-advanced in years, and this had left its mark on her features and hair.
(from novel)
- 3) We now have a substantial corpus of early-Christian textual material.
(archaeologist in interview)
- 4) His approach to the experimental matter at hand was methodologically unsound and did not pass the threshold for what might be termed a success.
(internal laboratory report)
- 5) Passengers who are abusive to our staff are liable to prosecution.
(notice on bus)
- 6) In a less-economically advantaged area of London, he was subjected to a physical assault, in which he lost personal items of value, and that necessitated the deployment of the emergency services.
(magazine article)
- 7) In this state, capital punishment was reserved for those who had carried out the most egregious of crimes.
(novel)
- 8) His attitude immediately changed for the better when I informed him about his success in the lottery.
(radio podcast)

- 9) Listeners who stand in close proximity to the speakers may incur symptoms of an unpleasant nature.
(warning notice at concert)
- 10) The ice-skating incident resulted in the hospitalisation of four bystanders, one of whom later lost his battle to survive.
(local news report)
- 11) Refuse and rubbish shall not be collected from the site or receptacles thereon before the hour of 8:00am or after the hour of 6:00pm any day.
(public notice)
- 12) With respect to possible mechanical deficiencies, the rear axle bearings of the car can deteriorate. Continued driving with a failed bearing could result in disengagement of the axle shaft and adversely affect vehicle control.
(Ford Motor Company notice)
- 13) Due to time constrictions, we did not micromanage all aspects of the assault, leaving certain tactical decisions to the initiative of officers on the ground.
(US general)
- 14) Due to a streamlining of the company's operations, Mr Philips was declined a contract extension and informed that it was time for him to embrace a career change opportunity.
(newspaper article)
- 15) Sometimes one is forced to consider the possibility that affairs are being conducted in a manner which, all things being considered and making all possible allowances, is, not to put too fine a point on it, perhaps not entirely straightforward.
(civil servant in UK sitcom *Yes, Minister*)
- 16) This paper aims to introduce the reader to the concept of family relations in the literary output of Stephen King.
(student paper)
- 17) It could be considered the case that, on balance, Victorian readers had a negative attitude towards Dickens's last novel.
(academic conference paper)

Ex. 56: Trouble with lists

Commas separate items in a list, but sometimes this gets tricky. Can you spot the problem with the following?

The room was cluttered with furniture and oddities, such as a square table with a hole cut in the centre, the hole a mystery to him, a large fish tank, tipped on its side, a collection of dusty antique books, which showed just how long the house had been unoccupied, and two skeletons, either of whom could have been his uncle.

When we reach ‘tipped on its side,’ we can’t tell if it means that the fish tank or the book collection is tipped over. We can guess, but the construction makes us wonder for a moment, and we read on a little uncertainly. Good writing should make things as clear as possible for the reader – especially if that writing aims to convey something subtle, or complex, or profound. You can’t dig deep with a crooked spade.

How would you fix the list?

Answer: you either recast the sentence so the list ordering is more comprehensible, or you use semi-colons to separate the items in the list, so that we immediately see what applies to what (and in this example, we can legitimately use a colon, too).

The room was cluttered with furniture and oddities: a square table with a hole cut in the centre, the hole a mystery to him; a large fish tank, tipped on its side; a collection of dusty antique books, which showed just how long the house had been unoccupied; and two skeletons, either of whom could have been his uncle.

Another function of semi-colons is to join separate sentences or clauses that seem to have a strong connection. As in, ‘It was one of those beautiful, heart-warming days when anything seemed possible; at such times he liked setting fire to old people’s hair and feeding poisoned bread to the ducks in the park.’

This usage is optional, and often a matter of style preference of the author. There is nothing wrong with a full-stop if the reader can easily see the logical connection of the sentences either side of it.

The American author Kurt Vonnegut disdained semi-colons, saying that all they did was show you went to university. That may be taking things too far. Vonnegut learned to stop using semi-colons after writing a novel on a mechanical typewriter whose semi-colon key was actually missing. Or at least, that is what he claimed.

By the way, never use ellipsis dots for rhetorical effect. And be stingy with exclamation marks, too. For example, don’t write:

The answer to this problem of conflict, of war, of hatred, is...love.

Or

He opened the door...and there she was.

Or

He pressed the detonator. Instantly he heard it...the explosion.

Or

He pressed the detonator. Instantly he heard it. The...explosion!

Or (dear god)

He pressed the detonator. Instantly he heard it. The...explosion!!!

One exclamation mark is usually too many, since you should be able to convey surprise, wonder or consternation through vocabulary and sentence construction alone. Three exclamation marks, and we suspect you are taking the wrong kind of drugs.

Ex. 57: A Squid Game for nerds

Can you reduce a sentence one word at a time, each stage making a complete sentence (with the addition or subtraction of commas, if you want) until you are down to just one word?

An example.

Start sentence: I did not know you run eight bookshops.

- 1) I did know you run eight bookshops.
- 2) I know you run eight bookshops.
- 3) Know you run eight bookshops.
- 4) You run eight bookshops.
- 5) You run bookshops.
- 6) You run.
- 7) Run.

Perhaps three is a command, if a friendly one, telling someone to remember that she is successful in the book business. Six turns the verb 'run' fully intransitive; it could be a statement, but also a command similar to saying 'Now jump.' 7 could be a command, too, and an exclamation mark might work as well as a full-stop.

Now do the same with this more complex sentence. Bring it down to a sentence of just one word. 'It's' is a contraction, but count it as a single word.

Buses, trains, and however, they do go away, and it's almost yearly, visiting old friends abroad.

And here is another; reduce its 11 words to one (counting 'don't' as one).

You can all grin, but I don't live only for smiling.

Ex. 58: Giving it Character

Saying a sentence, as opposed to writing it, opens up a vast array of inflections, tones and emphases.

If you say 'I know where you've been' with stress on the 'I', you may be suggesting you know where the other person has been while other people don't. Stress on 'been'

could imply, perhaps, that the person has just lied to you, and that you know the truth. And so on.

There is the tone or character of the voice that conveys the words. 'I'm so pleased you're here,' is a different expression in the mouth of Marilyn Monroe or Jeffrey Dahmer.

And of course there is variation *within* a word, where it is twisted internally, deformed, broken into different notes or syllables that don't ordinarily belong to it, and these idiosyncrasies bring new meanings, too.

For example, you ask a friend about the health of a female colleague, who has been absent. He replies, 'She's all right.' But the stress seems to be in the wrong place, on 'she's,' not 'all right.' And he pronounces 'she's' with a swoop up a few notes or so in the middle, then down again at the word's end, which stretches it beyond its normal length. The sound is like briefly revving a car engine. What do you surmise from this weird distortion? Possibly that your female colleague is fine, but someone else isn't – and that, if you had been paying attention to office politics for the last few months, you would understand who this someone else is, *and* why they are not fine.

Possibly. The devil is all in the tone.

In a voice that was a mesh of question, disbelief and statement, and so low Alain only just caught it, Martin said, 'You *do* know where you are.' p. 66

Martin wants to ask Alain if he knows what kind of a bar he is in, finds it hard to believe that he doesn't know, and at the same time is *telling* him what kind of bar it is. This segment in the story is doing a lot of heavy lifting, and it's arguable whether it works. The direct speech itself, if *said* the right way, could do the heavy lifting all on its own.

- A) 'Did he really expect them to do as he said?'
- B) 'And how should I tell them, or would you prefer to do it yourself?'
- C) 'I don't know how you do it. Every bit of clothing you buy is so you it's a miracle.'
- D) 'Snow.'
- E) 'I'm sure everything's going to turn out well.'
- F) 'You know you can trust me.'
- G) 'Close the door, please.'
- H) 'Perfection.'
- I) 'He's your brother.'

Every one of these speech acts can be spoken in different ways. Below are some less common adjectives, and verbs that can function like adjectives, that can describe

the behaviour of a character or the style in which she speaks. A few of the definitions (and none list *every* use of a word) are ghosted from entries in the Merriam-Webster online dictionary.

apoplectic: so angry you could explode or have a stroke

arch: playful, but in a forced or artificial way

bellicose: warlike, ready for a fight

brazen: openly unashamed

brusque: brief and harsh in speech; without good manners

disingenuous: false; two-faced

dolorous: miserable or full of grief

effervescent: bubbly, lively

fawning: bowing to and flattering significant people

imperious: bossy (like an emperor)

impudent: rude, especially with those one should be polite to

ingenuous: naive, quick to believe someone rather than doubt them

insinuating: suggesting something, usually in a sly or self-serving way

intractable: uncontrollable; resistant to authority

lachrymose: tearful

maudlin: too sentimental (41% of everything made by Walt Disney)

preening: showing obvious pride in oneself (Zeus, Hitler, Donald Trump, Tom Cruise)

rebarbative: spiky; hostile

redoubtable: solidly intimidating, like a tank or castle

saccharine: sweet in manner, too much so

sardonic: mocking; sarcastically humorous

sepulchral: in a style suitable for funerals

servile: like an obedient servant

somnolent: sleepy; or causing sleep (Taylor Swift)

unctuous: smug; the behaviour of someone with an oily, false smile

wheeling: using soft words or flattery to get what you want

Pick any one of the speech acts A to I that takes your fancy. Consider how you could say it in a way that suggests a hidden meaning or story – and don't think *aloud*, just mentally rehearse what voice, character, word emphasis and distortion, sentence rises and falls you could use. Be inventive. Be devious. Then choose one of the twenty-five words above that you believe describes how you will say your piece. On a slip of paper write 1) the hidden meaning or story behind your performance, and 2) the adjective or verb-adjective that will describe it best.

Each student then performs his or her speech act. The others have to guess the meaning or story, and which one of the 25 words the student is trying to embody.

Ex. 59: Tupting rattles in the girth rored

A quiz on some of the less common words in the story. Guess each word from its anagram and from an indication of what it usually means. (The anagrams can have two or three parts, but the answer is always a single word – which retains the tense it took in the story.) Smartphones or other online devices must not be used for this exercise!

Note: smartphones or other online devices not allowed!

- 1) DRESS LURED – Without a sense of direction; lost _____
- 2) BEST FIG TURNER – A clumsy person _____
- 3) SPED UP – Drank with sips, rather than gulping _____
- 4) SPEEDY SHELL – Thoughtlessly, or without regard to risk _____
- 5) LOGICALLY TIE – The relationship between workmates, or like it _____
- 6) ARSE PITY – Roughness or harshness of behaviour _____
- 7) HAT HER – Fireplace; home _____
- 8) TOAST – A kind of weasel _____
- 9) PING TOOL – A made-up word for the sound a little engine makes _____
- 10) GRADE MUM – Roughly searched through a bag, drawer, room, etc. _____
- 11) BE BED – Lessened, weakened; retreated like a sea tide _____
- 12) GUN IN TWIT – Unaware; unintentional _____
- 13) EVER IRE – Daydream; state of being lost in thought _____
- 14) GRIND GUT – Walking with heavy or tired steps _____
- 15) FACE NEAR ORB – Patience; leniency _____
- 16) A TUT – Tight, as with a drum's skin or a rope under tension _____
- 17) DESERT KIT – Moved in a quick, twitchy way _____
- 18) INTO MANIA – Aliveness, mobility _____
- 19) HACK LABS – Reaction, usually negative or aggressive _____
- 20) COIN IN SAUCE – Unconcern; indifference to what others think about you

Ex. 60: Trouble with time

When it stopped, the waiter sighed and turned a page. Two patrons resumed their quiet conversation, released from a spell.

It had come from this end of the restaurant, near the balcony. p. 61

Martin glanced at the table where he'd been seated before. On it was a newspaper. A soft leather briefcase lay against a chair leg. Alain realised that when he had come over and introduced himself with a goodbye, on the way, apparently, to the stairs, he had left them there. p. 67

English tenses are sneaky. Two different pasts are at work in these extracts.

When we further complicate tenses by incorporating words like 'if,' 'will,' 'would' and 'should,' etc., we can end up with sentences that flummox even a British person.

- A) If I had gone to the party, I would have seen her there.
- B) If I had gone to the party, I would see her there.
- C) If I went to the party, I would have seen here there.
- D) If I go to the party, I see her there.
- E) If I went to the party, I saw her there.
- F) If I had gone to the party, I see her there.
- G) If I go to the party, I would see her there.
- H) If I go to the party, I will see her there.
- I) If I went to the party, I will see her there.
- J) If I will go to the party, I would see her there.

Look at all these constructions and decide which ones are legitimate – and in what situation they would be legitimate – and which ones are so wild there's no situation they could be applied to.

A sidenote: J is there to advertise an error Polish learners of English sometimes make, namely, a construction like, 'If I will stand close to the edge, I could fall off.' The proper construction is 'If I stand close to...'. That 'will' is wrong. You may indeed *choose* to stand close to the edge, it may be an action you have *willed*, but the sentence is about what could happen to you if you are already *there*.

The error is an intrusion of Polish grammar. A learner of English might also be hijacked on this issue by other, legitimate, English expressions such as 'I don't know if I will go to the party,' or 'I will arrive in a stretch limo and could end up being the talk of the town.'

More constructions. Which of the following could be used – describe a situation – and which belong in the graveyard of exploded grammar? ('If only you' here means

you could have done something, but failed to. It does not mean you did or didn't do that something all on your own.)

- A) If only you speak with her, things were all right now.
- B) If only you had spoken with her, things would have been all right now.
- C) If only you spoke with her, things would be all right now.
- D) If only you speak with her, things would have been all right now.
- E) If only you spoke with her, things will be all right now.
- F) If only you speak with her, things would be all right now.
- G) If only you had spoken with her, things would be all right now.
- H) If only you speak with her, things were all right now.
- I) If only you had spoken with her, things will be all right now.
- J) If only you speak with her, things will be all right now.

Ex. 61: Once upon one time ago

The following is an excerpt from a memoir, written largely in the present tense. Change the whole thing one tense back, so that the opening, for example, is now in simple past. Where the original dips into other tenses, use the correct tense and verb form to register this 'other time' in your own version. This can be a written or spoken exercise.

I walk down the street to the main square, cobbles underfoot, fierce blue sky above. Not yet acclimatised since my flight yesterday, I sweat like the rookie tourist I am. A serene coffee drinker under the shade of a cafe awning eyes me through Ray-Bans. He reminds me of a bored leopard I saw a few years ago in Boston Zoo.

Last night I barely slept. I lay on the narrow hotel bed for no more than three hours before my American body clock jolted me to my feet. So I'm not only sticky today, but wired by sleep loss. I knew it would be like this, my friend telling me before my departure that he once went to Rome for a three-day trip and slept only on the flight back to New York.

A bell rings in the church campanile that looms over the square. A bigger but softer version of the bell that rang in the hotel foyer this morning for god knows what reason.

The walk is worth it. The square is beautiful. In fact the whole town is, or at least it promises to be from the glimpses I have had so far, and I make a promise to myself that next year I will return for a longer stay. Alas, I must go to Naples tomorrow. But when I come here again, I will bring a bigger suitcase, and an empty diary, and a cool pair of Ray-Bans.

(Regional curiosities.

In Ireland, and to some extent Wales, English grammar is occasionally inflected by forms that may be a relic of Celtic languages. Ask an Irish friend where she has just been, and she might say 'I'm just after going to the shops,' not 'I've just been to the shops.' And 'to be' is sometimes missing in everyday phrases like 'That'll need to be cooked,' or 'That'll need to be seen to,' the first one, for example said, 'That'll need cooked.' Short and sweet and weirdly beautiful.)

Ex. 62: Doing the doing

Our everyday speech is littered, quite naturally, with intensifiers like 'very,' 'really,' 'extremely,' etc. Two Brits in conversation:

A: It was a good meeting on Thursday?

B: Bad

A: Really?

B: I mean, like, really.

A: Really?

B: I mean really really.

A: Really? That bad? Really?

B: Really really *really*.

Eight turns in an exchange, and just one verb: 'was.' OK, there is 'mean,' but it's like a broken arm on a scarecrow. In *writing*, when you use an intensifier, it can be a sign that the word you want to boost has been mischosen, and that a stronger one is waiting for you to pick it.

This is especially so with verbs. We often give them a leg up with an adverb when we would do better using a new verb. 'His eyelids moved quickly up and down' is awkward, long and imprecise compared to 'His eyelids fluttered.' No adverb can rescue a badly-chosen verb. The right verb saves you the bother of qualifying it, and will carry your meaning straight into a good reader's imagination.

With this advice in mind, how would you fix the following sentences?

- 1) He went very quickly to the fire exit.
- 2) She hit him very hard in his face.
- 3) He spoke in a quick way about the accident.
- 4) She quietly crossed the landing.
- 5) He gave the policeman an angry look.
- 6) The launch vessel ascended quickly into the sky.

7) The lizard moved slowly over the grass.

8) He moved in a drunk way towards his front door.

Here are 12 short verbs, some of which you may be more used to seeing as nouns or adjectives. Without using a dictionary, does your instinct tell you which verbs go where in the following sentences? (The verbs can be in past tense or present participle form.)

bilk slight beget berate prune flout flaunt rook laud worst gazump waylay

A) After the financial scandal, their expenses were _____ by Parliament and they had to survive on a smaller monthly allowance.

B) He _____ his new suit at the film premiere.

C) She felt she had been _____ of her part in a grand tragedy.

D) On day one of his new job, the bad-tempered manager _____ him in front of other staff.

E) Ties were compulsory in the Excelsior restaurant, but he entered wearing jeans and a pullover, _____ their petty rules.

F) He lost the fight. What hurt most was to be _____ by such a small opponent.

G) She _____ the team for their effort, even if that effort hadn't won the company the contract.

H) She moved fast, and _____ her daughter before she could reach the pond.

I) The sly croupiers and blackjack dealers _____ her of everything, and she left the casino penniless.

J) We thought we were home and dry, but their company _____ us at the last moment, and they won the contract.

K) I did not shake the guest's hand, choosing to _____ him rather than greet him.

L) As spring _____ leaves, so aggression _____ war.

Don't scant/eschew/shun short punchy verbs. They are the lifeblood of good prose – in creative, journalistic *and* academic writing. They show real literacy and can make the meaning of a text more precise, more alive. Notice how many of the verbs above have their first, literal meaning – as with 'prune' – but that the meaning can then be extended more metaphorically.

Ex. 63: Jack in the box

On page four of the story, Alain's awareness of his wife's absence is suddenly so raw it hurts. A few seconds later, he almost bursts out laughing. Why? What is it specifically that makes him laugh? And can you explain the psychology of this?

(Nothing is quite black and white in this question.)

Ex. 64: Passive aggression

Several of the test sentences above use the passive mood of the verb. For example: 'After the financial scandal, their expenses were pruned by Parliament' The active-mood version would be, 'After the financial scandal, Parliament pruned their expenses.'

It is often better to use the active than the passive voice with verbs. It is direct, and it can help us to understand longer, more complex sentences. Whenever you write a sentence using the passive, ask yourself if it could be improved by using the active. If it can, if the passive construction isn't serving any purpose, go for the active.

Here are three passive-construction sentences that immediately look better when whipped into active shape.

His programming ability was admired by us, but his social skills were criticised.

vs

We admired his programming ability but criticised his social skills.

That painting will never be liked by me.

vs

I will never like that painting.

It is understood by committee members that action must be taken now.

vs

Committee members understand that action must be taken now.

But sometimes a moment is made better by using the passive, because it keeps focus on the main subject of the piece.

Imagine a newspaper article on a person's treatment after a car accident. Triage medics see that he needs surgery immediately. If we now write

Then three nurses, the paramedic and a doctor rushed Jeremy to the operating theatre.

we detract attention from *Jeremy*, who should be at the centre of the story. It is better to write

Then Jeremy was rushed to the operating theatre by medical staff.

We don't need details about the medical staff. We are pretty sure they all had medical training. And of course, since we are sure it is medical staff who rush him to the theatre – not a troupe of clowns and animal impersonators – we can also simply write, 'Then he was rushed to the operating theatre.'

All of the following use passive-voice constructions. Which ones should stay as they are and which ones should be changed to active voice? Say why.

- 1) The preservation of inland waterways is supported by most Welsh people.
- 2) The new hate-crime law was called by the prime minister a 'distortion of justice.'
- 3) The hook was cast out into the river by William on the river bank.
- 4) He was brought into the hospital for treatment after a year-long wait.
- 5) Edinburgh has been referred to as the Athens of the North.
- 6) After two weeks of travel, he had almost reached Zimbabwe, only to be bitten by a poisonous snake.
- 7) The Prime Minister was dismayed by the negative news coverage.

Ex. 65: Being brief – and poetic

Mark Twain once wrote a letter to a friend that began, 'Please forgive such a long letter, but I didn't have the time to make it shorter.' It is possible that he stole that line from the French philosopher Pascal.

It takes effort to put things with brevity and precision.

What, arguably, is the most famous line in Shakespeare? 'To be, or not to be, that is the question.' Hamlet doesn't say, 'I find myself torn by the dilemma of continuing with existence or putting an end to it' (26 syllables versus the original's 11). If he had, the moment would not stick in our memory.

In *Beyond Good and Evil*, Nietzsche wrote, '...if you gaze for long into an abyss, the abyss gazes also into you.' He could have written

One should be careful when considering or studying certain kinds of negative phenomena, because if you do so for too long you can be infected by the negativity itself, and perhaps even take on its characteristics.

But he didn't. His way of putting it is brief, poetic, and *apt* – conveying the peril of our attraction to dark topics. We are making a point here that was touched on in the section on Orwell.

Nietzsche's literary style was partly influenced by François de La Rochefoucauld, whose *Maxims*, published in 1665, was a collection of short sharp sayings about life.

Here are two of his maxims:

Our envy always lasts longer than the happiness of those we envy.

Almost always we are bored by people to whom we ourselves are boring.

That's it; there are no explanatory notes, each maxim standing alone as just one or two sentences, and the brevity is what makes us *think*.

Below is a collection of original and fake Rochefoucauld maxims. Each entry in the right-hand column is the real thing. Each entry in the left-hand column, A to G, is a grammatically correct but long-winded, clumsy version of one of the maxims. Can you match them up, saying which entry on the left is a poor version of which maxim on the right? (There are two extra maxims on the right, without a partner version on the left.)

- | | |
|---|--|
| A) There is an intellectual aspect to stating what it is we want which, to my mind, is completely different from whatever it is that we want in a non-intellectual way. | 1) Absence diminishes small loves and increases great ones, just as the wind blows out the candle and fans the bonfire. |
| B) There are some people who are stupid enough to believe they can make a huge difference to their society and community. At the same time – and perhaps this is even worse – it doesn't make much sense to think that you have no place at all in your own society or community. | 2) A refusal of praise is a desire to be praised twice. |
| C) Sometimes it's difficult to tell somebody what is really on our mind, and this is often because we get a feeling that we might put ourselves in danger if we do, or we might make a fool of ourselves, or the people we tell will think that we are strange. But at the same time, perhaps we don't want to tell even ourselves what is really on our mind. Perhaps we couldn't take it. | 3) We never desire earnestly what we desire in reason. |
| | 4) As it is the mark of great minds to say many things in a few words, so it is that of little minds to use many words to say nothing. |
| | 5) We should often be ashamed of our very best actions if the world only saw the motives that caused them. |

- D) When we're away from somebody for a long time we really find out what we feel about them. We might, for instance, realise that somebody doesn't mean that much to us when they're not next door or there at work when they usually are. And then it can work the other way around, too, and we discover how much we miss them.
- E) People usually think that the end result of something we do is what really matters. But maybe this is wrong. Maybe what really matters is why we did something in the first place, not the end result.
- F) It often seems to be the case that when someone says something nice about us, and we don't accept it, it doesn't really mean that we're modest. In fact it can mean the opposite.
- G) Sometimes we are not quite sure what other people are up to. I think this is mostly because people are difficult to read. But not being sure can be almost a habit, and if you take it too far, if you keep thinking this about people, then it sort of changes other people themselves, and you don't know who you can rely on.
- 6) Our distrust of another justifies his deceit.
- 7) He who thinks he has the power to content the world greatly deceives himself, but he who thinks that the world cannot be content with him deceives himself yet more.
- 8) What commonly hinders us from showing the recesses of our heart to our friends is not the distrust we have of them, but that we have of ourselves.
- 9) Jealousy is in a way just and reasonable, as it tends to preserve a good that belongs, or that we believe belongs, to us; on the other hand, envy is a fury that cannot endure the happiness of others.

And here are three more poorly-written versions of Rochefoucauld maxims. Pick one that interests you most and, without searching for the original online, turn it into a brief, evocative maxim that Rochefoucauld himself would be proud of. Be original. Take a risk. If you use as many words as the poorly-written version, you are missing the point.

- A) Most of the time, it seems that when we say we like someone or really admire what they've done, it isn't always so straightforward. For example, if we look closely into our own reasons for admiring a person, we often find that it is only because they admire us. One way of testing this is to think how often you've said you really admire someone who actually despises you.
- B) We tend to hate people who have tricked us or got away with lying to us, and I think the reason we really hate them is not because of what they've actually done so much as the fact that they think they are more clever than we are.
- C) When you look around you and see people in love, you sometimes wonder if it's only because they've seen so many romances, etc., on TV and in books and magazines, and that they have somehow been taught to 'fall in love' rather than done it through a deep instinct inside themselves.

Ex. 66: Beating about the bush

On page four of the story, Martin asks, 'And when...when, if I may ask, did you know?' Know *what*?

Ex. 67: Going native

Some expressions in the story lean away from the formal to the idiomatic, some expressions can't be identified as *single* words in a dictionary, and they all have a native-English flavour, despite the nationalities of the characters. Here is an email from one British friend to another. Can you guess what expressions from the story go in the gaps? The expressions may be altered in tense, etc., to fit the email's context. (One kind of expression is used twice.)

John, how's it going?

I went to see that film in the end, and it's really ___ ___ t ___ / ___ m ___ ___ ___ g, even if Eddie doesn't ___ a ___ / ___ t. What does Eddie know, anyway? If he's not getting pissed on supermarket cider, he's ___ u r ___ ___ / ___ ___ the kind of video game that trains you for a mass shooting. I'm just glad he doesn't live in the US. Try getting an AR15 in Luton.

I had an argument with him last week. Not about the film, about parking. I mean the space he takes up so no one else can park by the front lobby. You may say it's ___ / b ___ g / d ___ ___, but I hate the way he ___ ___ ___ n t / g ___ ___ / ___ / ___ n ___ y ___ about the other people who live in the block. Maggie included. She's an invalid, even though you wouldn't know from the way she c ___ r ___ ___ s / ___ ___ ___ l f. If she can't park near the door the only other place is down the street.

I know I shouldn't have argued. I should have just ___ f t / ___ t / ___ e ____. But then again, I wasn't the one who started it. He got out of the car, defending himself before I'd even said a word – which shows he knows what he's doing. I'd say that ___ / m ___ / ___ a ___ t I'm more concerned about the other residents than about having a fight with him. But o ___ / h ___ / w ___ n ___, cursing about the set-up in the parking spaces, and how no one can park here anyway. So I'm afraid I cursed back, and he just sort of ___ ___ e d / ___ and went inside. I haven't spoke to him since.

Anyway, you don't really need to hear all this stuff. I'll ___ a v ___ / ___ / ___ h ___ ___.

I really wanted to wish you and Julie a nice break in Thailand. I guess you're ___ t t i ___ / ___ ___ tomorrow morning? I ___ k ___ / ___ t you'll be travelling with the right documents this time? (I'm sorry, I still love your Vietnam story.) If it's that resort, I hope you'll also be g ___ ___ ___ / ___ u ___ / ___ ___ / ___ b ___ u ___ – there's so much to see in that part of the country.

Ex. 68: Get your chopper out

A) I like short sentences. They are easy to read. They are easy to write. The grammar is usually straightforward. Many great novelists use them. People tend to speak in them, too. Movies use them. Especially American ones. But sometimes short sentences give the wrong impression. Readers think the writer must be simple if the sentences are simple. This is wrong. Simple construction isn't the same thing as simple thoughts.

Or

B) I like short sentences, their clear grammar making them easy to write, and to understand – in everyday speech, in American movies, and in certain great novels – but they can give the wrong impression to those who mistake simplicity of construction for simplicity of thought.

Which version do you prefer? A has 12 sentences, B, just one.

As noted earlier, you should vary your sentence-lengths in prose. After several long sentences, it might be time to bring in a shorter one. After several short sentences, it might be time to bring in a longer one. I find long texts that consist exclusively of long sentences not only tin-eared, but rude. I feel I am being talked over, not spoken with. Hannah Arendt's *Eichmann in Jerusalem: A Report on the Banality of Evil* is a bit like this, despite the terrifying subject. It is like being carpet-bombed with clauses.

When it comes to short sentences, there is the good and the bad.

Ernest Hemingway, for example, belongs with the good. He can write whole novels in which long sentences are few and far between, and somehow the prose *flows*.

The short-sentence example above, A, is another matter. There, short sentences are handled in a way that makes the piece choppy. It doesn't actually *help* our comprehension, because we must repeatedly let go of one idea and hop on to the next. As you see, B has more complex grammar, is more eloquent, and is shorter while managing to convey the ideas of A clearly – perhaps more clearly.

Remove the choppiness of the following examples:

- 1) The senator asked the chairman a question. The senator is from Alabama. The question was about taxes.
- 2) Philip Watson said that he is not attending the gala. Watson is the mayor of Bradford. Bradford has never funded the new year celebrations.
- 3) London estate agents made a fortune from Russian property buyers. The Russian boom is now over. London estate agents hope new buyers will appear. The number of Saudi-Arabian customers is now increasing. Their money comes largely from oil. For them, London property is a sound investment.

As you tried to turn the three extracts into flowing English, perhaps you saw how choppy language can result in the repetition of key words.

In 1, 'senator' and 'question' appear twice; in 2, 'Watson' and 'Bradford' appear twice; in 3, 'Russian,' 'estate agents' and 'buyers' appear twice, and 'London' appears *three* times.

There is nothing wrong with repetition when it is used well for effect, but in the above examples it is just clumsy. Choppy language is the culprit here.

Did you also notice how a certain part of speech could help you fix the problem? Ask yourself what you would change in this piece:

In 1889, Simon Philips — whose original name was Simon Jones — died at 33 years old. During his short life, Philips made use of his medical condition to make a living.

Philips was 7 ft 7 in tall. Philips had two siblings who were much taller than average, but Philips was the tallest member of his family by far. Because of an anomaly in Philips's growth hormones, he was over six feet tall before he was five.

Philips made his living as an exhibit in a travelling circus. But as Philips continued, even in adulthood, to gain height, medical researchers began to take an interest. Two of them asked Philips if he would allow them to examine his corpse after his death. Philips declined. However, when Philips died, his wishes were not respected. Today, Philips's corpse is on display in the anatomical museum of John Hopkins Medical School.

If instinct told you that 'Philips' crops up far too much, your instinct is sound, the name appearing *twelve* times in just ten lines. The piece is choppy, it could flow better, and the part of speech that could help remove that clumsy repetition is the pronoun, in this case 'he' – and the adjective/pronoun form 'his.'

How many times do you feel the name Philips needs to be used in this extract?

As a written or spoken exercise, recast the above extract so that the clumsiness and repetition are removed.

In fact, the extract can happily contain just one 'Philips,' the one at the start. The others can be turned into 'he' or 'his.' You don't need to repeat a proper noun if the reader now understands who or what you mean by a pronoun. As soon as you sense that the reader *will* be confused, perhaps because another character taking 'he' or 'she' is now in the mix, it is time to use the proper noun again, or find another way to make things clear.

Having said that, it is kind to give the reader a reminder of a person's actual name now and then even when matters aren't confused. In an essay on Napoleon, though the reader is sure that that is who you are talking about, it might be good to use his actual name if you haven't for a while. After all, he almost took Moscow.

Ex. 69: Corrections in the newsroom

The following extracts are all from real newspapers and news websites. We have radically altered the content (except that of B) to avoid copyright infringement, but kept the bones of the linguistic errors. Can you see what those errors are?

A) Stewards said that the rain was making it difficult for musicians to play on the stage, and local radio described conditions at the festival as 'a quagmire' with 'thick, oily mud clung to footwear and legs.'

B) Donald Trump, verbatim: '[I promise to] root out the communists, Marxists, fascists and the radical left thugs that live like vermin within the confines of our country that lie and steal and cheat on elections.'

- C) The students on the philosophy course have just watched a scene from Blade Runner and are about to discuss it as I enter the classroom, switching to English for my benefit.
- D) The new government has made itself vulnerable to accusations of the same undermining democracy of which it accused the previous government.
- E) The Sicilian mafia is estimated to have murdered over 400 people in Palermo since 1998, 70% of which remain unsolved.
- F) There has been public condemnation of Michael Waters' apparently racist comments on Fox news about President Obama.
- G) The protest attracted local and international journalists to the site of the barricade, where they had blocked the road with overturned cars.
- H) The mass media have been turned into a mouthpiece for the current government and acts both to bolster support for the government and to spread black propaganda about the opposition.
- I) Yes, the characters in Friends and Curb Your Enthusiasm could hardly be more different, but they also share something significant in common: comedy that centres on social embarrassment.
- J) This film is however, at least arguably, like many others that defy the expectations of the genre, and in defying it, presents something new.

Ex. 70: Liking more or less

Martin seems to profess a love of Oscar Wilde. But just before leaving the bar, this happens:

'Do you rate Oscar Wilde?'

'I do,' Alain said. 'From what little I know.'

'Me too. Well, I have to.'

'Well he's quite something.'

Martin said, *'No, I mean I have to. But I prefer others.'* p. 67

What is going on here? What does Martin mean?

(Your guess could be as good as the author's.)

Ex. 71: Midnight copy

You work for a magazine that prints its next issue at midnight. It is now 11:30 p.m., and the editor hands you an article she wants to include in the magazine. It seems that the author was drunk when he wrote it. Your job is not to rewrite it wholesale but to check grammar, punctuation, spelling, and word choice (correcting only words

that are flat-out wrong, not words for which there are slightly better synonyms). How many errors can you spot? Many of them are errors we have already discussed. What would your corrections be?

Democracy Dies, by Hiccups

The Prime Minister is less than honest, and his director of communications, John Roberts, is as deceptive as a scam artist. Stealth tax is an interesting phenomena. We are used to governments giving with one hand as they empty our purse with the other. But what has just happened in London is brand new. The government's tactic, in which backbenchers and cabinet secretaries try to pull tricks on the British public, make one weary of Westminster itself. Most of us are not taken up by this ploy.

What is the government's criteria here? Laws that effect us all should be the peoples' laws, not degrees handed down by some Roman emperor. This is not how Parliament is supposed to work. We live in a democracy. At least that's what I was told. However it seems that we are being lead by miniture men who posess greed, and ambition, and zero integrity.

Now we must pay 300 pounds a year simply for daring to live in London. The charge applies to everyone, irregardless of income or address. Furthermore, to be caught driving on London's streets without the new license could incur a fine of 1,500 pounds.

Where is the Lord Chancellor in all this? He is conspicuously absent. Of the two remaining Supreme Court judges involved, Lord Carrington is the best person by far, he has remained silent on the question of the legalism of the new charges. There appeared to be hope in 2020, when he had not fit in with other participants in the London Charges Committee. Now he bends to the government's will.

But that is hardly a surprise. In Eton where he was educated conformity is as much a subject as math or Latin.

This new charge, is catastrophically ill-concieved. The government is taking a huge gamble. The dice has been thrown, and we are now in an absurd game of blackjack invented by public school and Oxbridge types who have no idea about the lives of British citizens. Ordinary people will yet again need to tighten their belts, and a new level of bureaucracy added to an already overburdened city council. (Sadiq Khan recently forecasted a £578m shortfall in city revenue next year) Londoners, who feel that this new charge is affordable and fair, are likely to live in plush homes far removed from housing estates and high-rise apartment blocks. If I was rich, I would think nothing of the charge myself. It would be water off a swan's back.

Almost all of us would prefer it more if the government changed direction. Everyone knows how moralistically wrong this new charge is. It is unfeasable, since

the poor literally can't pay – not without cutting in on such essentials as heating, clothing or healthy food. When a person on London's median wage tries to make ends meet, but she or he must always make vital compromises. So why has the Prime Minister given the thumbs-up to this law when most of us detest it, and want it thrown out in its entirety. To please the plutocrats. But soon he will find, that they are the tail that shakes the dog.

Ex. 72: Getting cryptic

In exercise 48, 'Two-timing little words,' the clues sneakily hint at the several meanings of a word. They are similar to the type of clues you find in a cryptic crossword, where the answer is suggested through devious wordplay and tricks with the *sound* of language.

In a proper cryptic crossword, you might get a clue like this:

Turn around, please, to make it a good night; 6 letters ___ s ___ ___ ___

At first you haven't the foggiest what this means, though certain images come to mind. What can 'turn around' be referring to? Is it addressed to a person, a lover?

But then, perhaps, you begin to think that, since the answer is six letters long, *maybe* it is one of the six-letter words in the clue itself – because *maybe* you are supposed to 'turn around' or *re-order* its letters to make a new one. So you wonder if it is 'around' or 'please,' the only six-letter words in the clue. The word 'around' is out, because there is an 's' in the answer word.

Then you try 'please.' If you re-order 'please,' you find that you can make the word 'asleep.'

And what can 'make it a good night'? To be asleep. So 'asleep' is the answer.

When a cryptic clue uses sound, it relies on the way words or parts of words – to our ear, at least – can resemble completely different words or parts of words. A clue might run

'If you're this red-handed, it sounds like you'll end up here before a judge; 6 letters
___ ___ ___ g h ___'

Again your brain does cartwheels. You wonder about 'end up here before a judge.' If you are *here*, with a judge looking down at you, where *are* you? In a *court*. Is 'court' part of the answer? Now you may take a risk, and wonder if the answer *sounds like* 'court.' You look at the first part of the clue: 'If you're this red-handed.' Where do we usually see the term 'red-handed'? Next to 'caught.' As in 'the police said he was

caught red-handed.' Then you realise that 'this' in the clue is not some intensifier, but a stand-in for 'caught.' And 'caught' *sounds like* 'court.'

That 'this' has been pointing to the answer all the time, and the answer is 'caught.'

Not all cryptic crossword clues are so devilish. Even if they play with sound, you don't have to be Sherlock Holmes on amphetamines. Take this one:

The police direct him to the side of the road, then comment on his sweater; 8 letters

___ ___ l o ___ ___ r

The police make you 'pull over' when they wave you to the side of the road – perhaps because you are speeding, or drunk, or driving a fancy Porsche, or just way better-looking than the average cop, which makes them furious. The answer word is eight letters. Another name for sweater is 'pullover.' So you see how the police action is a two-word version of the actual answer, 'pullover.'

In cryptic clues, half the art is guessing which part of a clue is related most directly to the target word. All cryptic clues have these more direct pointers. In the above examples, they are 'please' (the anagram of this), 'this' (as a blank space for 'caught'), and 'sweater.' But it's usually only when you *solve* a cryptic clue that you find your guess was right. You need linguistic ability to solve one, for sure, but you also need a slippery, imaginative kind of thinking. You often find that you solve one just when you feel defeated – because what happens then is that you give up, your mind relaxes, and your unconscious, which has been busy all along, gives you the answer.

Sometimes Sherlock Holmes needed to chill before solving the mystery.

Find the solutions to the following cryptic clues. Every solution is a word in the short story.

- 1) Breathe out, since it sounds like your previous lover is healthy; 6 letters

___ ___ h ___ l ___

- 2) The monster in the loch shows no motion, but has kept her name; 9 letters

___ t ___ ___ l ___ ___ ___ s

- 3) Put in handcuffs, or have what we hear as a snooze? 6 letters ___ ___ r ___ ___ t

- 4) Hide, or trick what appears to be a cute aquatic mammal? 7 letters

c ___ ___ c ___ ___ ___

- 5) This trial won't take long if you have the right bag; 9 letters ___ r ___ ___ ___ c a ___ ___

- 6) A huge emptiness you should dodge! 5 letters ___ ___ o ___ d

- 7) He fell in a Paris river? I heard he was mad; 6 letters ___ n ___ a ___ ___

- 8) Definitely not blonde or playing by the rules; 6 letters ___ ___ f ___ ___ ___

- 9) Most houses have several, but backwards it's a lonely, windswept place; 4 letters
 _ _ _ _
- 10) Like a metal, though it also sounds like the size of an item in a lingerie shop;
 6 letters _ r _ _ _ s _
- 11) A sheltered place, or a long fish turned back to front; 3 letters _ _ _
- 12) Envious *and* inexperienced? 5 letters _ r _ _ _
- 13) Yearn for the lengthy? 4 letters _ _ _ _
- 14) A net, or a pigsty if you're drunk? 4 letters _ _ _ _
- 15) Depressing someone by confiscating their whisky? 11 letters
 _ _ _ s _ _ _ r _ _ _ _ n _
- 16) Left this world – for another colour, by the sound of it: 4 letters _ _ _ _
- 17) A speed regulator for a machine, or an exercise machine for an insect? 8 letters
 _ _ _ y w _ e _ _ _
- 18) It sounds like where I have been placed, though really it's about vision; 8 letters
 _ _ _ e s _ _ _ h _
- 19) Posted it a second time, that's what I dislike; 6 letters _ e _ _ _ n _
- 20) Heard, it's the team you picked, and it's what you did when they lost; 6 letters
 _ _ _ g _ e _

Ex. 73: Last is good

As you read about a boxing match you come across this sentence:

Commentators know that, without his vicious liver punch, he would be just another forgotten name.

There is nothing wrong with it. The grammar is fine, as is the vocabulary. It would work well in a sports-pages article about a fight.

But it can be improved.

You could find out how by putting this book down for a while to make yourself a cup of coffee. In the few minutes you are away, the sentence begins to fade from your memory. Before you open the book again, it's possible that almost all of the sentence has gone. Or is there a part it that persists in your mind?

This is a subjective business. I would remember 'vicious liver punch.' While the rest falls away, that part clings on – because it has flavour, distinctness, difference. In short, it has something *emphatic*.

In *The Elements of Style*, an excellent guide to writing, the authors use that word – emphatic – to describe the part of a sentence that feels most alive and memorable. And they go on to say that whenever you can you should put the most emphatic part of a sentence at the *end*.

The most emphatic part is not necessarily the subject of a sentence. It is the part that *you* instinctively feel has most flavour or specialness. As I said, it's a subjective business. But let's take the sports-page sentence and sweeten it according to this rule:

Commentators know he would be just another forgotten name without his vicious liver punch.

The sentence now ends with power – which gives power to the *whole* sentence. (By the way, notice how we can omit 'that' in the revised version.)

Think of your favourite song lyrics. The chances are that the lines that really get you, that you carry around like a secret mantra, have just this structure. Good lyricists, good poets, and good prose writers automatically shift the emphatic part of a sentence or line to an end position. Wisława Szymborska does it. So does Amy Winehouse. Often, this simply isn't possible, the language refusing to be moulded into that order, in which case, don't sweat it. But it can be done much more than you may think.

Another sentence:

The defendant was found guilty of voluntary manslaughter at the end of a court case that lasted five weeks and three days.

If you are like me, 'guilty of manslaughter' is the juiciest part of this sentence – who can resist guilt, and a word for killing that comes from the Vikings? But it is hemmed in by less memorable language. So:

At the end of a court case that lasted five weeks and three days, the defendant was found guilty of manslaughter.

Now the sentence sings.

And what about this?

Sometimes, a simple, straightforward kiss is the best way to save a relationship.

There is nothing remarkable about the word 'kiss,' but it is still the most interesting part of this sentence, and deserves to go last.

Sometimes, the best way to save a relationship is a simple, straightforward kiss.

Better.

The author Isaac Babel once said that nothing pierces the heart like a full-stop in exactly the right place. (That's deliberate hyperbole, of course, and we might wonder

if Babel just didn't get out much, but we can take the point.) Another author, Tobias Wolff, talks about the 'tensile strength' of a sentence – when you get the structure and length just right, it has a muscular elegance. In contrast, when you go on and on, adding clause after clause without regard to how you should end, it feels like a burst water pipe. Earlier, we discussed the periodic sentence. That is one way to make sure a longer sentence comes to a satisfying finish. Another, here, is to shift the most interesting stuff to the back of a sentence. Then the full-stop arrives with grace.

Now we have discussed this rule (or advice, since it can't be applied to every sentence), can you use it to rewrite the following extracts?

- 1) The Tudor Rose, an Elizabethan man-o'-war, is one among many ships lost in that area of the sea.
- 2) That part of the Norwegian coast can suffer catastrophic hurricane-force storms, as recorded by weather stations and meteorological surveys for the last hundred or so years.
- 3) In their press release, the police state that Mrs Johnston used a claw-toothed hammer in the assault on her husband, to whom she had been married for 37 years.
- 4) When the Speaker supported the guillotine motion, the debate was brought to an end and members of Congress dispersed.
- 5) Some argue that artificial general intelligence (or AGI) could mean the destruction of humankind, mass unemployment, radical inequality, and the end of many traditional industries.
- 6) On the return journey I lost my beloved Hasseblad camera, along with various other possessions of sentimental value.
- 7) With a poker-face, he hid the effect that the news had on him.
- 8) We deploy them as assault troops because of their resilience.
- 9) A party can be fun, but champagne on a moonlit yacht is the best thing of all.
- 10) The lift dropped like a stone when I pressed the down button.

Ex. 74: Boomerang

Martin appears to be angry when he comes back to the bar. What do you think was going through his mind in the time between his departure and his return?

Ex: 75: And they lived...

The story ends with Martin staring at the other people in the room. What do you think happened next?

Abstract

Andrew Simon Tomlinson, Patrycja Marta Kamińska

Classroom Diversions: Exercises, Games and Writing Tips for Advanced English Language Learners

The textbook is a unique resource for learning English at the highest level of proficiency, as it includes two original short stories written by a native English speaker. All exercises in the book directly or indirectly relate to linguistic phenomena present not only in both texts but also in natural, contemporary English. The textbook contains dozens of exercises that allow for the expansion of vocabulary, phraseology, and grammatical structures across various registers, while also providing two complete literary texts that can serve as sources for literary analysis and discussions on the topics addressed in the stories.

Keywords:

Language exercises, language games, prose writing rules in a foreign language, advanced English

Abstrakt

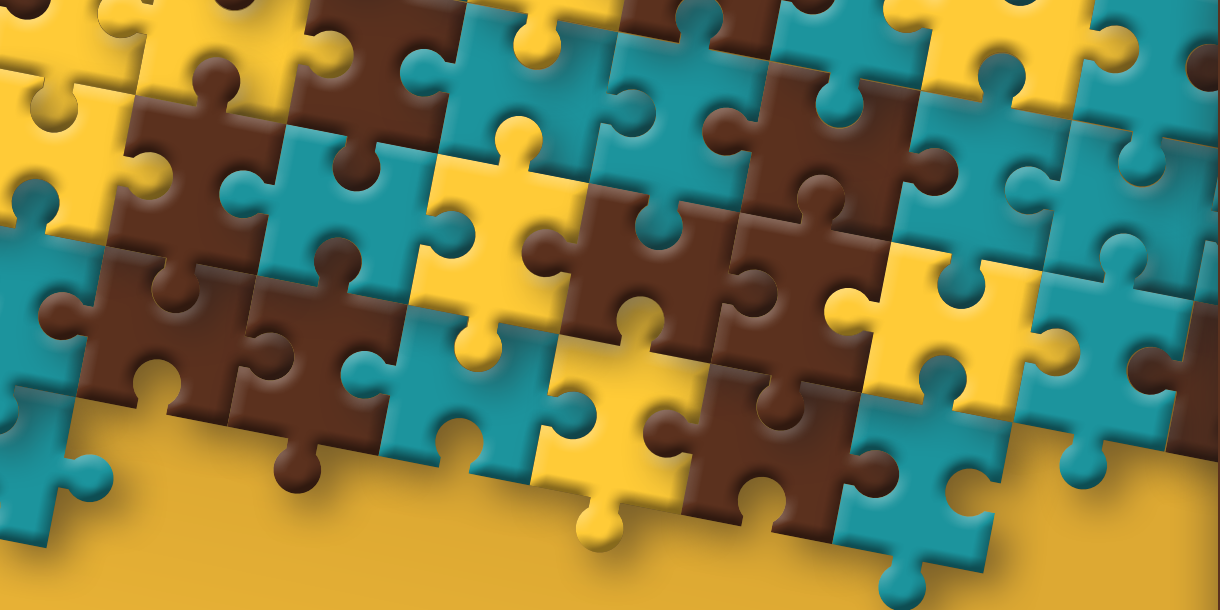
Andrew Simon Tomlinson, Patrycja Marta Kamińska

Rozrywki w klasie: ćwiczenia, gry i wskazówki pisarskie dla zaawansowanych uczniów języka angielskiego

Podręcznik stanowi unikatową pozycję do nauki języka angielskiego na najwyższym poziomie zaawansowania ze względu na to, że zawiera dwa oryginalne opowiadania napisane przez rodzimego użytkownika języka angielskiego. Wszystkie ćwiczenia zawarte w książce nawiązują bezpośrednio lub pośrednio do zjawisk językowych obecnych nie tylko w obu tekstach, ale również w naturalnym, współczesnym języku angielskim. Podręcznik zawiera kilkadziesiąt ćwiczeń pozwalających na poszerzenie słownictwa, frazeologii i struktur gramatycznych w różnych rejestrach, a jednocześnie dostarcza dwa pełne teksty literackie, które mogą służyć jako źródła zagadnień do analizy literackiej i dyskusji na tematy poruszane w opowiadaniach.

Słowa kluczowe:

Ćwiczenia językowe, gry językowe, reguły pisania prozy w języku obcym, język angielski dla zaawansowanych



The book is structured, as the title states, around exercises, games and writing guidance. Aimed as it is at advanced learners, its preferred reader is likely at certain moments to have his or her English skills tested to the limit – but this is largely in those sections of example text, which replicate advanced real-world English, and the authors' own commentary contextualises and explains those sections in student-friendly language. (...) The emphasis is on learning through close reading, twinned with a more ludic approach where linguistic comprehension and understanding is stimulated by games. (...) Fun is the element that a language teacher might first pick up from a cursory reading. However, more careful reading, and a genuine attempt by that teacher to answer the book's questions, would, I think, reveal proper seriousness underneath. Many problems that bedevil the writing and speaking of good English students are treated in real depth, in tandem with exercises and games that then test understanding of the problem.

Paul Wilson, PhD



71-101 Szczecin, ul. Mickiewicza 64
tel. 91 444 20 06, 91 444 20 09
e-mail: wydawnictwo@usz.edu.pl
www.wn.usz.edu.pl

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