

# ***THE LANGUAGE PAGE***

- A) Expression and Clarity: 5 Exercises
- B) Dangling/Misplaced Modifiers: 2 Exercises
- C) Parallelism: 2 Exercises
- D) Complementation: 2 Exercises

## Expression & Style #1: Activating Sentences

In English, the *passive voice* puts the real, active subject of a sentence after the verb instead of before it; often, it removes the real subject entirely:

- \* *It was suggested by one student that the class be cancelled.*
- \* *It was felt that the suggestion should not be accepted.*

These sentences are correct, but they are more effective in active voice:

- \* **One student suggested canceling the class.**
- \* **Other students rejected the suggestion.**

You can't avoid the passive in English, but you should use it sparingly. In the sentences below, you will find correct, but awkward passives. Rewrite actively, keeping the same meaning; cut unnecessary words; introduce a subject if necessary, and alter structure where appropriate. Count your words, and make sure your rewrites are shorter than the original. You have various options here....

\* \* \* \* \*

1. Among many Canadians, the opinion is shared that we are required to pay too many taxes. [16 words]

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2. The observation was made by Frank Kermode, who is known as a leading Shakespeare scholar, that the 'entire world' is contained in the plays written by William Shakespeare. [28 words]

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3. A consultation process has been proposed by the college president, in which various stakeholders will be heard from. *[18 words]*

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4. It was clearly stated by the union leader that wages were seen by the workers to be the key issue in contract negotiations. *[23 words]*

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5. Near the end of the story, there is a conversation which needs to be carefully analyzed by readers. *[18 words]*

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6. Literature is seen by many people as a field of study which has been made obsolete by technology. *[18 words]*

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7. A poem can be said to be understood when an emotional response is felt by the person by whom the poem is being read.

*[14 words]*

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## Expression & Style #2: Avoiding the 'Noun Disease'

Many writers habitually use nouns which are really 'verbs in disguise'; to do this, they need to add extra words.

- \* *The oil spill resulted in the presence of pollution in the harbour.*
- \* *Not getting the job was the reason why I felt a lot of frustration.*

The action in these two sentences here is 'hidden' in the nouns '*pollution*' and '*frustration*'. You can improve these sentences if you use these nouns as verbs:

- \* **The oil spill polluted the harbour/Oil spilled into the harbour.**
- \* **Not getting the job frustrated me.**

\* \* \* \* \*

The following sentences are correct; however, they will be more concise and dynamic if we transform key nouns into verbs. Alter/delete words as necessary, but keep the same meaning. The rewrites should have fewer words than the originals.

1. The student provided the correct answer. *[6 words]*

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2. Hamlet was the topic of the discussion we had in class. *[11 words]*

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3. The decision that the teacher made concerned an extension of the deadline. *[12 words]*

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4. The first appearance of James Joyce's "Araby" was in the short story collection, Dubliners. *[14 words]*

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5. The shock of the sudden flood was felt by everyone in town. *[12 words]*

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6. A close analysis of seemingly unimportant details is required by a student who has hopes of arriving at an understanding of a poem. *[23 words]*

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7. The implementation of the new program was an accomplishment of the school board. *[13 words]*

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8. Although physical resemblances between twins are almost always in evidence, differences in their behaviour occur often. *[16 words]*

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9. The singer's first performance before a large audience came with her participation in the Jericho Folk Music Festival. *[18 words]*

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## Expression and Style #3: Faulty Complementation

*Complementation*—sometimes called '*predication*'—is a common structure in English. Basically, it says that one thing is, or equals, another. For example,

- \* William is a writer.

Here, 'William' is the *subject*; 'writer' is the *subject complement*. [It is NOT an object!] **William = writer**; they are the same thing. Only one person appears in this sentence. A few other examples of *correct* complementation:

- \* Your essay is very intriguing.
- \* The problem is that he doesn't have any money.

In the first, *the essay = intriguing*; in the second, *the problem = not having any money*.

Students often rely heavily on complementation because it uses a simple structure and a simple verb, 'to be'. However, it can lead to problems, especially in more complicated structures, because not all ideas involve an 'equality relationship'. Here is a simple example of awkward complementation:

- \* *One important goal of medical research is cancer.*

We get the idea, but clearly, the 'goal' does NOT equal cancer. We should say:

- \* **Medical researchers are trying to cure cancer.**      ...or...
- \* **One important goal of medical research is a cure for cancer.**

Here is another example of awkward complementation:

- \* *The reasons why Mary divorced Ted were that he was abusive and that he wasn't working.*

This is much clearer if we express the logical relationship more directly:

- \* **Mary divorced Ted because he was abusive and lazy.**

Complementation is unavoidable in English; however, a) *it expresses only one relationship, equality*, b) *it is 'static', involving no action*. Therefore, it can be limiting when you want to express more complicated relationships.

*these sentences have faulty complementation/ predication---rewrite them correctly...*

1. The purpose of this story is how Nature can't be hurried.

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2. Women are passive is a common cultural stereotype.

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3. The temperature of water is that it boils at 100 degrees.

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4. Mary's personality is a girl who is happy but impatient.

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5. One way to tell a good story from a bad story is the good ones make you think and the bad ones don't.

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6. The function of metaphor is the way that two dissimilar things are linked in a meaningful, creative way.

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7. The mood of the story is the characters feel sad.

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8. The difficulty some students have with literature is it has different levels of meaning.

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## Expression & Style #4: Dummies, Delays & Debris

1. **Dummies.** English commonly uses an 'it' which doesn't refer to anything. This is called a '*dummy subject*'. For example:

\* *It is surprising* that he didn't understand the book.

This sentence is clear enough, but it's more effective without the 'dummy' subject:

\* **Surprisingly, he didn't understand the book.** ...or...

\* **I was surprised that he didn't understand the book.**

2. **Delays.** The structure '*there is*'—also called the '*expletive*'—delays the subject of the sentence without adding any meaning. It also complicates grammar.

\* *There are many people who* think literature is boring.

In most cases, you can easily remove the expletive and tighten up the sentence:

\* **Many people think literature is boring.**

3. **Debris.** Many writers are addicted to '*catchphrases*' and '*clichés*'. These are often groups of words that come together in little packages. Generally, they don't mean much.

\* *At this particular point in time, the economy as we know it is not what informed observers would be inclined to call healthy.*

\* *It is an indisputable fact which can't be denied by anyone with even the slightest degree of rationality that money buys power.*

You can clean up these sentences by deleting the 'debris' and getting to the point:

\* **Right now, the economy is unhealthy.**

\* **Obviously, money buys power.**

*The sentences below are correct, but wordy and clichéd; tighten them up by removing the 'dummies, delays, and debris'. Keep the same meaning, but alter grammar as necessary. Try to cut the word count by half (if possible!).*

1. It can't be denied that it is of rather significant importance that the prime minister has entered into dialogue with Iran. *[21 words]*

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2. One would be wise not to ignore the fact that a key risk factor in the development of heart disease is stress. *[22 words]*

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3. Despite these difficult economic times in which we find ourselves, there are many otherwise intelligent people who could be said to be fiscally irresponsible. *[23 words]*

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4. With regard to the theme of the story, it can be said that it relates to the general idea that there are people who are blind to their own desires. *[30 words]*

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5. It goes without saying that there are a whole multitude of various questions which British Columbians would like to be asked of the premier. *[19 words]*

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6. When all is said and done, there is little need to point out that the realm of poetic studies can't really be said to be attracting great interest at this point in time. *[33]*

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7. It is clearly beyond any reasonable doubt that there is a litany of reasons why students who are in university should be under an obligation to study literature. *[28]*

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## Expression and Style #5: Being Concise

Academic writing is grammatically correct, but it is often wordy and indirect, and quite hard to follow. Some students think this is because the ideas are complicated; just as often, academics simply want their ideas to sound more impressive. A good writer can express complicated ideas in clear, concise sentences. Compare:

*\* It was a common perception among James Joyce's contemporaries that the primary cause for his book's poor sales was the indisputable fact that the style utilized by Joyce was felt to be markedly too complicated for readers.* [37 words]

**\* James Joyce's contemporaries thought his book sold poorly because readers couldn't understand his complicated style.** [15 words]

\* \* \* \* \*

The sentences below are grammatically correct, but awkward and wordy. Find the key ideas, and without losing any meaning, rewrite the sentences. Try to **activate** unnecessary passives; watch out for the **noun disease**; keep an eye on the **dummies**, **delays and debris**, and improve **awkward complementation**. Alter grammatical structures as necessary. Your rewrites should be shorter than the originals.

1. The decision of the mayor to put into effect the implementation of an increase in property taxes has been responsible for creating a lot of anger among those in the Vancouver resident category. [33 words]

2. It is generally true that it's evident to drivers of cars that what's being emitted by their cars can't be said to be good for the environment. [27 words]

3. To no one's great surprise, there are studies in which mental illness has been shown to be a factor in the process by which people find themselves homeless. [28 words]

4. It goes without saying that poetry is a field of study in which some students get frustrated due to the fact that the language that is used is so obviously and undeniably complex and metaphorical. *[35 words]*

5. One would not be lying if one said that Anton Chekhov occupies a position in world literature which, by any measurement at all, would have to be called, at the very minimum, prominent. *[33 words]*

6. It has been proposed by a great number of critics that the books written by the writer Ernest Hemingway have been felt by many later writers to have been a great influence on their style. *[35 words]*

7. There was a decision among the teachers that it should be expressed to the students that the coming strike would not be a factor that affected their grades in any way whatsoever. *[32 words]*

8. The short stories which were written by John Cheever give an undeniably accurate reflection of the nature of post-war American society in the 20<sup>th</sup> century. *[25 words]*

9. It hardly needs to be pointed out that the interpretation of literature which is done by students is affected by any and all of their own personal experiences. *[28 words]*

10. On balance, taking everything into consideration, it's safe to say that one would not provoke too much controversy if one proposed that there is no one who would disagree with the proposal that Henrik Ibsen is a great playwright. *[39 words]*

**DANGLING/MISPLACED MODIFIERS #1:** 'Modifier' refers to a word, a phrase, or a clause which modifies a noun. A *dangling modifier* occurs when the sentence does not contain a specific word or idea to which the modifier can logically refer to. In this situation, the modifier applies to whatever it's next to, often with humorous results:

a) **After a good sleep, my teachers were impressed by my alertness.**

*[who had the good sleep here?]*

b) **Cycling close to the curb, a Porsche almost hit me.**

*[can Porsches ride bicycles?]*

...to correct dangling modifiers, you usually need to restructure the sentence...

a) **After a good sleep, I impressed my teachers with my alertness.** ...or...

**After I'd had a good sleep, my teachers were impressed with my alertness.**

b) **While I was cycling close to the curb, a Porsche almost hit me.** ...or...

**Cycling close to the curb, I was almost hit by a Porsche.**

**MISPLACED MODIFIERS** are similar to dangling modifiers, but are easier to fix.

\* **I thought of starting a business with my sister being unemployed.**

The modifying phrase, 'being employed', is confusing; it seems the sister is unemployed, which doesn't make logical sense in this sentence. If you move the misplaced modifier into the correct position, the sentence becomes clear:

\* **Being unemployed, I thought of starting a business with my sister.**

Read the following sentences. Decide if the problem is a '*dangling modifier*' or a '*misplaced modifier*'. Correct in the simplest, clearest way possible. With dangling modifiers, you may have to change the grammatical structure a bit.

1. Leaving the theatre, it had gotten dark.
2. The furniture should be dusted before vacuuming the floor.
3. Belching smoke and ash, we watched the volcano as it erupted.
4. Swiftly crawling across the ceiling, my grandmother spotted a large spider.
5. After criticizing both my work and attitude, I lost my job.
6. Reading the morning newspaper, a squirrel ran across my front yard.
7. A big ugly worm was spotted by Belinda wriggling through the dirt.
8. I learned that provincial premiers in Ottawa will soon meet in *The Globe and Mail*.
9. Turning 80 years of age and in excellent health, a set of silver-plated garden tools seemed the perfect gift for my grandmother.
10. Tourists can visit the cemetery where famous Russian composers, artists and writers are buried daily between 9 a.m. and 9 p.m.

**DANGLING/MISPLACED MODIFIERS #2:** Here are some more examples of 'problem' modifiers. Examine the sentence and find the problem; correct in the clearest, simplest way. Alter grammar if necessary, but don't change the meaning of the sentence.

1. Confused and angry as he walked through the woods, a large bear jumped out of the bushes and attacked John.
2. Wearing a fur coat, the beggar asked an elegant woman for food money.
3. The highest earning American writer in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century, many critics refuse to recognize that Edith Wharton is also a great writer.
4. Vladimir Nabokov moved to the United States, where he wrote his famous novel Lolita, who was born in Russia.
5. Trapped under an upside-down crystal wine glass on the elegantly set table, we spied that most unwelcome of dinner guests, a cockroach.
6. I learned that the Columbian writer, Gabriel Garcia Marquez, had received the Nobel Prize for Literature in the book section of the *Vancouver Sun*.
7. Suffering from a deadly disease that cut her writing career short at age 39, I find the stories of Flannery O'Connor strange and fascinating.
8. Raymond Carvers uses simple descriptions, short sentences, and a minimum of adjectives like Ernest Hemingway.
9. Reading a story for the second time, different levels can be seen.
10. Born in Louisiana in the mid-1800's, many critics say that Kate Chopin's short piece, "*The Story of an Hour*", has a feminist sub-text.

## Parallelism #1: The Parallelism Principle....

Let's imagine that I want to express three ideas: 1: *I like camping.* 2: *I like fishing.* 3: *I like hiking.* I could use three separate sentences, but they would be repetitive and boring. Parallelism allows the writer to join these separate ideas in one sentence which avoids repetition, i.e.

**I like camping, fishing and to hike.**

The approach is fine, but the grammar isn't totally parallel. 'Camping' and 'fishing' are gerunds, and 'to hike' is an infinitive. Parallelism requires that the items in parallel sequence be grammatically consistent. So:

**I like camping, fishing and hiking. ...or...**

**I like to camp, fish and hike.**

There are no fixed rules for how to use parallelism effectively. Some parallel structures are very simple, but others can be quite complicated. Here are several examples of awkward sentences improved by parallel structures.

a) *not parallel:* **Gordon tries to do what is right, honest behaviour, and make money.**

*parallel:* **Gordon tries to do what is right, honest, and profitable.**

b) *not parallel:* **With his sharp mind, his father being well-connected, and he's a friendly guy, he is sure to be successful.**

*parallel:* **With his sharp mind, well-connected father, and friendly personality, he is sure to be successful. ...or...**

*parallel:* **Having a sharp mind, a well-connected father, and a friendly personality, he is sure to be successful.**

c) *not parallel:* **I'd like to find a job, buying a house is also desirable, and the idea of getting married seems appealing. ...or...**

*parallel:* **I'd like to find a job, buy a house, and get married.**

*Rewrite the following sentences below. Identify the sequence of items, and use parallel structure to clarify and 'smooth out' the key ideas. There are various options.*

1. The three main kinds of speech are demonstrative, giving some information, and you can also persuade somebody of something.

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2. Two of the most difficult problems the single mother faces are supporting her household and she's the sole parent to her child.

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3. The doctor told me to take two aspirins and calling him the next day was advisable.

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4. Books provide information, I'm entertained by books, and education is also possible through reading.

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5. I am overworked, and my cheques aren't big enough.

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6. To make your court appearance as painless as possible, prepare your case well, some nice clothes won't hurt, and it's not a bad idea to be respectful to the judge.

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7. Quickly, and showing signs of skill, the woman gutted and cooked the fish.

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8. To be a good tennis player, mental concentration is required, you should be in good physical shape, and enjoying hitting balls won't hurt either.

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9. The apostrophe is used for two purposes: contractions, and it shows possession.

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10. The two main jobs of a prison guard are general security and controlling the inmates.

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**Parallelism #2:** Improve the following sentences using parallelism. *[n.b. there may be several ways to do this]*

1. Jack is a sports announcer, he drinks heavily, and it is well-known that he is very confused.

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2. Their constant arguments make me wonder about their ability to understand one another, and whether they really love each other.

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3. In his life, Ernest Hemingway was the recipient of the Nobel Prize for literature, he once won the Pulitzer Prize, and not only that, but the National Book Award was also given to him.

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4. Sherlock Holmes asked Moriarty about his degree of closeness to the murder victim, inquiries were made about where Moriarty was on the night of the murder, and there was also a request from Holmes that Moriarty reveal the extent of his financial dealings with the victim.

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5. This essay argues that the plot of the novel is fundamentally flawed and the characterization is puzzling as well, and it contains some good things, too.

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6. The conflict in this story arises for three reasons: first, Jack's drinking, secondly, because Maggie is childless, and also that Maggie and Jack hate each other.

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7. There were a number of different reasons for the accident: the road was icy, the driver lacked experience, and poor visibility was also a factor.

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8. Literature is either a profound effort to understand the human condition, or people are totally wasting their time by engaging in literary studies.

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9. Short story writers need to be concise in their use of language, quick character descriptions are required, and it's generally true readers appreciate a clear resolution.

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**MORE COMPLEMENTATION ('Predication')**: The terms 'complementation' and 'predication' refer to the relationship between a 'subject' and a 'complement' joined by the verb 'to be'.

i.e. **Gordon is a Canadian.**

'Gordon' = subject  
'is a Canadian' = complement

The basic idea here is one of equality: Gordon 'equals' Canadian. They are the same. There is only one person in this sentence. Now look at this sentence:

**The reason I'm tired is when I work too much.**

'reason' = the subject  
'when I work too much' = complement

Clearly, 'reason' can not equal 'when I work too much': a reason can't be a time. The problem is faulty complementation.

*correct:* **I'm tired because I work too much.**

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## COMPLEMENTATION EXERCISES

1. Dyslexia is a psychological problem where people have trouble reading.

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2. Canadians are polite is a common belief around the world.

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3. The weather in Vancouver is that it rains a lot, especially in winter.

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4. The reason that Bill is with Ruthie is because they are sharing gas.

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5. The essayist discusses a misrepresentation of women which is biased textbooks.

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6. One challenge for writers is the ending a story can be quite tricky.

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7. The essay's thesis is the corruption of most, if not all, politicians.

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8. The word 'tomboy' is a bias against women.

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9. The author describes the true nature of the young protagonist as a girl who is happy but impatient.

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10. The tree that the boy climbed is rough bark.

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## COMPLEMENTATION #2

1. The purpose of writing "*Ripe Figs*" is because Kate Chopin wants to comment on how Nature can't be hurried.

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2. The tone of "*Ripe Figs*" is a warm, gentle story.

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3. The theme of the novel is when people have too much power, power can corrupt their moral sensibilities.

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4. The interpretation that Ruthie becomes attractive to Bill is in the last few lines of "*20/20*".

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5. The style of Kate Chopin is simple clear prose that sounds quite modern.

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6. The guiding metaphor in "Ripe Figs" is that, similar to the figs, Babette has 'ripened'.

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7. The theme of "20/20" is that it can be found in the way Brewer keeps alluding to 'vision' and 'sight'.

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8. The main difficulty students have with "A Rose For Emily" is when the chronology of the story gets confusing.

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9. The tone of "The Cask of Amontillado" is that the story is full of gloomy, terrifying images.

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10. In "Hills Like White Elephants", the involvement between the man and the woman is that the man seems to want an abortion and the woman doesn't.

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