

Nouns, Verbs, Adjectives, and Adverbs. Oh My.

Purpose of Exercise - This Mad-Libs-style exercise gets students thinking about how language works via an underhanded grammar refresher, and jarring them out of the world of conscious language use.

Description - You will need index cards; color-coded work best. The idea is that by stringing together random parts of speech, sentences can be constructed which, while they do not make "sense," have, nonetheless, an internal grammatical logic.

Suggested Time - 20 minutes to a full class period

Procedure - Color-coded index cards work well for this: designate a color for each part of speech, making sure that there are twice as many cards for nouns and adjectives (you might ask students to prep for the lesson by bringing in their own cards). Some students who have trouble visualizing what kinds of words fit into each category (Noun, Verb, Adjective, Adverb) may feel too embarrassed to ask, so give a few quick examples to get them going. Ask each student to write down two nouns, two adjectives, one verb and one adverb - each on its own card.

After they have written down their words collect them into four stacks by color and shuffle them. Distribute the cards so that each student once again has a verb, an adverb, and two each of nouns and adjectives. At this point they should begin to arrange their cards to form sentences. Articles and possessive pronouns may be inserted wherever needed and verb tenses may be changed or nouns changed from singular to plural or vice versa. When all are finished go around the room and ask each student to share his or her sentence.

Discuss each sentence in terms of language play and grammar. You might emphasize grammar and focus on subject-verb agreement, subject-action-object, or the effect of punctuation. Or, you might focus on the power of word play, active, illustrative verbs, odd pairings, connotations, metaphor, etc. Help students apply what they've learned to their own drafts.

If time allows, students could be asked to write a paragraph or a poem around their sentence to share and discuss with the rest of the class, or as a journal.