

Sentence starters

The whole pack, for printing. Claim, evidence, commentary, conclusion, verbs.

sheets.works/english/sentence-starters

How to run this

Project one starter. Give them a quote they already know. Two minutes on paper. Then show a filled example.

One paragraph, filled in

Claim

Macbeth kills because he wants more, not because he has a reason.

Evidence

He says he has "[no spur to prick the sides of my intent, but only Vaulting ambition, which o'erleaps itself and falls on th' other.](#)"

Commentary

The word "vaulting" makes ambition a horse that jumps too far and comes down on its head. He names the fall before he does the murder.

Conclusion

So the play tells you the end in Act 1. He does it anyway.

Claim

In this scene, [character] [does X] so that [Y].

First sentence of a body paragraph about one moment.

In this scene, Lady Macbeth shames her husband so that he will kill the king. She does it with [When you durst do it, then you were a man.](#)

[Character] wants [X] more than [Y].

When the motive is the point, not the plot.

Macbeth wants to be safe more than he wants to be king. He says so himself: [To be thus is nothing, But to be safely thus.](#)

The writer presents [X] as [Y].

When you are writing about method, not just character.

Dickens presents Scrooge as a stone that will not spark: [Hard and sharp as flint.](#)

By [this point], [character] has changed from [A] to [B].

A paragraph about change. You need two quotes, early and late.

By Act 5, Lady Macbeth has changed from the one who said [A little water clears us of this deed](#) to the one who cannot wash her hands: [Out, damned spot, out, I say!](#)

What looks like [A] is actually [B].

Appearance and reality. Fair is foul. A smile with a knife in it.

What looks like a welcome is actually a trap. Lady Macbeth's plan is [Look like th' innocent flower, But be the serpent under 't.](#)

I claim that [X]. The text [does Y].

US classes that use claim-evidence-reasoning. Say the claim in your own words first.

I claim that Jekyll never split himself in two. The text has him look in the mirror and say Hyde is himself: [This, too, was myself.](#)

The play tells you the ending in [early bit], then makes you watch it happen.

Prologues, witches, the Friar warning them. Fate that still needs a choice.

The play tells you the ending in the Prologue, then makes you watch two families bury their children. They are [star-cross'd lovers](#) from line one.

Evidence

[Character] says, "[short quote]" ([where]).

The basic drop. Name the speaker. Cut the quote. Put the act and scene in brackets.

Lady Macbeth says, "Look like th' innocent flower, But be the serpent under 't" (Act 1, Scene 5).

Do not start the sentence with the quote. Put a short lead-in first.

When [event], [character] calls it "[quote]".

When the timing of the line is the point.

When the king is dead, Macbeth calls what he has done murder sleep:
[Macbeth does murder sleep.](#)

The line "[quote]" comes just after [what happened].

When you need the reader to feel the gap between two moments.

The line [Out, damned spot, out, I say!](#) comes after four acts of her saying blood will wash off.

The narrator calls [him] "[quote]".

Novels. Dickens and Stevenson talk about people. That talk is evidence too.

The narrator calls Scrooge [Hard and sharp as flint](#). Flint is a cold stone. It can make a spark. Scrooge never lets one out.

[Character] answers with "[quote]".

A reply. The line is doing work because of what came just before.

When Malcolm says take it like a man, Macduff answers, [But I must also feel it as a man](#).

Cut it. Keep the words that do the work.

Every time. A twelve-word quote is usually a three-word quote with padding.

From Macbeth's long line about having no spur, you only need two bits: "vaulting ambition" and "falls on th' other". The rest is him circling. [Vaulting ambition, which o'erleaps itself](#)

Commentary

The word "[X]" turns [A] into [B].

Point at one word. Say what it does.

The word "unsex" turns kindness into a problem she wants removed. [unsex me here](#).

If [character] meant [A], they would have said [B]. They said "[quote]" instead.

When the exact word is a choice, not an accident.

If Lady Macbeth only wanted him brave, she would have said be brave. She said be a man. She has made murder the test of manhood. [When you durst do it, then you were a man](#).

That is how [writer] makes [idea] look like [picture].

After the quote. Tie the picture back to your claim.

That is how Shakespeare makes ambition look like a horse that jumps too far and comes down on its head. [Vaulting ambition, which o'erleaps itself](#).

So the audience sees [X], not [Y].

The effect. What a person in the room would notice.

So the audience sees a king going mad, not a king in control. Nobody else can see Banquo's ghost.

This only works because of [earlier moment].

A later line that pays off an earlier one. Two quotes, one paragraph.

[Out, damned spot, out, I say!](#) only works because she once said [A little water clears us of this deed](#).

The same idea comes back when [later moment].

The other direction. Start with the early line, land on the echo.

The flower - and - serpent plan comes back as [False face must hide what the false heart doth know](#).

[Character] is not explaining. They are [doing X].

When students paraphrase the plot and think that is analysis.

Lady Macbeth is not advising. She is shaming him into the murder. [When you durst do it, then you were a man](#).

The boast and the fact sit next to each other.

Poems especially. A claim in the line, a ruin in the next one.

Ozymandias says [Look on my Works, ye Mighty, and despair!](#) The next thing in the poem is sand. The king's sentence does the opposite of what he meant.

These do not count

~~This quote shows that...~~

Does not count.

It names the job. It does not do it. Point at a word instead.

~~This suggests that...~~

Does not count.

Suggests is a shrug. Say what the word does.

~~This proves the theme of...~~

Does not count.

A theme is not a stamp. Tie the line to the claim you actually made.

Conclusion

So [character] ends as [X], which is why [theme] is the problem of the book.

Last two sentences of a paragraph, or the last paragraph of the essay.

So Macbeth ends as a butcher, which is why kingship in this play is about whether anyone loves you, not whether you have the crown. [this dead butcher and his fiend-like queen](#).

The book does not reward [X]. It counts what [X] costs.

When the moral is in the plot, not in a speech.

The book does not reward greed. Marley's chain is every greedy thing he did, and he has to wear it: [I wear the chain I forged in life](#).

Both [A] and [B] wanted [Y]. They both pay.

Two characters, one idea. Romeo and Juliet. Macbeth and his wife.

Romeo and Juliet both wanted out of the feud. They both pay. The Friar saw it coming: [These violent delights have violent ends](#).

What [character] said in [early scene] is now true about them.

A line that comes back as a punishment.

Lady Macbeth said a little water would clear them. In Act 5 the water does nothing. The line has come true the other way round.

The last word on them is "[quote]". That is the writer's verdict.

When someone else gets the last line. Malcolm. The Chorus. The last stave.

The last word on them is [this dead butcher and his fiend-like queen](#).

Malcolm gets the last line. The play will not forgive them.

Instead of "shows"

undercuts

Takes the power out of a claim.

Ozymandias undercuts the king's boast with sand. [Look on my Works, ye Mighty, and despair!](#)

inflates

Makes a thing bigger than it is.

Lady Macbeth inflates murder into a test of manhood. [When you durst do it, then you were a man](#)

isolates

Leaves a character alone.

Dickens isolates Scrooge before he changes him. [Hard and sharp as flint](#)

binds

Ties two things together.

Marley's chain binds every greedy act to his body. [I wear the chain I forged in life](#)

delays

Puts off the thing we already know is coming.

Macbeth delays the murder for one scene. Then he does it.

repeats

Says it again so we cannot miss it.

"Tomorrow and tomorrow and tomorrow" repeats a day that means nothing.

withholds

Does not tell us.

The witches withhold how the prophecies will come true.

mirrors

Copies an earlier moment.

[Out, damned spot, out, I say!](#) mirrors [A little water clears us of this deed.](#)

splits

Makes two out of one.

Jekyll splits himself, then cannot put himself back. [man is not truly one, but truly two](#)

hardens

Makes a person cruel.

Lady Macbeth tries to harden herself. It works. Then it breaks.

excuses

Gives a reason that is not a reason.

Macbeth has "no spur" except wanting more. [Vaulting ambition, which o'erleaps itself](#)

traps

Leaves no way out.

[I am in blood stepped in so far](#) traps him in the next murder.

names

Calls a thing what it is.

Malcolm names them butcher and devil queen. [this dead butcher and his fiend-like queen](#)

hides

Covers the real thing.

[False face must hide what the false heart doth know](#)

tests

Checks if someone will do it.

Lady Macbeth tests him with [When you durst do it, then you were a man.](#)

shrinks

Makes a big thing small.

[A little water clears us of this deed](#) shrinks a murder into a wash.

damns

Judges without appeal.

The witches damn Macbeth as one of them: [Something wicked this way comes.](#)

Instead of "says"

asks

Instead of "says".

Puts a question on the page. Juliet asks why he has to be Romeo.
\${Q.wherefore}

answers

Instead of "says".

A reply that does work. Macduff answers Malcolm: $\{Q.feel\}$

orders

Instead of "says".

Tells someone to do it. Lady Macbeth orders the night to hide the murder.

begs

Instead of "says".

Asks from underneath. Macbeth begs the stars to go dark.

jokes

Instead of "says".

Makes light of a thing that is not light. The businessmen joke about the dead man in stave four.

threatens

Instead of "says".

Names a cost. The Friar threatens the marriage with $\{Q.violent\}$

lists

Instead of "says".

Piles items. Marley lists the chain. Dickens lists Scrooge: squeezing, wrenching, grasping.

shortens

Instead of "says".

Cuts the sentence. "Out, damned spot." Three beats. No grammar left.

understates

Instead of "says".

Says less than the fact. "She should have died hereafter" is a whole marriage in six words.

repeats

Instead of "says".

Same as the other list. If they say it twice, write that they repeat it.

Notes by Akash Wadhvani. Copy it. Print it. Share it. No sign-up. sheets.works/english/sentence-starters