

VCOP – Writing

Vocabulary, Connectives, Openers and Punctuation

Helping your child with V.C.O.P at home

Throughout the school students are involved in activities that help them to gain more knowledge about how to improve their own writing. As well as focussing on the genre-specific writing features, they are encouraged to always focus on four core targets; Vocabulary, Connectives, Openers and Punctuation (V.C.O.P) – as a way of improving all of the writing they do. This guide will provide you with details about this approach, and includes suggestions as to how you could support their V.C.O.P development at home.

What is V.C.O.P.?

V.C.O.P. are the four core targets we use to teach writing. The letters stand for:

Vocabulary
Connectives
Openers
Punctuation

Vocabulary (Wow words!)

It is important that students begin to think carefully about the vocabulary they choose and the effect that it has on the reader. We promote the use of ‘WOW’ words in writing. These are words that are ambitious for the students to use; they can uplevel their nouns, adjectives, verbs and adverbs:

Noun - A word that names a person, place or thing: The exhausted, frightened **youngster** trudged slowly through the thick **mud**.

Adjective – A word used to describe a person, place or thing: The **exhausted, frightened** youngster trudged slowly through the **thick** mud.

Verb - A word to describe action; what is happening in the sentence: The exhausted, frightened youngster **trudged** slowly through the thick mud.

Adverb - A word to describe how the action is taking place: The exhausted, frightened youngster trudged **slowly** through the thick mud.

How can you help?

- Read to and with your child.
- Talk about and write down interesting ‘WOW’ words in the stories you are reading at home.
- Ask your child to try using the words you have found in a sentence.
- When you use a word your child is unfamiliar with, discuss what it means with them (encourage them to use the word in a sentence).
- Discuss with them words that you would use in different situations (eg formal, informal).
- Have a mini-quiz: ‘How many words can you think of instead of ‘said’?’ or ‘went’, ‘nice’, ‘good’. Put each one in a sentence.
- Give your child two different words and ask them to make different a sentence from them, eg: ‘magical’ and ‘boy’
- Encourage your child to look up vocabulary to find possible synonyms (a word or phrase that means the same).

Connectives

Connective is the name for any word that links clauses or sentences together. There are two main groups of connectives: Conjunctions and Connecting Adverbs.

Conjunctions

Conjunctions are words that are used to link clauses within a sentence. There are two main kinds:

Coordinating Conjunctions – link two main clauses to make compound sentences.

eg **and, but, or, so, for, nor, yet**

I was angry **but** I didn't say anything.

Subordinating Conjunctions - go at the start of a subordinate clause. They work to link the subordinating clause to the main clause.

eg **when, while, before, after, since, until, if, because, although, that**

We were hungry **when** we got home.

When we got home, we were hungry. (Commas are used when the subordinating clause is first).

Connecting Adverbs

Connecting adverbs link the ideas in two sentences together but the two sentences still remain separate, eg **also, furthermore, moreover, however, nevertheless, on the other hand, besides, anyway, after all, for example, in other words, that is to say, first of all, finally, therefore, consequently, as a result, just then, meanwhile, later**

Commas are often used to mark off connecting adverbs.

I was angry. **However**, I didn't say anything.

How can you help?

- Try to search for connectives in the stories you read at home. Use a highlighter pen to highlight connectives in old newspapers/magazines.
- Give your child a connective and ask them to use it in a sentence.
- Think about connectives that have a similar meaning. For example, which connectives could be used instead of 'but'? (however)
- Try rearranging sentences with the connectives at the start, eg The little boy shivered, **despite** it being warm in the cave. **Despite** it being warm in the cave, the little boy shivered.

Openers

An opener is the first word or phrase used in a sentence. There are lots of different ways of opening sentences. When students start on their writing journey, most sentences initially begin with 'I, they, he/she, then'.

Older students are introduced to ISPACED openers. Here we use an acronym to remind the students to use a variety of ways to start sentences:

Running towards the sparkling sea, Megan couldn't wait to jump in!

Like a bottle-nose dolphin, she swam up and down, in and out of the waves.

Underneath the water, Megan could see a shoal of colourful fish.

Silently, she then tiptoed over to a rock pool to see if she could see a crab.

Meanwhile, Megan's parents fell asleep in the warmth of the sun.

Exhausted from all her activities, Megan lay down on her brightly coloured towel and drifted off to sleep as well! **“Wake up!”** cried mum. “The tide is coming in. Grab your things – before we get wet!”

How can you help?

Look out for different types of **ISPACED** (Ing Simile Preposition Adverb Connective Ed Dialogue) openers when reading with your child. Why has the author chosen to start the sentence in that way? Ask your child to use the openers you have found and to use them to start their own sentences.

Punctuation

Using a wide variety of punctuation is important to add variety and interest to your child’s writing. We provide the students with lots of examples of where punctuation is used effectively and model how to use them. The pyramid below shows differentiation in punctuation. It starts at the top with basic punctuation and progresses down to using complex skills such as speech marks and brackets.

How can you help?

- Look at different types of punctuation with your child in their reading book.
- Discuss why the author has chosen to use it.
- Use a highlighter pen to highlight different forms of punctuation in old newspapers/magazines.
- Give your child a piece of punctuation and ask them to give you a sentence using it.
- For older students, ask them to write a short story/article and try to use all the punctuation on the bottom row of the pyramid!

VCOP- in action

Encourage your child to improve a simple sentence that they write, using VCOP. For example,

The cat went along the wall.

We can improve this sentence using:

Vocabulary: The **fluffy, ginger** cat **quietly prowled** along the **unstable** wall.

Connectives: The fluffy, ginger cat quietly prowled along the unstable wall **while** the unsuspecting bird pecked for worms in the garden below.

Openers: **Licking his lips**, the fluffy, ginger cat quietly prowled along the unstable wall while the unsuspecting bird pecked for worms in the garden below.

Openers: Licking his lips, the fluffy, ginger cat (**who had missed his breakfast**) quietly prowled along the unstable wall while the unsuspecting bird pecked for worms in the garden below.

However, in order to add interest and variety to their writing, students must also learn to balance longer, detailed sentences with shorter, simpler ones. For example:

One glorious summer's day, on the edge of a forest far away, the sound of laughter and excitement could be heard rippling through the fragrant, pine-scented air. **Three young pigs were finally moving out!**