Seven Seconds

How sentence structure shapes pace and emphasis

L.11-12.3.b "Vary syntax for effect in writing and speaking, consulting references for guidance as needed."

NAME _____ DATE _____

1 READ AND MARK

Read it twice

YOUR JOB Underline two short sentences, circle one sentence that begins with a dependent clause, and number three actions listed in a single sentence. Notice how each choice affects the pace or emphasis.

The Crossing

1 At 6:40 a.m., the crosswalk outside the high school flashed its white walking figure. Across the street, Maya watched a bus pull to the curb. She stepped forward. Then a delivery truck rolled through the turn, its tires brushing the painted line where her shoe would have landed. The bus doors folded shut. By the time the truck cleared the intersection and the signal changed again, the bus was already two blocks away. Maya stood beside a rain-dark backpack and counted the seconds of the next signal: seven. Seven seconds to cross six lanes, if every driver stopped.

2 At the city meeting that evening, Maya carried a sheet of notes crowded with measurements. She had timed the signal on four mornings; each time, it allowed seven seconds. While the speakers before her thanked the council for new benches, fresh paint, and a plan for spring flowers, she kept her pencil pressed against the number at the top of the page. Her name was called. Maya rose, crossed to the microphone, and looked at the council members. "Seven seconds," she said. "That is the time we get to cross six lanes." Nobody interrupted.

3 A council member asked whether she had brought a video. Maya shook her head. "I brought a clock." A few people laughed, but she did not. She described the truck, the missed bus, and the students who waited for the next signal rather than risk the turn. Then she laid her notes on the table. The chair said the transportation staff would check the signal timing and report back at the next meeting. Outside, the intersection still worked exactly as it had that morning. For now, though, the seven seconds were no longer hers to count alone.

2 ANSWER WITH EVIDENCE

Use the passage

1. How does the short sentence "She stepped forward" affect the moment before the truck turns?

2. In the sentence beginning "While the speakers before her," why might the writer delay the main idea, "she kept her pencil pressed against the number"?

3. What effect does the three-action series "rose, crossed to the microphone, and looked at the council members" create?

4. A council member asks about a video. How does the brief reply "I brought a clock" give Maya's answer emphasis?

3 YOUR TURN

Your own words

Write a 60 to 80 word scene about someone searching for a lost key during a power outage. Include a sentence of four words or fewer, a sentence that begins with a dependent clause, and a three-verb series. Then add one sentence explaining how one of your syntax choices shapes the mood.

Seven Seconds

PART 1 · READ AND MARK

Underline two short sentences, circle one sentence that begins with a dependent clause, and number three actions listed in a single sentence. Notice how each choice affects the pace or emphasis. Accept any marking that follows this job and points at the right text.

PART 2 · ANSWERS

#	QUESTION	ANSWER
1	How does the short sentence "She stepped forward" affect the moment before the truck turns?	**Its brevity isolates Maya's movement, making the truck's sudden turn feel more alarming.**
2	In the sentence beginning "While the speakers before her," why might the writer delay the main idea, "she kept her pencil pressed against the number"?	**The opening makes readers wait through the other speakers' topics before reaching Maya's focus on the crossing time, emphasizing her impatience and concern.**
3	What effect does the three-action series "rose, crossed to the microphone, and looked at the council members" create?	**It moves Maya steadily from her seat to the microphone and ends with her facing the people she must persuade.**
4	A council member asks about a video. How does the brief reply "I brought a clock" give Maya's answer emphasis?	**The brief reply draws attention to the clock as her evidence and makes her response sound direct.**

PART 3 · YOUR TURN (SAMPLE ANSWER)

When the hallway went dark, I felt along the wall for the hook where my key should have been. Empty. I checked my pockets, searched the kitchen counter, and swept my hand beneath the mail. A car passed outside, its headlights sliding over the floor. There, beside the door, lay a small silver tooth of metal. I picked it up just as the hallway lights flickered back on.
The one-word sentence "Empty" makes the search feel suddenly urgent.

Accept other passage-supported explanations of pace, emphasis, or mood. For Part 3, check that the scene is 60 to 80 words, includes all three required structures, and is followed by a sentence explaining one choice.