



STERLING & STONE TABLET EXTRA

Dictation Practice

Your First Two Weeks

15 Minute Dictation by Sean M. Platt and Neeve Silver

Week 1: Reading Aloud

In your first week of dictation, you need to get used to the pace of speech and using punctuation commands. This is also your best opportunity to try different setups.

Each day, take one of the following stories and read it aloud into the recording device or app of your choice. Go through the entire process of recording, transcribing, and editing.

Remember, it will never be perfect. But you will find the process easier as you continue to do it.

We thought it would be more fun for you to read some true personal stories from the Sterling & Stone Story Studio rather than a boring article. While the stories are different lengths, the idea is that you read one a day, even if you don't hit that 15 minute mark.

1. The Rooster Story

This is a short S&S classic. We even set up a bot that shares this story every time someone in our Slack channel types "rooster story" as a quick and easy way to share with our writers why we leave rooster emoji reactions.

The first version of this story will include the punctuation commands typed out so you can simply practice your pace. The second version is with the appropriate punctuation filled in. Bonus points to anyone who reads both versions.

Make sure to go back through and tidy up your transcription — this story has a few challenging elements to help you look for what to catch in your edit pass.

* * *

As told by Johnny
(v1)

Well comma it all started open parentheses I say as I stroke my beard comma sitting on the front porch in a rocking chair and drinking iced tea close parentheses when I was replying to a Slack comment from someone using the mobile app period I wanted to end one sentence with an exclamation point because it was awesome or something period But I was typing fast comma and instead of hitting the open quote123close quote button open parentheses to change my keyboard from letters to numbers and symbols close parentheses comma I hit the emoji button beside it instead period Then my other thumb stabbed at where I knew the exclamation point to be comma but because I was on the emoji screen instead of numbers/symbols comma I hit a rooster emoji



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instead period Then I said something like comma open quote I accidentally hit a rooster instead of an exclamation point comma but it works for me so I'm going to leave it period close quote And with that comma somehow comma the rooster became open quote a thing period close quote Since then comma it's become the universal S&S symbol for open quote okay close quote or open quote cool close quote or open quote that works for me period close quote It's sort of like the big thumbs hyphen up you can use on Facebook Messenger to end a chat period If you're excited comma you can also add many roosters in a row period Also comma someone at some point made a open quote roosters close quote icon similar to the already hyphen built hyphen in open quote hearts close quote icon Asana already had comma so that if you like a comment comma you can open quote rooster close quote it period Good Slack comments often get many roosters period

* * *

(v2)

Well, it all started (I say as I stroke my beard, sitting on the front porch in a rocking chair and drinking iced tea) when I was replying to a Slack comment from someone using the mobile app. I wanted to end one sentence with an exclamation point because it was awesome or something. But I was typing fast, and instead of hitting the “123” button (to change my keyboard from letters to numbers and symbols), I hit the emoji button beside it instead. Then my other thumb stabbed at where I knew the exclamation point to be, but because I was on the emoji screen instead of numbers/symbols, I hit a rooster emoji instead. Then I said something like, “I accidentally hit a rooster instead of an exclamation point, but it works for me so I'm going to leave it.” And with that, somehow, the rooster became “a thing.” Since then, it's become the universal S&S symbol for “okay” or “cool” or “that works for me.” It's sort of like the big thumbs-up you can use on Facebook Messenger to end a chat. If you're excited, you can also add many roosters in a row. Also, someone at some point made a “roosters” icon similar to the already-built-in “hearts” icon Asana already had, so that if you like a comment, you can “rooster” it. Good Slack comments often get many roosters.

2. Safari

As told by Vered

When I was five months pregnant with child #1, my husband and I went to the Mount Kenya region for a few days. The lodge offered horse riding safaris, and how could we resist? After all, the two (and a half) of us, accompanied by a guide, would be riding among the herds of zebra, antelope, giraffe and other creatures while on horseback. The wildlife are far more tolerant of horses than they are of humans, so we would be able to get quite close.

Now, in my defence, I did request a gentle, docile horse as I pointed to my obvious condition. The guide was quick to affirm his perfect understanding of the situation, and shortly thereafter, we departed for our horsey stroll across the savannah. It quickly became clear that something had



been lost in translation.

My husband's horse could barely stay awake. Every few minutes, it dozed off, and only a lot of heel kicking, arm flapping and loud encouragement could convince the sleepy nag to stumble onward.

On the other hand, the horse given to the obviously pregnant lady was bright-eyed and bushy-tailed. By that, I mean someone must have poured a few pots of extra-strength coffee down its throat. My mount ran circles around the other two, skipping in a caffeine-induced merriment that was wholly unbecoming of a safari horse.

It was all I could do to maintain my balance and observe the giraffe gracefully gliding by. I swear the wildlife were laughing at me.

3. Kid Wolf

As told by Joel

I looked at my collection and realized I had over a thousand books. Boxes so full the flaps didn't close on the creases. Rounded out like hay bales.

It was time to let some of them go.

My choices were the library or Goodwill. The library was closed when I made my decision to donate, and I knew if I waited until they were open, I'd talk myself out of it. That's how I ended up with that many books in the first place.

Goodwill got 'em.

Late afternoon in the fall. There was rough weather moving in. Dark clouds bringing chill gusts. Crackling swirls of scattering leaves across the driveway.

By the time I had the back of the Town and Country full, it was sagging. I bet there was close to eight hundred pounds back there. Add my big ass, and it was hauling over half a ton.

To donate to the Goodwill in my town, you drive around back and roll over the rubber line by the back door to ring the bell. Like how you used to alert the gas station attendants in a full-service station. Kind of like what a physical book feels like in an age of tablets and smartphones.

Goodwill was in an old department store. And this particular store was in a rundown part of town. Cracked concrete and dim lighting. Faded paint, and you could just see the old store name above the front doors.

Like a clean spot in the shape of K-MART.



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It was getting so dark, the automatic lights over the back doors were on. They flickered and hummed, casting a narrow arc of light that barely made it to my van.

I slid out and walked to the back. I had one of those sweet electric hatches that opened with the press of a button on the key fob. That's right, ladies.

There was a metal door with flaking paint. Had a DONATIONS sign above it. Right when my hatch hit the top, the door popped open with a rusty screech.

A bored kid with a crooked Goodwill apron sauntered out. He was a little fella. Maybe a hundred and thirty pounds. That meant each box of books outweighed him by at least ten. Should have used smaller boxes.

"Hey, man." He nodded.

His voice sounded like it came from the center of the earth. Like a party trick.

I drew back in surprise. Recovered with a fidgety wave. "Howdy."

He pointed at my cargo with his hand shaped like a gun. "You want help with that?"

Despite what his voice was telling me, I didn't think he had it in him, so I shook my head and waved him off. Quicker if I did it myself.

I heaved the first box out of there, and as I stepped out from under the hatch, I heard a rhythmic scrape behind me. Like somebody dragging their feet.

I glanced at Mr. Universe, but it wasn't him. He stood with his hands in his pockets. Mouth clamped shut to keep that basso profundo voice in check.

But he was squinting into the dark. I turned to follow his gaze, and the Wolfman stepped into the cone of light from the lamp post next to the dumpster.

Tall and lanky. Curled forward like he was carrying a loaf of bread against his abs. His wrists were loose, and his fingers were hooked into claws. Like he was about to break into the Thriller dance.

Cowboy boots with silver toes. Slacks the color of tapioca pudding. A matching jacket over a black shirt. I saw his face and nearly dropped the box.

His beard was as black as a velvet robe in the bottom of the drawer. It went all the way up to his eyes. Thick and wavy. His eyebrows grew together in the middle, and it looked like he peered out through the slit of a ski mask. And his Kid Rock hair was beautiful.

Like a shampoo commercial, it flowed back from his furry face in feathered waves. The light



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brightened the ends like his head was surrounded by fire. I couldn't look away, and his eyes twinkled like he knew what I was thinking.

Like he knew I was under his spell.

He took another step, and his heel ground through the grit in the parking lot. He lifted one clawed finger and pointed at the van. "Yo, man. Can you give me a ride?"

His voice was dry. Like dying grass. Brown and gold leaves blew across his path, and his hair rippled like a candle flame.

I shook my head. "I don't think so."

His shoulders straightened like he couldn't believe what he'd heard. "Alright, alright." His teeth flashed in a grin. His finger tracked through the air. From the van to me. "What's in the box?"

I smiled. "About a hundred and fifty pounds of go fuck yourself."

He jerked upright, and his hands fell against his thighs. "Damn son. I just wanted to know what was in the box."

My arms were starting to burn, so I turned to Mr. Universe. "You still wanna help?"

He looked from Kid Wolf to the back of the van. Up into my eyes, and he shook his head. "Nah, man. I'm good. Let me get the door for you."

I followed him to the back of the store, and when I glanced over my shoulder, Kid Wolf was gone. I'd never seen him in town before, and I never saw him since.

He asked for a ride, so probably just a guy passing through ... but...

Turned out to be a full moon that night.

Just saying.

4. The Spider Story

As told by Ninie

When I was a little girl, our family only had one car so on the days my mother wanted to use it she'd take my father to work — ten minutes away if you hit every red light in town. (There were three of them. We're talking Muleshoe, Texas, in the 1950s here.) If it was summertime and my brother and I were still asleep, she'd just leave us at home alone.



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I was five years old. Bill was seven ... and there were sharper knives in the drawer than my older brother. Just putting that out there.

On one particular morning, my father woke me up as he left the house. I had been playing on the porch the night before and had left a mess of newspapers and he wanted it cleaned up immediately.

The newspapers were under a table. I got down on my hands and knees as my parents pulled out of the driveway. They waved goodbye and drove away, and I reached out and picked up the first newspaper. Underneath it was a tarantula. I don't know how big it actually was. I do know that at the time it looked as big as a toaster. I had never seen anything in my short life as monstrously hideous as that hairy, black thing with eight legs.

So I shrieked and leapt to my feet. This is where that under-a-table fact becomes important. I banged my head so hard I was knocked unconscious. When I came to and opened my eyes, the tarantula was on my face.

I'll pause here while you shudder.

They tell us as writers that every life experience is fuel for fiction, and I am here to testify that nobody writes more convincingly about mindless terror than I do. I know what it feels like to be so petrified you are LITERALLY petrified. I was frozen. Could. Not. Move. All I could do was scream. As I screamed, the spider crawled around on my face. I still have nightmares about its stickery feet in my open mouth.

Another pause for shuddering,

The only person at home to hear my screams was my brother. This is where the not-the-sharpest-knife-in-the-drawer part comes in. He burst out the front door, instantly assessed the situation and knew exactly how to deal with it. Racing into the kitchen, he grabbed a full can of RAID and a half-full can of REAL-KILL, returned to the porch and emptied them both on the spider.

The spider that was on my face.

I don't know why the spider didn't run away. You'll have to ask the spider. Or why my brother didn't have better sense than to spray poison into his little sister's face. I've asked. He says none of this ever happened.

When my mother got back home, I was unconscious again — this time from inhaling and swallowing insecticide. I was hospitalized for a month. I'm told I almost died.

It's a miracle that the only permanent damage I sustained was a cataclysmically intense case of arachnophobia. I once ran through a plate glass window when a kid put a rubber spider on my shoulder. I knocked over one of those gigantic postcard carousels in the Dallas/Ft. Worth International Airport when I chanced to see a tarantula-in-an-acrylic-bubble paperweight in a giftshop. I was 8.9 months pregnant and waddling. It was quite a show, but that's a story for



another time.

5. Dave's Airport Story

As told by Johnny

If you don't know Dave, it's important before this story begins to know just a bit about him. He's awake at night and sleeps during the day, is sure the whole world is stupid and evil, carries a decoy wallet just in case he gets mugged, and won't reveal his phone carrier (not his phone number) for fear of someone somehow triangulating on his paranoid little xenophobic world.

The second time I met Dave in person, one of the more trivial things we did was to ride in an elevator together with Sean and a few other people we were working with at the time. It wasn't a dramatic elevator ride at all, though I'll admit to being a little surprised that Dave would go on an elevator. I guess his fear of being dropped to his death in an elevator pale compared to his fear of dying of a heart attack from climbing all the way to the top floor of the downtown Hilton.

What matters to this story is that after we were in the elevator, someone else ran to join us. I stuck my hand out to stop the doors, but the doors were somewhat aggressive and didn't re-open right away.

That reminded me of a story. So after we were all safely in the elevator, I told it.

The last time I saw an aggressively closing door like that, it was in the San Francisco airport. If you've never been there, what matters is that it's incredibly confusing. The terminals are arranged in a big circle, and travellers take one of two trains to move between terminals — one going clockwise and one going counter-clockwise. The whole thing is confusing and chaotic. You have to figure it all out (which isn't easy), then board the correct train, then get on and off very quickly because nothing moves slowly — or without huge crowds.

In the middle of all this train-switching confusion, Sean and I settled in after getting aboard and watched a family try to do the same on/off dance we'd done. There were three of them: mom, dad, and a girl of around eight years old. A big crowd got off the train before they got on, then they had to shuffle all their luggage quickly aboard. The train thought they were taking too long. It started bonging and trying to close the doors, but they were still trying to board.

Eventually, the doors got sick of their crap and bit down on a large suitcase. It wouldn't let go. The doors did not rebound like they were supposed to; they held that case half-in and half-out of the tram.

The family pulled and tugged, eventually getting it out. The doors closed so quickly and so decisively after that, it was as if we'd all pissed the train off. It started moving. We could practically hear it groaning at the passengers' stupidity.



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That's when we realized that out of the three members of this family, only the eight-year-old girl had managed to get aboard. Mom and Dad were still on the platform with the rest of their luggage. The train had been so aggressive, it'd separated them and there was no chance to fix it.

The girl seemed very scared. She was also not a native English speaker, making her a stranger in a strange land. But the story, at this point, actually turned sweet. The other passengers on the train kept her calm, then worked together to get the girl's parents' phone number, call them, reassure everyone, and arrange for a pickup at the next stop. A pair of travellers even said they'd postpone their rush to the gate to get off the train with the girl and sit with her until her parents were able to hop on the next train, ride a single stop, and meet them.

At that point, back inside the elevator, I concluded my story. It had a nice little happy ending. Everyone looked satisfied, giving tribute to my ability to spin a good yarn.

Everyone, that is, except for Dave.

He would have been on the edge of his seat if we'd been sitting. As it was, his enormous 6'3" frame was leaning so far over, I thought he might fall and cripple me.

We all looked at Dave, who was acting like I'd left a cliffhanger in the story I'd just concluded. Then Dave said, "Did ... did she die?"

Which just goes to show you: Don't tell a story with a happy ending to Dave. He's always looking for the cloud behind the silver lining.

6. The Prodigal Flip Phone

As told by Jim

I used to be terrible at keeping up with my belongings. Ever since childhood, I was a thorn in my mother's purse — losing coats, shoes, pencils, notebooks, toys. If I could carry it out of the house, there was a 25% chance it wouldn't return.

But once, when I was eighteen, that's exactly what happened.

In my freshman year of college, I'd outgrown most of my absent-mindedness. And that was a good thing because I'd moved a thousand miles away from home. If I wasn't careful, I'd have an empty dorm room by the semester's end.

As an undergraduate in a music conservatory, it only made sense that I spent countless nights going to rock concerts instead of studying for the following day's ear training test. Going to a concert is technically studying, right? Right. And tonight's was a big one, so my buddy Jesse and I had to attend.



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Screw getting a perfect score the following day. This was a once in a lifetime opportunity. Which band was it? Fuck if I remember.

What I remember is that in a rush of euphoria, I did what a proper fan should do in an unforgettable situation like this. I crowd surfed. And it. Was. Awesome. Even the band noticed how phenomenal it was because after the concert was over, they gave me a high five. And another—a local opening band—invited Jesse and I to their practice space to hang afterward. It was the perfect night ... until I shoved my hands in my pockets and realized my flip phone was missing.

“Dude. Where’s my phone?”

Jesse frowned at me. “I don’t know. Did you leave it in your room?”

“No. I had it with me—” The entire night flashed before my eyes and I realized that my phone must have fallen out of my pocket while I was crowd surfing.

Jesse and I combed the music venue (a church rented by a local music promotion company) but came up empty. We left Jesse’s number with the promoter in case he came across the phone during clean up. But I knew my phone was gone. *Perfect.*

But the night wasn’t entirely ruined. We got invited to hang with a cool band, and they’d be back at their practice space in about an hour. If we were quick, we could grab a bite to eat and salvage the rest of the night.

Determined not to let this be the night I lost my cell phone, Jesse and I headed out, grabbed some fast food, then walked the cold Boston streets for about an hour until we found the band’s practice spot. Jesse hit the buzzer and we waited.

Nothing.

“Do you think we beat them here?” I asked.

He shrugged. “Maybe.”

We waited a good forty-five minutes in the cold before I called it.

It was perhaps a thirty-minute walk to the nearest train, and if we didn’t hurry, we’d miss the last one back to our dorm. We half-walked, half-jogged to the nearest green line stop and hopped on an empty train. Well, it was mostly empty. In our train car, one scruffy guy sat in a row by himself.

Jesse and I sat a few rows behind him.

I felt defeated. I’d lost my phone. I’d stood out in the cold and waited for a band that didn’t even show. And tomorrow I would probably have to cram in some last-minute studying if I wanted to



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ace my exam.

Jesse must have sensed my discontent, because — like a good friend — he distracted me with conversation about the good part of the night. Then he pulled out a stack of stickers from his pocket and handed me half. “I got these from the band.”

We peeled a few and stuck them on the seat ahead of us because we were punk rock and vandalizing public transportation is what we do. When we settled into a comfortable silence, Jesse began ripping up the discarded, white wax paper into tiny pieces and made a small pile of it on the train car floor between his feet.

The unkempt guy a few rows ahead turned to look at us. His eyes locked onto the small pile of shredded wax paper.

“Is that cocaine?” he asked us.

Jesse and I looked at each other. “What?”

The man pointed and the paper pile.

“Uh. No.”

“Oh.” He sniffed. “I was listening to you guys talk about the concert.”

“Cool.”

“Yeah.” He leaned back and smiled. “I used to do the sound for a lot of concerts around Boston. Used to find a lot of stuff after the show like cocaine. I was actually doing the sound for a concert tonight.”

“Ever find a cell phone?” I asked, jokingly.

“As a matter of fact...”

He pulled my phone out of his pocket. MY phone.

“Holy crap, dude. I think that’s my phone!”

He looked at me incredulously. “Yeah? What concert where you at?”

“The one at the ICC Church.”

His eyebrows went up, then he flipped open the phone. “What’s on the background?”

“Uh ... Beyoncé.”



Jesse frowned at me. “Beyoncé? Really?”

“Holy shit,” said the man. “This is your phone.”

Before he gave it back to me, he asked if he could call his daughter as a “finder’s fee.” I let him call her, of course, and he was happy about that.

Jesse and I got off the train with our minds blown. This was a night to remember. And though I can’t recall what concert I went to, I do remember the most unlikely thing that has ever happened to me. A couple hours after a concert in a big city, I boarded the same train — and the exact same train car — as the guy who had my cell phone. Not only that, if it wasn’t for his love for cocaine and Jesse’s convincing wax paper model of it, he may never have talked to us or brought up the fact that he used to “find things” at concerts he worked at.

Nuts, huh?

The end.

No wait. That’s not the end.

A week later, I left my flip phone on the train and lost it. I never saw it again.

The end.

7. Mr. Graubner

As told by Sean

I only took typing because it seemed like an easy class, and because I figured I’d probably need the skill someday. I didn’t plan to be a writer, but I also couldn’t imagine living the rest of my life hunting and pecking.

Our keys were all blacked out and the drills were boring. I kept wanting to go faster, but my teacher, Mr. Graubner, believed that students shouldn’t be typing fast until the end of the semester.

Mr. Graubner had loose jowls, not because he was overweight or anything. It was more like the Good Lord just hated his face. His stringy hair looked like he only washed in between elections and sometimes in the waft of an Indian summer, we could smell him as he paced the room, a cardboard tie bouncing on his chest as he walked.

“You cheated!” Mr. Graubner accused after when time was called on our end of semester test and I claimed 108 words with only two errors.



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It's not as impressive as it probably sounds. These were the same phrases and words on repeat, typed over and over throughout the semester. My fingers knew those patterns like they now know the small of Cindy's back. But still the Graubner Monster was growling, sure that I'd somehow deceived him.

"How could I cheat?" I asked. "We all started at the same time."

"You started early!"

I couldn't believe it. "You would have heard the typewriter if I had!"

And he would have, those things were louder than our Volkswagon bus.

"I won't tolerate cheaters in my classroom," he said.

I looked at Mr. Graubner for a long time, drew what felt like a bottomless breath, and pulled a can of spinach out of a previously hidden interior pocket. With strength I didn't know I had, I squeezed the can and sent all of that spinach into my mouth. Then bursting, with the pure raw strength of nature's chalkiest greens, I gave the old Graubner an uppercut that sent him flying from the classroom where he refused to tolerate cheaters and into a dirty urinal in the bathroom where he belonged.

In reality, the Graubner Monster tried to fail me, and he even sent me to the office. But I cried foul and demanded a retest, took it again and got 104 words with only one error while he watched me.

So pretty much, even though Mr. Graubner tried to fail me, he ultimately failed at life.



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Week 2: Tell A Story

This week the real fun begins! It's time for you to start telling your own stories in your dictation. Instead of jumping into the deep end with your work in progress (I'm sure you're just dying to) it's better to take a little more time to get comfortable talking out a story. Last week you were reading aloud, and it helped you develop pace and punctuation.

Now you get to add in thinking the story as well.

We'll be giving you some prompts, but just like when you dictate "for real" it's helpful to think out your story before you start. Visualize the scene and characters, make it as real as possible before you hit record. Some of the prompts can be done more "freestyle" and can feel like more of a brain dump than a scene.

Go ahead and use sprints this week, and try to hit the ten or fifteen minute mark. If your story ends before you get there, that's ok. If you get to fifteen and you're in total flow, keep going. But it's also fine to simply stop when you finish your time.

We're giving you more than seven prompts so you can pick the ones that jump out at you, and leave any that don't inspire an idea.

Ready?

Tell the story of:

- One good (or bad, or weird) thing that happened today.
- Your proudest moment.
- The weirdest thing that ever happened to you.
- How you decided to become a writer.
- Your biggest regret and what you'd do differently if you got a do-over.
- How you met your partner.
- Something you did with your best friend in grade school.
- A moment of connection you had with one of your parents.
- Your worst job interview.
- Your favorite holiday memory.
- Someone discovering their partner is cheating on them with their roommate.
- Someone learning they've only got a week to live.
- Someone realizing they don't want to marry the person they're engaged to.
- A kidnapping.
- A parent realizing they don't really know their teenaged child.
- Someone getting fired.
- Someone losing a loved one.
- Someone setting foot on an alien world for the first time.
- Someone winning the lottery.
- Someone reuniting with a loved one they haven't seen for years — and who they've come to hate.