Using substitution and ellipsis

What is substitution and what is ellipsis?
Substitution is a process that we use to avoid repeating certain words in a sentence. Substitution can be used to replace a noun, a verb or even a phrase. For example, have a look at this phrase: 'I offered him a cup of coffee. He didn't want a cup of coffee'. In this case, it is possible to substitute the second 'cup of coffee' with 'one'. The sentence therefore reads: 'I offered him a cup of coffee. He didn't want one'. This latter sentence flows better and communicates the message more quickly.

An example of substitution for a verb is as follows:
- Full sentence: 'Did you see him?' 'Yes, I saw him'.
- Sentence with substitution: 'Did you see him?' 'Yes, I did'.

An example of substitution for a phrase is as follows:
- Full sentence: 'Do you want some help? If you want some help, I'll come over'.
- Sentence with substitution: 'Do you want some help? If so, I'll come over'.

Ellipsis means that we simply omit the repeated words from our speech or text because the meaning is understood without it. We can use ellipsis with both nouns and verbs. For example, have a look at this phrase: 'Ann liked the red shoes and I liked the blue shoes'. If you use ellipsis you can omit the second 'shoes' completely. The sentence therefore reads: 'Ann liked the red shoes and I liked the blue'. It is clear from the meaning that 'blue' refers to shoes. It is even possible to say 'Ann liked the red shoes and I the blue', thereby omitting both the second verb and the second noun.

Activity 1: Substitution of nouns, verbs and phrases. Have a look at the sentences below and rewrite them using appropriate substitutions for the second nouns, verbs or phrases.

1. Are you going to take the car tomorrow? If you are not going to take the car tomorrow, then I will use it myself.
2. I tried to buy a durian at the market, but I couldn’t find a durian.
3. I asked him if he wanted a chocolate and he wanted a chocolate.
4. John asked Maria to forgive him, and she forgave him.
5. Juanita wanted to know if it had rained because if it had rained she would not need to water the garden.

Activity 2: Practice with ellipsis. Now have a look at the sentences below and see if you can change them using ellipsis.

1. He said he would retire at the age of 55 and he has retired at the age of 55.
2. Cherry wanted to buy a big dog, and her husband wanted to buy a small dog.
3. Do you know if it will it snow tomorrow? I think it will snow.
4. Michiko bought a white scarf and Hiro bought a blue scarf.

Activity 3: Rewrite the paragraph. Have a look at the following paragraph and change it by using substitution, ellipsis, or using pronouns or demonstratives instead of nouns.

We had all worked extremely hard during the week, so the whole family decided that we would have a really relaxing weekend. We decided that we would book a country cottage; we needed a country cottage with at least three bedrooms to fit us all in to the country cottage. We used the Internet to find a couple of interesting-looking places – I liked a place north of the city, Robert and the children preferred a place south of the city. Robert promised that if we went south he would drive all the way and when the time came he drove all the way as he had promised.