

# INSTRUCTIONAL MATERIALS AND TECHNIQUES FOR TEACHING WRITING

Tutors of Literacy in  
the Commonwealth

<http://tutorsofliteracy.blogspot.com/>

# TECHNIQUES FOR TEACHING WRITING

## Agenda

**Introductions/Icebreakers/Expectations/Sign in**

Writing Activity HO #1

Helping People Learn to Write HO #3

**The Writing Process HO #4**

**Generating Ideas HOs # 5, 7**

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Other suggestions:

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Exchanging written dialogue with tutor

Paraphrasing

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**Conclusions/Questions/Evaluations**

*Writing Activity*  
*Adapted from All Kinds of Minds Conference Materials*

*The primary purpose of this activity is to apply key management by profile steps with a student that is experiencing writing problems.*

*DIRECTIONS: Read the following paragraph, then provide a brief description of:*

- ☞ the student's strengths*
- ☞ how you would increase the strength*
- ☞ the breakdown in writing*
- ☞ an intervention at the breakdown point that may improve writing performance.*

*Demetri is an independent 19 year old. He loves to travel and strike out on his own to learn about new places. His family and friends are amazed that he never seems to get lost. Demetri doesn't understand their amazement; he reads about places he visits and maps out his agenda before going on his trips. He just knows what to do to avoid getting lost. The same cannot be said about Demetri's writing. He just doesn't seem to know where to start or how to go about beginning complex writing assignments.*

*Demetri's Strength(s):* \_\_\_\_\_

*Strength Strengthening:* \_\_\_\_\_

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*Writing Breakdown:* \_\_\_\_\_

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*Accommodation/Intervention at the breakdown point:* \_\_\_\_\_

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## Helping People Learn to Write

- ❖ Provide **models**, allow learners to see others write.
- ❖ Have a **purpose** for writing.
- ❖ Reinforce the learner's **confidence** in his or her ability to learn.
- ❖ Use many **examples** of **writing**, show different kinds of writing used for different purposes.
- ❖ Provide **support** and **encouragement** as well as reinforcement from others.
- ❖ **Teach** writing skills.

# Writing Processes

**Generate ideas** – decide what to write about.

Questions to guide writing

Brainstorming/Concept mapping/Graphic organizers

**Draft** – put the ideas down on paper without concern for being correct.

**Composing**

 Ideas

 Words

 Language patterns

**Revise** – explain and expand the content, confirm logical sequence of sentences.

**Edit** – make final changes and corrections, make notes to review in future lessons, the type and amount of editing will depend on the purpose and audience of text, focus on one thing at a time (reinforce that writing does not have to be perfect!).

**Scribing**

 Spelling

 Punctuation

 Grammar

**Publish** – share the writing with others.

## Some Basic Guidelines to Writing

1) Brainstorming: The pre-writing process.

This step is skipped most often by the non-writing student, although it is the most important!

☺ Use the sense of smell for generation of ideas

The sense of smell is strongly attached to memory recall. Place a common but unique smelling substance in a jar. Ask your student to smell it and then jot down ideas that are associated with that scent.

(Examples - Vicks Vapo™ rub, oranges, mothballs, ammonia, etc.)

☺ Use pictures for generation of ideas.

Ask the student to create a story based on a photograph.

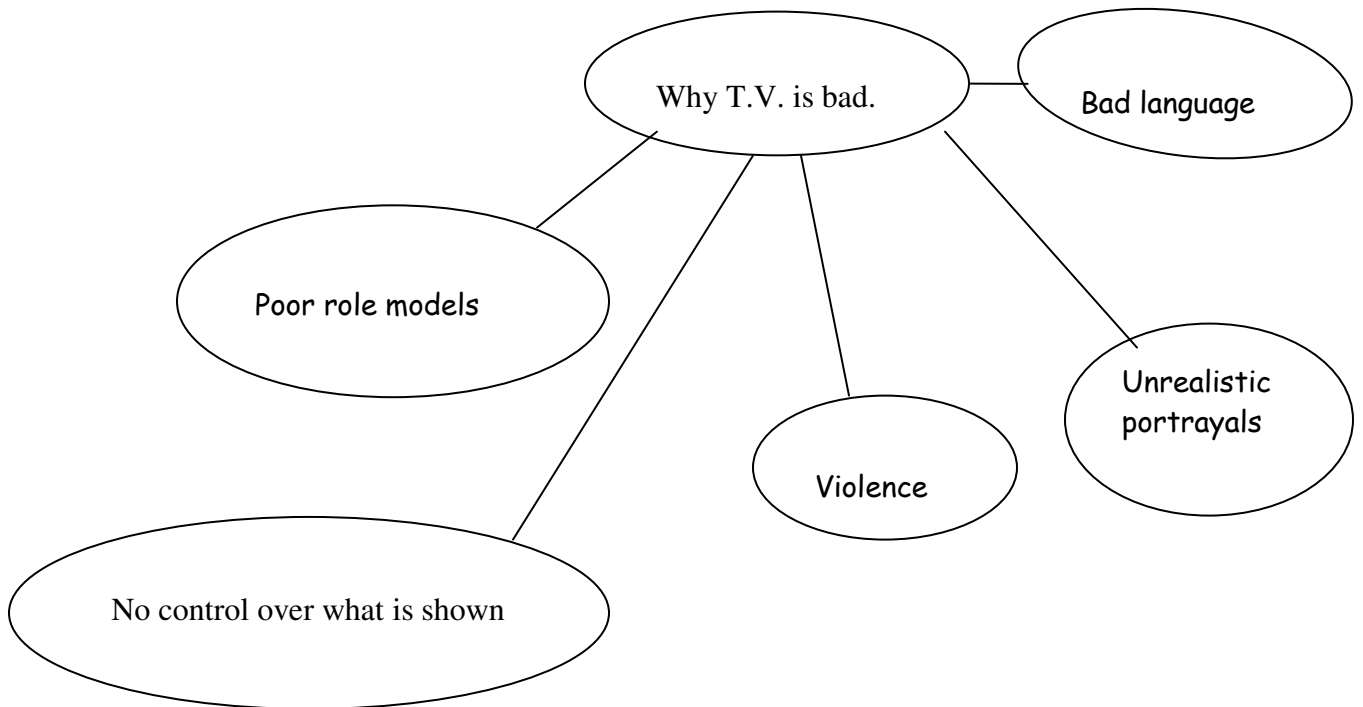
☺ Use a tape recorder

Allow student to dictate story to tape recorder, then transcribe.

This is especially good for ESL students.

☺ Diagram the ideas

Use balloon diagrams (graphic organizers, concept mapping) to show relationships of ideas to others (see below):



- ☺ Make lists  
Make lists of ideas
- ☺ Interview  
Students can interview people for opinions and ideas.

2) Organization: from brainstorming results

- ☺ Most essays have the following paragraph structure:
  1. Introduction paragraph stating main idea.
  2. Supporting paragraphs giving details that support main idea.
  3. Conclusion paragraph that rephrases the main idea.
- ☺ Write each main idea on a flash card. Have student write details on smaller cards and arrange underneath the main idea card.
- ☺ If a list was made, cross out any ideas that won't be used.
- ☺ Group according to similar ideas.
- ☺ Group from general to specific.
- ☺ Number the ideas in the order they will be written.

3) Writing a first draft:

Most students ignore the above efforts to generate and organize their ideas, and lose track of supporting ideas and the main point. They try to "just write". It is important to take writing step by step and not to try to write the entire paper at once. This is where a student needs the most support and guidance.

- ☺ Have student write about one point at a time, one paragraph at a time. Then put paragraphs together.
- ☺ Do the introduction and conclusion last. They are easier to write then.

4) Revisions:

Writing is such a personal process and a person's ego is truly on the line when someone critiques their work. Focus on the general point being made by the student - their thought processes. Always give positive, detailed feedback as well as detailed feedback regarding suggestions for improvement.

- ☺ If sequence is a problem - with scissors, cut your student's paper into sections and have them arrange the pieces in a more logical order.
- ☺ For many errors - focus only on one type of error, such as use of commas, pronoun use, details, main idea, etc.
- ☺ For spelling errors - focus on five misspelled words at a time for each revision. Do not spell word for the student - refer student to dictionary or spell checker and teach them how to use this resource.

## CONCEPT MAPPING

The purpose is to generate as many ideas as possible on the topic and, as they are generated, organize them by sub-topics. After they are mapped, one or more of the sub-topics can be used for writing.

1. Write the topic in the middle of a page.
2. Brainstorm the topic and write the sub-topics anywhere on the page, leaving space for additional ideas.
3. Brainstorm the sub-topics and write supporting ideas around the sub-topics; draw lines to show the relationships between the ideas.
4. Decide what topics and sub-topics to write about, put them in order, and write a sentence for each idea.



## Writing Organization Structures

 *Topical*

This organization of writing is by topic and the associated ideas.

 *Spatial*

This type of organization will use physical descriptions.

 *Cause/effect*

Writing will be organized by identifying a cause and then addressing the related effect(s).

 *Problem/solution*

Organization will be based on determination of a problem then discussing the possible solution(s).

 *Time ordered/chronological*

The sequence of this writing will be determined by the order in which events occurred. Examples would include: schedules, how-to directions, and narrative stories.



## Plot Map

1999 New Reader's Press

The plot is the action or series of events in a story. The plot usually has three parts:

1. The **rising action** introduces the characters in the story and tells about a problem or conflict.
2. The **climax** is the event that solves the problem, the turning point of the action. It usually occurs near the end of the story.
3. The **falling action** tells the effect of the climax. The plot draws quickly to a close.

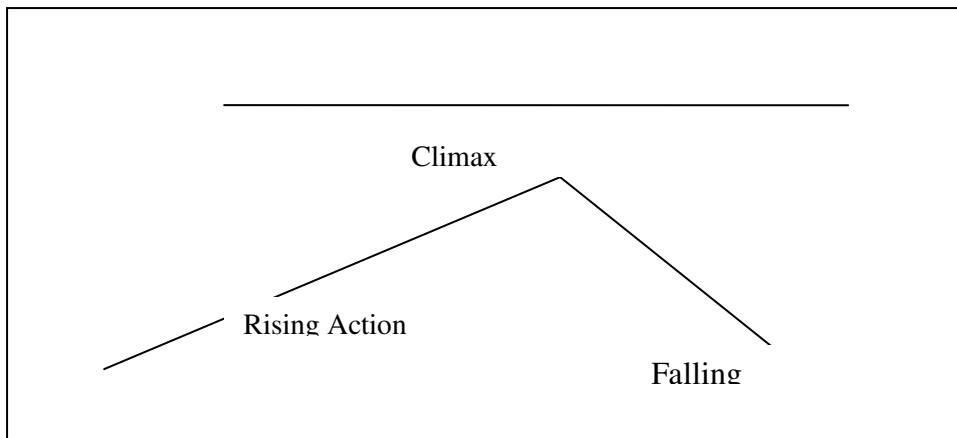
Write the rising action, the climax, and the falling action of a story on these lines. Fill in the plot map below.

**Title:** \_\_\_\_\_

**1. Rising action:** \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

**2. Climax:** \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

**3. Falling action:** \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

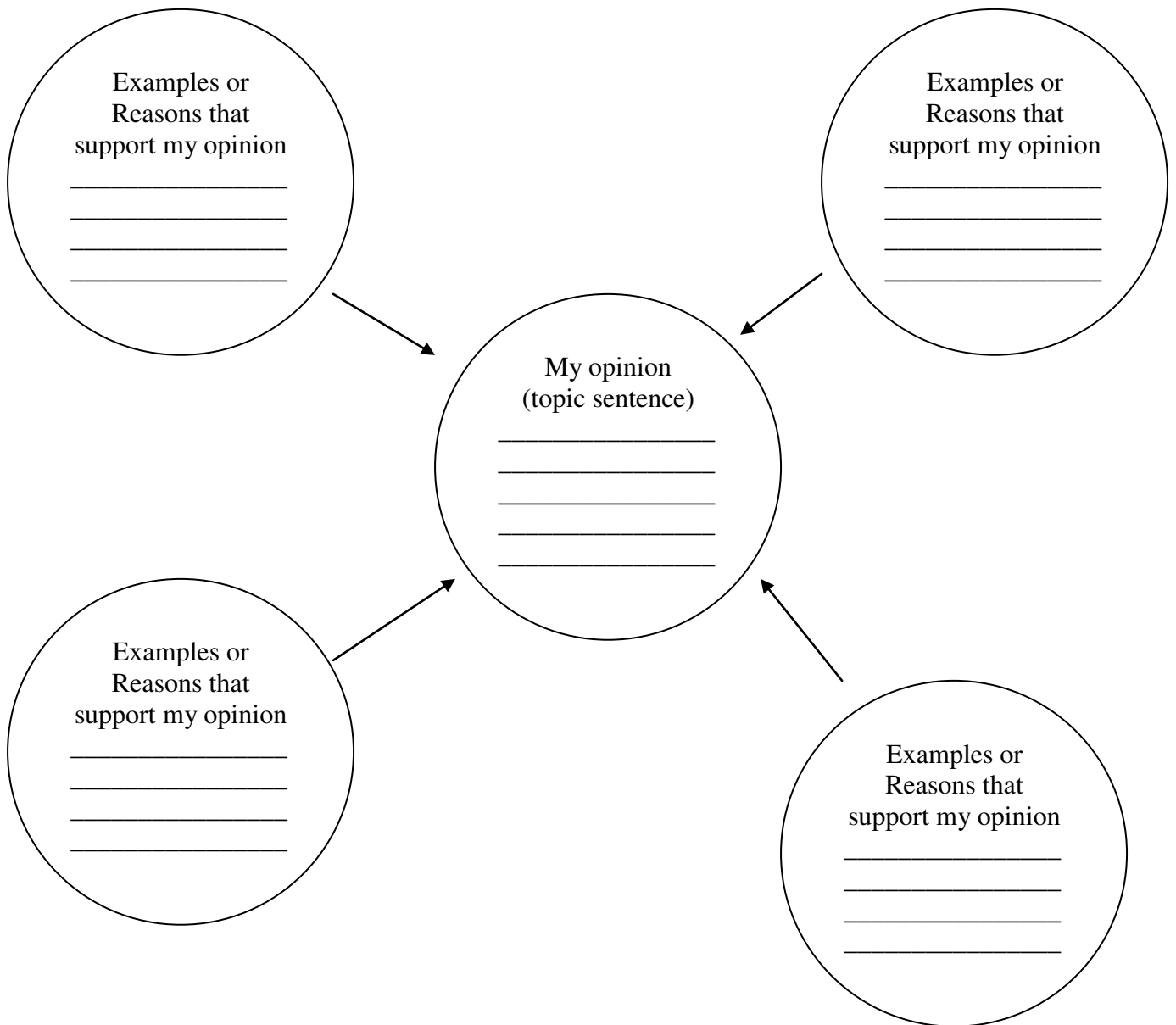


## IDEA MAP

1999 New Reader's Press

Write your topic on the line below. In the center circle, write a topic sentence summarizing your opinion about the topic. In the surrounding circles, list examples or reasons that support your topic sentence. You can add as many circles as you like.

My Topic: \_\_\_\_\_



## **Questions to Guide Writing**

- To whom are you writing?
- What is your reason for writing: to ask for information, register a complaint, apply for a job, etc.?
- What feelings do you hope to elicit in your readers?
- How do you want to present yourself to your readers, as a: friend, requester, complainer, storyteller, etc.?
- What tone do you want to use: emotional, matter-of-fact, formal, etc.?
- What types of words will best achieve your purpose?

## BUILDING SENTENCES (A Teacher/Tutor Reference)

### STEP 1

A subject (**who?** or **what?**) and a verb (**did?**) are provided. The direct object of the verb is introduced through the questioning procedure of asking **what?** or **whom?**. Use “action” verbs that require a direct object. Linking verbs, such as is, am, are, was, and were, etc., do not show action – they “link” the subject with a describing word. i.e. *That house is gray*. “Gray” describes the subject, so there is no direct object in the sentence. Also, the previously listed verbs can be used as helping verbs, i.e. *The paint is peeling*. In this sentence, “is peeling” is a verb phrase; again there is no direct object.

### STEP 2

This step introduces the idea of adjectives by asking which?, whose? or **how many?** before the subject of the sentence. Start with teaching **which?**: *The boss*, *Those big men*, *The baseball fans*. Then add the question, **whose?**: *Your uncle*, *My friend*. After that you can combine the two questions: *Our gray cat*, *His old car*. Next can follow **how many?** With numbers and with words such as some and several: *Six girls*, *Several boys*. Last, teach learners that any number of these describing words can be used in front of the subject: *Her three tall sons*.

### STEP 3

Through the question **how?** students learn an important sentence feature without having to know the term “adverb”. The **how?** of a sentence will always tell something about the verb. The easiest way to introduce this idea is to use words that end with **-ly**, i.e. quickly, slowly, softly, merrily, etc.. Students should be taught that **how?** can be moved around in a sentence: *Softly she sang the song*. (or) *She sang the song softly*. Prepositional phrases also can answer the question **how?**: *He closed the door with a bang*.

### STEP 4

The idea of **where?** is taught without using difficult phrasing such as “prepositional phrases used as adverbs,” etc.

### STEP 5

In this step prepositional phrases are used to answer the question **when?**.

### STEP 6

“Because” or “because of” can be used to introduce the concept of **why?**. *She was late because her car wouldn't start*. More advanced phrases, such as infinitive or prepositional, may also be used to answer the question **why?**. *He wanted to read to learn more about cars*. *She went to the library for a special presentation*.

## SAMPLE PRACTICE SHEET BUILDING SENTENCES

Complete the sentences by answering the questions below the blanks. The teacher will ask questions about each sentence. Use capital letters and periods where necessary.

1. Small children played games. \*  
(Which?)

Which children played games? Small children played games.

Small **who** played games? Small children played games.

Small children **did what** with games? Small children played games.

Small children played **what**? Small children played games.

2. \_\_\_\_\_ sister sold her car.  
(Whose?)

**Whose** sister sold her car?

3. \_\_\_\_\_ workers painted.  
(How many?)

**How many** workers painted? \_\_\_\_\_ .

4. \_\_\_\_\_ doctor cured \_\_\_\_\_ .  
(Whose?) (whom?)

5. \_\_\_\_\_ which cab stopped.  
(Which?)

6. \_\_\_\_\_ men lifted \_\_\_\_\_ .  
(How many? Which?) (what?)

**Write two sentences of your own.**

1. \_\_\_\_\_

2. \_\_\_\_\_

*\* Not all sentences will contain all of these parts.*

*Note: Require students to answer in complete sentences, both orally and in writing.*

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## REVISING

- ☺ Review what you have written.
- ☺ Keep your reader in mind. Will that person be able to follow your reasoning?
- ☺ Reread your essay. Use the following chart to evaluate your writing.

<b>FEATURE</b>	<b>WELL DONE!</b>	<b>OK</b>	<b>NEEDS WORK</b>
<b>Structure</b>	Writing has an engaging introduction, supporting paragraphs, and a strong conclusion. Every main idea has its own paragraph.	Introduction and conclusion are present, but not effective. Sometimes more than one idea per paragraph.	No introduction or conclusion, just body paragraphs. No clear main ideas in paragraphs.
<b>Organization</b>	Ideas are logical and flowing. Transition words are used well.	Order of ideas is confusing. Parts of the writing flow well, others don't. Could use transition words better.	Ideas in no order and do not flow. No transition words used.
<b>Content</b>	Main point(s) is well supported. All details relate directly to main point(s).	Reasons for main points are not presented clearly. Details not specific.	Hard to follow the reasons for the main points. Details not related to main points.



## EDITING

✂ The act of editing may be a daunting task in itself to the new writer. Take the time to explain the process of editing and that it is possible for the writer to make changes to their work – it doesn't have to be perfect from the start.

✍ Focus first on the **generation** and **drafting of ideas**, then move on to **clarity** (make sure the ideas make sense), and end with **accuracy** (in print). Take time with the process and only do what the new writer is comfortable with and ready to accept. Too many corrections early on may be enough to discourage the writer, so first concentrate on getting an idea across, regardless of the form and spelling. Once the writer has gained confidence in this area, you can move on to the next step in editing. (The amount of editing will also depend on the audience of the piece. Obviously, if it has a formal purpose, then the editing will need to be completed, but in a very positive manner.)

✂ Allow the writer to do as much of the editing as possible. Encourage them to read their work out loud, and then you can also read the piece out loud and ask them if they are happy with how it sounds or if they feel it is missing anything. If necessary, help them make changes so that they are comfortable with the writing. You can also ask if they think there are any words that are spelled incorrectly. If so, support them in making corrections by teaching them how to use the dictionary and/or spell check.

✍ By allowing your student to self-correct, you will be able to monitor what amount of editing they are ready for. Take each step at a time and don't rush it. As with all tutoring, individualize your style for your learner and let them take the lead.

# PROOFREADING

**C** Capitalization

**O** Overall Appearance

**P** Punctuation

**S** Spelling

# ***Editing Checklist***

***Adapted from Writing Well, by Libby Wilson, New Reader's Press, 2006***

## **4Mechanics**

- I capitalized the first word in every sentence.
- I capitalized all proper nouns.
- Each sentence I wrote ends with a period, question mark, or exclamation point.
- I used punctuation correctly.
- I spelled all words correctly.
- I indented the beginning of each new paragraph.

## **4Grammar**

- Each sentence is a complete thought with a subject and verb.
- There are no run-on sentences.
- Subjects and verbs agree in number.
- When pronouns are used, they clearly refer to someone or thing.
- Verb tenses are used consistently unless a change is required.

## **4Style**

- Sentence length is varied.
- Clear, interesting, colorful, precise words are used.
- Unnecessary words were cut out.

## **"POWER" Planning Your Essay**

<b>P</b> PLAN	Step 1	Read the writing sample assignment
	Step 2	Make your list
<b>O</b> ORGANIZE	Step 3	Group your ideas Name each group
	Step 4	Expand your groups Put groups in order
<b>W</b> WRITE	Step 5	Write introduction
	Step 6	Write body
	Step 7	Write conclusion
<b>E</b> EVALUATE	Step 8	Evaluate composition
<b>R</b> REVISE	Step 9	Make needed changes

## Real Life Applications for Writing

### Reasons for which adult learners may be motivated to write:


- ✍ writing checks, paying bills
- ✍ making a grocery list
- ✍ writing a telephone message
- ✍ leaving a note to someone
- ✍ writing a letter
- ✍ filling out an application
- ✍ completing a form
- ✍ requesting information
- ✍ sharing thoughts
- ✍ making self feel better


### Techniques for applying writing:


- ✍ write a journal
- ✍ create a written dialogue
- ✍ language experience stories
- ✍ write an advertisement
- ✍ do an advice column
- ✍ create a bedtime story
- ✍ give directions
- ✍ write down a dream
- ✍ create a humorous exaggeration
- ✍ predict a weather forecast
- ✍ free writing
- ✍ paraphrasing


## Writing Anxiety


You will find that, similar to math, many learners will experience varying stages of anxiety in relation to writing. One of your challenges as a tutor will be to help alleviate this anxiety. (Another challenge may be to find and address the strengths in your learners writing before the weaknesses.) Keep in mind that anxiety about writing is not necessarily all negative. A certain amount of anxiety may indicate that your learner is concerned about doing well and this may provide some motivation for their performance. Of course, too much anxiety will inhibit performance, and this is where the tutor needs to step in.


 Often anxiety may be caused by the learner not fully understanding the assignment. Be sure to take the time to answer any questions that there may be regarding what you are asking your learner to do.


 Similarly, if a student is unsure of the guidelines or the criteria required in association with the assignment, they will likely experience anxiety about their writing.

 Be sure to emphasize to your learner that their writing does not need to be perfect, correct, or neat. Remind them that their main goal in writing is to communicate an idea and as long as they do that successfully, then they have reached their goal.

 Encourage your writer to focus on the message that he is trying to get across, not the spelling and the overall correctness of the writing.

 Let the learner know that writing is a challenge for everyone, even those who are fluent, and that the writing process has many stages and is time consuming. Knowing this fact alone will help your learner reduce any stress they may feel about writing.

 DO NOT use a red pen to make corrections. Not only may this bring back bad memories, but it won't be the most effective way for the writer to learn. Instead, encourage the learner to self-correct. Ask the student to identify which words he thinks are not spelled correctly. This can be an amazingly accurate method of correction. Also, teach the learner to use a dictionary and spell check, if applicable.

 Find praise in even the most basic attempts at writing. Examples may be:

- ☺ he can write some letters
- ☺ he uses capital and lower case letters
- ☺ he uses letters that are uniform in shape and height
- ☺ he writes from left to right
- ☺ he is willing to try writing

**Most importantly, listen to your learner and provide them with encouragement and support!!**

## Creating a Language Experience Story

### **Purpose**

To link the learner's experience and speaking ability to the written word when the learner has little or no writing ability.

### **How**

#### *Discuss*

1. Ask the learner to share an experience.

#### **Dictate**

2. Print exactly what the learner says.

Use correct spelling and punctuation, but do not change any words. Leave a blank line between each printed line in case you must make changes. For beginning readers, you don't need to write the whole story; three to five sentences is enough.

3. Ask the learner to suggest a title for the story.

#### **Verify**

4. Read the story back to the learner and ask for any corrections or changes.

#### **Read**

5. Read each sentence aloud, tracking the words with your finger.
6. Ask the learner to read each sentence after you.
7. Ask the learner to read the entire story.

#### **File the story**

8. Review the story at the next session. Type it, if possible, and make one copy for you and one for the learner. Place your copy in a binder or folder as part of a permanent collection of the learner's writing.

## Language Experience: Ideas for Inspiration

**Picture Story Books:** Using a picture storybook, have the learner predict what happens next in the story. Have the learner describe details in the pictures, write a dialog for the pictures, or write a text for the story.

**Picture and Story Compositions:** Supply learners with a large selection of pictures and photographs cut from magazines. Allow learners to select pictures for which they will write a text. Or learners may write captions for pictures or photographs, a story on why they selected the pictures they did, or tell a story about an object or person in a picture or photograph.

**Cultural Stories:** Have learners select a person to interview and write the interview into stories.

### Other real-life materials for developing writers and readers:

Ads	Game rules	Real estate notices
Allegories	Graffiti	Recipes
Announcements	Grocery lists	Remedies
Autobiographies	Headlines	Reports
Awards	Interviews	Requests
Bedtime stories	Job applications	Resumes
Billboards	Journals	Reviews
Biographies	Letters	Sales pitches
Book jackets	Lists	Schedules
Book reviews	Lyrics	Self descriptions
Brochures	Magazines	Sequels
Bulletins	Menus	Serialized stories
Bumper stickers	Mysteries	Slogans
Campaign speeches	Myths	Speeches
Captions	Newscasts	TV commercials
Cartoons	Newspapers	Telegrams
Certificates	Obituaries	Travel folders
Comic strips	Pamphlets	Tributes
Contracts	Parodies	Vignettes
Conversations	Plays	Want ads
Critiques	Poems	Wills
Definitions	Posters	
Directions	Propaganda	
Directories	Product descriptions	
Dramas	Puppet shows	
Editorials	Puzzles	
Epitaphs	Questionnaires	
Encyclopedia entries	Questions	
Essays	Quiz games	
Fables	Quotations	



## **Three-line Stories Can Build Students’ Writing Confidence**

From Better Teaching Elementary Edition Newsletter, [www.teacher-institute.com](http://www.teacher-institute.com)  
Source: Susan M. Glazer, “Story Prompts,” Teaching K-8, February 2004, [www.TeachingK-8.com](http://www.TeachingK-8.com)

Some students are so anxious about writing, they can’t even begin. To help them start producing text, give them two things: A structured framework and gentle verbal prompts.

For the framework, tell students to write a story in three lines. The first line identifies the main character and setting. The second tells of a problem. The third gives a solution.

A student’s story might read:

1. A mouse (character) was in the house (setting).
2. The mouse was being chased by a cat (problem).
3. The mouse escaped through a hole (solution).

The three-line structure puts students in control of their writing and helps build their confidence. Have them write three-line stories whenever time permits.

Now use conversation prompts to help expand the text. Have a student read the story to you. As appropriate, interject words like “and,” “so,” “but,” or “because.” When the student reads “A mouse was in the house,” prompt with “because... .” Ask, “How do you know that?” or “Why?” Have the students add the response to the story.

With a little practice, it won’t take long for students to start thinking of the prompts on their own as they write.

Visit “The WRITE! Place” at [www.cawrite.com](http://www.cawrite.com).

## Create Interesting, Imaginative Assignments















Adapted from Better Teaching Elementary Edition Newsletter, [www.teacher-institute.com](http://www.teacher-institute.com)  
Source: Ronald L. Partin, "Homework That Helps," [http://ronpartin.com/pdf\\_files/homework.pdf](http://ronpartin.com/pdf_files/homework.pdf).

Students are more motivated to complete assignments that can be classified as "fun with a purpose."

The assignments are not only fun and interesting; they clearly reinforce concepts and skills being taught.

To create such assignments, use more imagination. Also think of what would require students to use more of theirs.

Here are assignments other teacher have found successful. Have students:

-  Interview people about their jobs or hobbies.
-  Design an ideal vehicle, home, school, or government.
-  Write a new myth.
-  Trace their family tree.
-  Interview {someone} about a historical event they lived through.
-  Write a how-to handbook for consumers.
-  Invent a game to teach to the rest of the class.
-  Plan a trip, including itinerary and expenses.
-  Plan a balanced menu for a week.
-  Create a detailed map of their neighborhood.
-  Update a fairy tale to modern times.
-  Collect and identify rocks, leaves, or wood [and write the descriptions].
-  Conduct an experiment [and document the steps and outcomes].
-  Create a bulletin board display on a topic they research.

## RESOURCES FOR TUTORS

 Tutors of Literacy in the Commonwealth

<http://tutorsofliteracy.blogspot.org>

 The Writing Center, Capella University

<http://www.capella.edu/writingcenter/index.aspx>

 Writing Lessons


<http://home.cogeco.ca/~rayser3/writing.htm>

 Arizona Association for Lifelong Learning

<http://az-aall.org/template/azlessons.asp>

 ProLiteracy Education Network

<http://www.proliteracyednet.org/pages.asp?pid=3>

 Media Library of Teaching Skills for adult  
learning and literacy

<http://mlots.org/>

## Reading and Writing

<http://www.lacnyc.org/resources/adult/printresources.htm>

*Reading Process and Practice (Third Edition)*, Constance Weaver, Heinemann, 2002.

*Print Literacy Development: Uniting Cognitive and Social Practice Theories*, Victoria Purcell-Gates, Erik Jacobson, Sophie Degener, Harvard, 2004.

*Applying Research In Reading Instruction for Adults: First Steps for Teachers*, Susan McShane, National Institute for Literacy/The Partnership for Reading, 2005.

*Teaching Reading to Adults: A Balanced Approach*, Pat Campbell, Grass Roots Press, 2003.

*Reading for Understanding*, Ruth Schoenbach (Ed.), Cynthia Greenleaf, Christine Cziko, and Lori Hurwitz, Jossey-Bass, 1999.

*Mosaic of Thought: Teaching Comprehension in a Reader's Workshop*, Ellin Oliver Keene and Susan Zimmermann, Heinemann, 1997.

*Strategic Reading: Guiding Students to Lifelong Literacy, 6-12*, Jeffrey D. Wilhelm, Tanya Baker, and Julie Dube, Heinemann, 2001.

*You Gotta Be the Book: Teaching Engaged and Reflective Reading With Adolescents*, Jeffrey D. Wilhelm and Michael W. Smith, Teachers College Press, 1996.

*Guiding Readers and Writers, Grades 3-6: Teaching Comprehension, Genre, and Content Literacy*, Irene Fountas and Gay Su Pinnell, Heinemann, 2001.

*The Art of Teaching Reading*, Lucy Calkins, Longman, 2000.

*The Art of Teaching Writing (Second Edition)*, Lucy Calkins, Heinemann, 2000.

*A Fresh Look at Writing*, Donald Graves, Heinemann, 1994.

*In the Middle: Writing, Reading, and Learning with Adolescents (Second Edition)*, Nancie Atwell, Boynton/Cook, 2000.

*Discovery and Respect: A Handbook for Student-directed Group Learning*, Mallory Clarke, Goodwill Literacy Adult Learning Center, Seattle, 1991. (Copies available from LAC.)

*Whole Language for Adults: A Guide to Instruction*, Judy Cheatham, Mallory Clarke, Denise McKay, Melody Schneider, and Mary Dunn Siedow, New Readers Press, 1994.

*Whole Language for Adults: A Guide to Portfolio Assessment*, Jane McKillop, New Readers Press, 1994.

*Litstart: Strategies for Adult Literacy and ESL Tutors*, Michigan Literacy Inc., 1999

