Handouts

Professional Development to Support Academic Writing

Quick Writing Rounds

Directions

1. Display two words. Have students select one of the words to write about. Ask them to write the word as a title for this round of writing.

Students can write in their writing notebooks or on a sheet of paper. Explain that they are to write in complete sentences. They can write about their own experiences or connections to the word or merely use the word one time in their writing.

2. Say: "When I say *Go*, write as much as you can, as fast as you can, and as well as you can in 1 minute. Any questions? Go!"
3. Allow 1 minute.
4. Say: "Stop writing. Lift your pen or pencil up in the air. Draw a line underneath what you just wrote to mark off the section."
5. Repeat for three rounds.
6. Continue doing this activity a few times a week to help students increase their ability to put their thoughts on the page. Discuss what they notice from one round to the next. Ask students to think about what is happening and explain why. For example, students may notice that they write more in each round.

Variations

Have students write for 3 minutes continuously, and repeat the process for three days (rounds) in a row. Use content words and concepts as a review.

REFERENCE: Adapted from Anderson, 2011.

Activity: Quick Writing Rounds

Adolescent Literacy Research Summaries

Writing Next: Effective Strategies to Improve Writing of Adolescents in Middle and High Schools
"This report identifies 11 elements of current writing instruction found to be effective for helping adolescent students learn to write well and to use writing as a tool for learning. It is important to note that all of the elements are supported by rigorous research, but that even when used together, they do not constitute a full writing curriculum" (p. 4).

Eleven Elements of Effective Adolescent Writing Instruction

Elements	Instructional Description
Writing Strategies	Teach students strategies for planning, revising, and editing their compositions.
Summarizing	Explicitly and systematically teach students how to summarize texts.
Collaborative Writing	Use instructional arrangements in which adolescents work together to plan, draft, revise, and edit their compositions.
Specific Product Goals	Assign students specific, reachable goals for the writing they are to complete.
Word Processing	Use computers and word processors as instructional supports for writing assignments.
Sentence Combining	Teach students to construct more complex, sophisticated sentences. *Note: Teaching students to focus on the function and practical application of grammar within the context of writing is more effective than teaching grammar as an independent, isolated activity.*
Prewriting	Engage students in activities designed to help them generate or organize ideas for their composition.
Inquiry Activities	Engage students in analyzing immediate, concrete data to help them develop ideas and content for a particular writing task.
Process Writing Approach	Interweave a number of writing instructional activities in a workshop environment that stresses extended writing opportunities, writing for authentic audiences, personalized instruction, and cycles of writing.
Study of Models	Provide students with opportunities to read, analyze, and emulate models of good writing.
Writing for Content Learning	Use writing as a tool for learning content material.

REFERENCE: Graham & Perin, 2007; http://www.all4ed.org/publication_material/reports/writing_next.

Writing to Read: Evidence for How Writing Can Improve Reading

"This report identifies a cluster of closely related instructional practices shown to be effective in improving students' reading. . . . all of the *Writing to Read* instructional recommendations have shown clear results for improving students' reading. Nonetheless, even when used together these practices do not constitute a full curriculum. The writing practices described in this report should be used by educators in a flexible and thoughtful way to support students' learning (p. 6).

Writing Practices That Enhance Students' Reading

Instructional Practices	Description
Have students write about the texts they read.	Students' comprehension of science, social studies, and language arts texts is improved when they write about what they read, specifically when they • respond to a text in writing (writing personal reactions, analyzing and interpreting the text); • write summaries of a text; • write notes about a text; and • answer questions about a text in writing, or create and answer written questions about a text.
Teach students the writing skills and processes that go into creating text.	Students' reading skills and comprehension are improved by learning the skills and processes that go into creating text, specifically when teachers • teach the process of writing, text structures for writing, and paragraph or sentence construction skills (improves reading comprehension); • teach spelling and sentence construction skills (improves reading fluency); and • teach spelling skills (improves word reading skills).
Increase how much students write.	Students' reading comprehension is improved by having them increase how often they produce their own texts.

REFERENCE: Graham & Hebert, 2010; http://carnegie.org/publications/search-publications/pub/315/.

Key Ideas from the ELAR TEKS for Grades 6–8

WRITING STRAND

Writing Process

Plan
- Genre
- Intended meaning
- Audience
- Topic(s)
- Thesis or controlling idea

Draft
- Appropriate organizational strategy
- Building on ideas (focused, organized, coherent)

Revise to clarify and enhance
- Meaning
- Style
- Precise word choice and vivid images
- Consistent point of view
- Simple, compound, and complex sentences
- Transitions
- Internal and external coherence
- Rethinking

Edit
- Grammar
- Mechanics
- Spelling

Revise
- Peer and teacher feedback

Publish
- Appropriate audiences

Literary Texts

Imaginative stories
- Clearly defined focus, plot, and point of view
- Reader interest
- Well-paced action
- Engaging story line
- Specific and believable setting through sensory details
- Dialogue
- Interesting characters
- Range of literary strategies/devices
- Style and tone

Poems
- Poetic techniques (alliteration; meter)
- Figurative language (similes; idioms)
- Graphic elements (line length; word position)

WRITING STRAND (cont.)

Personal (Own Experiences)

Personal narrative
- Clearly defined focus
- Communicate reasons for actions and consequences
- Include reflections on decisions, actions, and consequences

Expository/Procedural Texts

Letters
- Include important information
- Closure
- Date, salutation, closing

Literary response
- Incorporate multiparagraph skills
- Evidence from text
- Use of quotations

Multimedia
- Text and graphics
- Images and sound
- Using technology

Multiparagraph essay
- Effective introduction and conclusion
- Guide and inform readers' understanding
- Clear purpose/controlling idea
- Include specific facts, details, and examples
- Logically organized with facts and details
- No extraneous information or inconsistencies
- Variety of sentence structures, rhetorical devices, and transitions
- Synthesizes ideas from several sources

Persuasive Texts

- Written for the appropriate audience
- Clear position or thesis
- Sound reasoning
- Detailed and relevant evidence
- Consider/anticipate/respond to alternatives, other views, concerns, and counterarguments
- Logical, organized evidence to support viewpoint
- Differentiate between fact and opinion

ORAL AND WRITTEN CONVENTIONS STRAND

Conventions

Parts of speech in context
- Verbs
  - Irregular
  - Active and passive voice
  - Perfect and progressive tense
  - Participles
- Nouns
  - Singular and plural
  - Common and proper
  - Collective
  - Noncount
- Adjectives
  - Descriptive
  - Predicate
  - Comparative and superlative forms
- Adverbs: Conjunctive
- Prepositions and prepositional phrases
  - Convey location, time, direction
  - Provide details
  - Influence subject–verb agreement
- Pronouns
  - Indefinite
  - Relative
- Conjunctions: Subordinating
- Transitional words and phrases
  - Sentence to sentence
  - Paragraph coherence

Active and passive voice
- Differentiate and know how to use

Complex sentences
- Differentiate between main and subordinate clauses

Variety of complete simple, compound, and complex sentences
- Correct subject–verb agreement
- Correct use of modifiers, antecedents, parallel structures, and consistent tenses

Handwriting/Capitalization/ Punctuation

Capitalization
- Abbreviations
- Initials and acronyms
- Organizations

Punctuation
- Commas
  - In compound sentences
  - After introductory words, phrases, and clauses
  - After introductory structures and dependent adverbial clauses
  - Complex sentences
- Quotations
- Parentheses, brackets, and ellipses
- Semicolons, colons, hyphens

Proper mechanics
- Italics
- Underlining for titles of books

Spelling

Correct spelling
- Commonly confused terms (its/it's)
- Use spelling patterns and rules; use print and electronic resources to determine and check correct spellings
- Know how to use spell-check function while understanding limitations

General Suggestions for Teaching Writing to Adolescent English Language Learners (ELLs)

The following suggestions are intended as guidelines for supporting English language learners in the classroom. It is important to remember to linguistically accommodate instruction according to the English proficiency levels of students. The suggestions below are not an exhaustive list—contact your Educational Service Center for additional information about strategies for working with English language learners.

Provide intensive teacher modeling of writing (in front of the class) with explicit examples of all of the thinking processes involved. Verbalize your own thinking and engage ELLs in the process.

- Demonstrate how writers read their own writing and get more ideas about what else to write.
- Model some of the questions that writers ask themselves to evaluate what they have written.
- Model exemplary writing practices and demonstrate how writers write about meaningful topics.
- Model how to write for a purpose and for an audience.
- Have ELLs participate during the demonstration so they have an opportunity to practice and better understand the thinking behind the writing.
- Use a variety of mentor texts as models of effective writing.

Study mentor texts to demonstrate the connection between writing and reading. This teaches ELLs to read like writers.

- Include culturally relevant texts and materials that mirror family backgrounds, experiences, characters, and interests to help ELLs make connections between their own lives and school.
- Consider how the text supports ELLs as they write, including what they can try in their own writing.
- Notice the structure of the language and if it matches the students' stage of language acquisition.
- Point out differences in authors' styles and the distinguishing characteristics of text types.

Establish attainable goals based on ELLs' level of English proficiency and writing knowledge and skills.

- Sequence and scaffold writing assignments and tasks into manageable steps/small

increments.

- Introduce and focus on one writing element/grammatical point at a time.
- Allow time for ELLs to incorporate an element/grammatical point into their own writing.
- Continuously reassess and set new goals based on student progress.
- Ensure that students are writing frequently as this will support end-of-the-year TELPAS Writing requirements.

Incorporate procedural supports (i.e., conferences, planning forms and charts, sentence frames, word lists, and rubrics/checklists for revision/editing), oral language, and many peer-assisted learning opportunities.

- Foster a sense of community that supports taking risks, uses language for real purposes in authentic writing situations, views students and teachers as writers, and encourages collaboration as the norm.
- Have ELLs work in small groups, in pairs, or in triads. Ensure that ELLs are grouped with students who can offer beneficial feedback that will help them improve their writing.
- Help ELLs develop their ideas for writing in English. When ELLs think in their native language first and then try to translate what they are thinking into English, their writing may reflect the nuances of their native language and be difficult to comprehend (i.e., inaccurate verb tenses or word choice). For example, have ELLs brainstorm with others and/or their peers and then read and talk about their writing with their peers or teacher.
- Model for students how to use all procedures and graphic organizers.
- Provide guided practice for students to work together using rubrics and checklists to clarify criteria and expectations for writers.
- Provide sentence stems for students to access for both oral and written discourse.

Demonstrate how writing and reading reflect thinking and learning. Even though ELLs may have mastered content knowledge, their writing ability may not reflect this knowledge.

"In order to communicate effectively, writers need to know many words and to know those words well. This means knowing the various meanings a word may have (e.g., *Mean, root, log,* and *citation* are all examples of words with multiple meanings.); knowing how to use the word grammatically (e.g., We use a mop to mop the floor, but we don't broom the floor when we use a broom; we sweep it.); knowing the words it typically occurs with (e.g., *toxic waste*; *poisonous snake*); and knowing its level of politeness or formality (e.g., *kids* versus *children*, *fake* versus *fictitious*). Because this knowledge requires time and multiple exposures to each word in a variety of contexts, ELLs are likely to need a great deal of work in vocabulary in order to read and write like their English-proficient peers"(The Education Alliance: Brown University).

- Provide opportunities for ELLs to explain their writing and to obtain help in expressing

their knowledge effectively.

- Use visual cues, such as having students draw a picture before they write. Then, elicit more detail and provide language models by talking with students about their drawings (e.g., "Tell me more about…").
- Provide rich listening, speaking, and reading experiences; multiple exposures to words; and explicit teaching of definitions and usage.
    - Develop a basic writer's vocabulary (display in room and/or provide individual copies for writing notebooks). Include content-area and thematic words.
    - Incorporate lists of Spanish (or other native languages) cognates (i.e., words with common origins and meanings) as applicable.
    - Teach ELLs how to use dictionaries, thesauruses, and computer resources.

Demonstrate how writing is a recursive process.

- Have students write frequently, as this provides opportunity for practice and improvement.
- Model, model, model to help students understand all stages of the writing process, what you are asking them to do, how to do it, and why.
- Have ELLs revise and edit a paper in their writing folder/portfolio after they have learned more about a targeted grammatical point or text type/genre.
- Encourage ELLs to think and talk about what they have learned (e.g., "I learned to use a comma after an introductory clause"; "I use more dialogue now"; "I didn't include enough supporting details").
- Prompt for more information or clarification, when necessary.

Teach written conventions (grammar, mechanics, usage, and spelling) in the context of actual writing.

"Writing activities provide excellent context for providing the models, practice, explanations, and feedback that ELLs need" (The Education Alliance: Brown University).

- Provide models using sentences and examples from mentor texts and teacher writing.

  "ELLs learn many structural patterns of English unconsciously through hearing them and then using them in their speech. . . . [ELLs] do not have an intuitive sense of what 'sounds right' in English. That sense develops with time and experience. ELLs' grammar improves over time when they are provided with good language models, guided practice, clear explanations, and tactful but explicit feedback on grammatical correctness" (The Education Alliance: Brown University).
- Encourage ELLs to figure out the spellings of new and different words that express their

thoughts.

"Some ELLs 'play it safe' when they write, using only words they have memorized or can copy from the classroom print environment. This can result in writing that has no spelling errors but also little individuality" (The Education Alliance: Brown University).

Provide varied and increasingly challenging writing experiences for students. Scaffold as appropriate to a student's proficiency level.

- Incorporate authentic writing assignments and provide opportunities for ELLs to write on culturally relevant topics.
- Be sure to revisit writing genres that ELLs may or may not have experienced or mastered previously (other grade-level expectations).

REFERENCES: The Education Alliance, 2006; Haynes, 2007; Kendall & Khoun, 2006.

Teacher Resources to Support English Language Learners

English Language Proficiency Standards Academies

These academies explore ways to increase achievement for English language learners (ELLs) through the English Language Proficiency Standards (ELPS). The ELPS focus on developing academic language in the content areas through the language domains of reading, writing, speaking, and listening in kindergarten through grade 12. Academy participants examine the ELPS and practice writing language objectives, using the four domains of the ELPS. The academies also include specific strategies for teachers to use to incorporate the ELPS into their classrooms.

Check your district or education service center professional-development catalog for information about ELPS academies offered both face-to-face and online through Project Share.

Implementing the ELPS: Project Share Online Modules

Implementing the ELPS in ELAR, Mathematics, Science, and Social Studies will be available in the fall of 2012. These online modules will guide content area teachers through the use of the ELPS within sample content area lessons.

Texas English Language Learners Portal

This website provides information about assessment, compliance, accountability, the instructional environment, professional development, and other resources for teachers of ELLs.

Website: **http://elltx.org**

ELPS Presentations

Presentations are available through Education Service Center Region 20.

Website: **http://portal.esc20.net/portal/page/portal/esc20public/ELPS_EnglishLanguageProficiencyStandards**

A+RISE Instructional Strategies Linked to the ELPS

Resources are available through Project Share for teachers of students in grades 9–12. Check the Gadgets section of your Project Share My Portal page.

Grade 7 Expository Writing Rubric

	SCORE POINTS: The essay represents a/an _____ writing performance.			
	1: Very limited	**2: Basic**	**3: Satisfactory**	**4: Accomplished**
ORGANIZATION/PROGRESSION				
Form and structure	The organizing structure of the essay is **inappropriate** to the purpose or the specific demands of the prompt. The writer uses organizational strategies that are only marginally suited to the explanatory task, or they are inappropriate or not evident at all. The **absence of a functional organizational structure** causes the essay to lack clarity and direction.	The organizing structure of the essay is **evident but may not always be appropriate** to the purpose or the specific demands of the prompt. The essay is not always clear because the writer uses organizational strategies that are **only somewhat suited** to the expository task.	The organizing structure of the essay is, **for the most part, appropriate** to the purpose **and responsive** to the specific demands of the prompt. The essay is clear because the writer uses organizational strategies that are **adequately suited** to the expository task.	The organizing structure of the essay is **clearly appropriate** to the purpose and responsive to the specific demands of the prompt. The essay is skillfully crafted because the writer uses organizational strategies that are particularly **well suited** to the expository task.
Thesis statement, focus, and coherence	Most ideas are generally related to the topic specified in the prompt, but the **controlling idea is missing, unclear, or illogical**. The writer may fail to maintain focus on the topic, may include extraneous information, or may shift abruptly from idea to idea, weakening the coherence of the essay.	Most ideas are generally related to the topic specified in the prompt, but the writer's **controlling idea is weak or somewhat unclear**. The lack of an effective controlling idea or the writer's inclusion of irrelevant information interferes with the focus and coherence of the essay.	The writer establishes a **clear controlling idea**. Most ideas are related to the controlling idea and are focused on the topic specified in the prompt. The essay is coherent, though it may not always be unified due to **minor lapses in focus**.	The writer establishes a **clear controlling idea**. All ideas are strongly related to the controlling idea and are focused on the topic specified in the prompt. By sustaining this focus, the writer is able to create an essay that is **unified and coherent**.
Progression of ideas and transitions	The writer's progression of ideas is **weak**. Repetition or wordiness sometimes causes serious disruptions in the essay. At other times the **lack of transitions** and sentence-to-sentence connections causes the writer to present ideas in a random or illogical way, making one or more parts of the essay unclear or difficult to follow.	The writer's progression of ideas is **not always logical and controlled**. Sometimes repetition or wordiness causes minor disruptions in the flow of the essay. At other times transitions and sentence-to-sentence connections are **too perfunctory or weak** to support the flow of the essay or show the relationships among ideas.	The writer's progression of ideas is **generally logical and controlled**. For the most part, transitions are meaningful, and sentence-to-sentence connections are sufficient to support the flow of the essay and show the relationships among ideas.	The writer's progression of ideas is **coherent and well controlled**. Meaningful transitions and strong sentence-to-sentence connections clearly show the relationships among ideas throughout the essay.
DEVELOPMENT OF IDEAS				
Details and examples	The development of ideas is weak. The essay is ineffective because the writer uses details and examples that are **inappropriate, vague, or insufficient**.	The development of ideas is minimal. The essay is superficial because the writer uses details and examples that are **not always appropriate or are too briefly or partially presented**.	The development of ideas is sufficient because the writer uses details and examples that are **specific and appropriate**, adding some substance to the essay.	The development of ideas is effective because the writer uses details and examples that are **specific and well chosen**, adding substance to the essay.
Depth and understanding of task	The essay is **insubstantial** because the writer's response to the prompt is vague or confused. In some cases, the essay as a whole is only weakly linked to the prompt. In other cases, the writer develops the essay in a manner that demonstrates a **lack of understanding** of the expository writing task.	The essay reflects **little or no thoughtfulness**. The writer's response to the prompt is sometimes formulaic. The writer develops the essay in a manner that demonstrates only a **limited understanding** of the expository writing task.	The essay reflects **some thoughtfulness**. The writer's response to the prompt is original rather than formulaic. The writer develops the essay in a manner that demonstrates a **good understanding** of the expository writing task.	The essay is **thoughtful and engaging**. The writer may choose to use his/her unique experiences or view of the world as a basis for writing or to connect ideas in interesting ways. The writer develops the essay in a manner that demonstrates a **thorough understanding** of the expository writing task.

Grade 7 Expository Writing Rubric (cont.)

	SCORE POINTS: The essay represents a/an _____ writing performance.			
	1: Very limited	**2: Basic**	**3: Satisfactory**	**4: Accomplished**
USE OF LANGUAGE/CONVENTIONS				
Word choice	The writer's word choice may be **vague or limited**. It reflects little or no awareness of the expository purpose and does not establish a tone appropriate to the task. The word choice may impede the quality and clarity of the essay.	The writer's word choice may be **general or imprecise**. It reflects a basic awareness of the expository purpose but does little to establish a tone appropriate to the task. The word choice may not contribute to the quality and clarity of the essay.	The writer's word choice is, for the most part, **clear and specific**. It reflects an awareness of the expository purpose and establishes a tone appropriate to the task. The word choice usually contributes to the quality and clarity of the essay.	The writer's word choice is **purposeful and precise**. It reflects a keen awareness of the expository purpose and maintains a tone appropriate to the task. The word choice strongly contributes to the quality and clarity of the essay.
Sentences	Sentences are **simplistic, awkward, or uncontrolled**, significantly limiting the effectiveness of the essay.	Sentences are **awkward or only somewhat controlled**, weakening the effectiveness of the essay.	Sentences are **varied and adequately controlled**, for the most part contributing to the effectiveness of the essay.	Sentences are **purposeful, varied, and well controlled**, enhancing the effectiveness of the essay.
Command of conventions; occurrence of errors	The writer has **little or no command** of sentence boundaries and age- appropriate spelling, capitalization, punctuation, grammar, and usage conventions. **Serious and persistent errors** create disruptions in the fluency of the writing and sometimes interfere with meaning.	The writer demonstrates a **partial command** of sentence boundaries and age- appropriate spelling, capitalization, punctuation, grammar, and usage conventions. **Some distracting errors** may be evident, at times creating minor disruptions in the fluency or meaning of the writing.	The writer demonstrates an **adequate command** of sentence boundaries and age-appropriate spelling, capitalization, punctuation, grammar, and usage conventions. Although **some errors** may be evident, they create few (if any) disruptions in the fluency of the writing, and they do not affect the clarity of the essay.	The writer demonstrates a **consistent command** of sentence boundaries and age-appropriate spelling, capitalization, punctuation, grammar, and usage conventions. Although **minor errors** may be evident, they do not detract from the fluency of the writing or the clarity of the essay. The overall strength of the conventions contributes to the effectiveness of the essay.

Spring 2012

Grade 7 Personal Narrative Rubric

	SCORE POINTS: The story represents a/an _____ writing performance.			
	1: Very limited	**2: Basic**	**3: Satisfactory**	**4: Accomplished**
ORGANIZATION/PROGRESSION				
Form and structure	The form or structure of the narrative is **inappropriate** to the purpose or the specific demands of the prompt. The writer uses organizational strategies or literary devices that are only marginally suited to the narrative task, or they are inappropriate or not evident at all. Because the narrative is presented in a random or illogical way, the writer is not able to convey a sense of the experience.	The form or structure of the narrative is **evident but may not always be appropriate** to the purpose or responsive to the specific demands of the prompt. The writer uses organizational strategies or literary devices that are only somewhat suited to the narrative task. The writer is able to convey some sense of the experience but may not be able to communicate its importance or meaning.	The form or structure of the narrative is, **for the most part, appropriate** to the purpose and responsive to the specific demands of the prompt. The writer uses organizational strategies or literary devices that are adequately suited to the narrative task. The writer is able to clearly convey the experience and adequately communicate its importance or meaning.	The form or structure of the narrative is **appropriate** to the purpose and **responsive** to the specific demands of the prompt. The writer uses organizational strategies or literary devices that are particularly well suited to the narrative task. The writer is able to skillfully convey the experience and communicate its importance or meaning.
Unity and coherence	**Many** of the details **do not contribute** to the narrative. The writer's lack of focus on a specific personal experience weakens the unity and coherence of the narrative.	**Some** details **do not contribute** to the narrative. The writer may focus on a specific personal experience but may not sustain that focus, limiting the unity and coherence of the narrative.	**Most** details **contribute** to the effectiveness of the narrative. The writer focuses on a specific personal experience and generally sustains that focus. The narrative is coherent, though it may not always be unified due to minor lapses in focus.	**All** details **contribute** to the effectiveness of the narrative. The writer focuses on a specific personal experience and sustains that focus, strengthening the unity and coherence of the narrative.
Progression of ideas and transitions	The writer's narrative presentation is **weak**. Repetition or wordiness sometimes causes serious disruptions in the story line. At other times the lack of transitions and sentence-to-sentence connections makes one or more parts of the narrative unclear or difficult to follow.	The writer's narrative presentation is **inconsistent**. Sometimes repetition or wordiness causes minor disruptions in the story line. At other times transitions and sentence-to-sentence connections are too perfunctory or weak to support the logical movement of the narrative or establish a link between the experience and its meaning.	The writer's narrative presentation is **adequately controlled**. For the most part, transitions are meaningful, and sentence-to-sentence connections are sufficient to support the logical movement of the narrative and establish a link between the experience and its meaning.	The writer's narrative presentation is **well controlled**. Meaningful transitions and strong sentence-to-sentence connections enhance the logical movement of the narrative and reinforce the link between the experience and its meaning.
DEVELOPMENT OF IDEAS				
Development of the narrative	The development of the narrative is weak because the details are **inappropriate, vague, or insufficient**. They do not contribute to the writer's portrayal of the experience.	The development of the narrative is **minimal and remains at a surface level** because there are few details, they are not always appropriate, or they are too general. For the most part, the details contribute only marginally to the writer's portrayal of the experience and provide the reader with little or no understanding of why this experience was meaningful.	**Specific details add some substance to the narrative**. For the most part, these details contribute to the writer's portrayal of the experience and provide the reader with some understanding of why this experience was meaningful.	**Specific, well-chosen details add substance** to the narrative. These details contribute significantly to the writer's portrayal of the experience and provide the reader with a clear understanding of why this experience was meaningful.

Grade 7 Personal Narrative Rubric (cont.)

	SCORE POINTS: The story represents a/an _____ writing performance.			
	1: Very limited	**2: Basic**	**3: Satisfactory**	**4: Accomplished**
Depth and understanding of task	The narrative is **insubstantial** because the writer's response to the prompt is vague or confused. In some cases, the narrative as a whole is only weakly linked to the prompt. In other cases, the writer fails to establish a realistic situation, present motivations for behavior or actions, or show any awareness of changes or insights that developed as a result of the experience.	The narrative reflects **little or no thoughtfulness**. In some cases, the writer's response to the prompt is formulaic and demonstrates only a limited understanding of the writing task. In other cases, the writer establishes some elements of a realistic situation but may provide few motivations for behavior or actions. In addition, the writer may not address changes or insights that developed as a result of the experience.	The narrative reflects **some thoughtfulness**. The writer demonstrates a good understanding of the writing task by establishing a realistic situation, providing reasonable motivations for behavior or actions, and addressing (at least to some degree) changes or insights that developed as a result of the experience.	The narrative is **thoughtful and engaging**. The writer demonstrates a thorough understanding of the writing task by establishing a realistic situation, providing plausible motivations for behavior or actions, and revealing changes or insights that developed as a result of the experience.
USE OF LANGUAGE/CONVENTIONS				
Word choice	The writer's word choice may be **vague or limited**. It reflects little or no awareness of the narrative purpose. The word choice **impedes** the writer's ability to relate the experience clearly or to convey a sense of its importance or meaning.	The writer's word choice may be **general or imprecise**. It reflects a basic awareness of the narrative purpose. The word choice **limits** the writer's ability to relate the experience clearly or to convey a sense of its importance or meaning.	The writer's word choice is, **for the most part, specific and concrete**. It reflects an awareness of the narrative purpose. Generally effective word choice allows the writer to relate the experience clearly and to **convey some sense of its importance** or meaning.	The writer's word choice is **vivid and expressive**. It reflects a keen awareness of the narrative purpose. Effective word choice enables the writer to recreate the experience in a way that **conveys its importance or meaning**.
Sentences	Sentences are **simplistic, awkward, or uncontrolled**, weakening the effectiveness of the narrative.	Sentences are **awkward or only somewhat controlled**, limiting the effectiveness of the narrative.	Sentences are **varied and adequately controlled**, for the most part contributing to the effectiveness of the narrative.	Sentences are **purposeful, varied, and well controlled**, enhancing the effectiveness of the narrative.
Command of conventions; occurrence of errors	The writer has **little or no command** of sentence boundaries and age-appropriate spelling, capitalization, punctuation, grammar, and usage conventions. **Serious and persistent errors** create disruptions in the fluency of the writing and sometimes interfere with meaning.	The writer demonstrates a **partial command** of sentence boundaries and age- appropriate spelling, capitalization, punctuation, grammar, and usage conventions. **Some distracting errors** may be evident, at times creating minor disruptions in the fluency or meaning of the writing.	The writer demonstrates an **adequate command** of sentence boundaries and age- appropriate spelling, capitalization, punctuation, grammar, and usage conventions. Although **some errors** may be evident, they **create few (if any) disruptions** in the fluency of the writing, and they do not affect the clarity of the narrative.	The writer demonstrates a **consistent command** of sentence boundaries and age- appropriate spelling, capitalization, punctuation, grammar, and usage conventions. Although **minor errors may be evident**, they do not detract from the fluency or clarity of the writing. The overall strength of the conventions contributes to the effectiveness of the narrative.

Spring 2012

Discussion Board: Writing Reflects Thinking

Discussion Prompt

In his latest book, *Write Like This: Teaching Real-World Writing Through Modeling and Mentor Texts*, Kelly Gallagher states the following:

"When teaching students how to write, the most effective strategy is a teacher who writes, and thinks out loud, in front of his or her students. We go first, then they go" (p. 16).

He also explains that few secondary teachers "take the leap and write in front of their students" (p. 15).

Discussion Questions

- How do you feel about composing text in front of your class?
- How can you show your students that "the struggle they feel when they attempt to write is normal"?
- Why is it important for you to model writing that is authentic, rather than perfect?

Authentic Writing

- Words do not "magically spill" from your brain to the page/screen.
- Writing is difficult (a struggle) for you at times.
- You often have to "wrestle" with decisions as writing unfolds.
- Writing reflects deeper thinking and leads to the development of new ideas.
- Revising and editing what you have written is an important part of great writing.

REFERENCE: Gallagher, 2011.

Author's Style or Craft

Stylistic Devices	ELAR TEKS Glossary Definitions	Expository	Personal Narrative	Literary
Organizational pattern	The pattern an author constructs as he or she organizes his or her ideas and provides supporting details (e.g., cause-and-effect, compare-and-contrast, sequential/chronological order, logical order, proposition-and-support, problem-and-solution)	✓	✓	✓
Sentence variety	Use of a variety of sentence types (simple, compound, complex)	✓	✓	✓
Transitional words and phrases	Words or phrases that help to sustain a thought or idea through the writing. They link sentences and paragraphs together smoothly so that there are no abrupt jumps or breaks between ideas.	✓	✓	✓
Word choice	The author's thoughtful use of precise vocabulary to fully convey meaning to the reader	✓	✓	✓
Figurative language	Language layered with meaning by word images and figures of speech, as opposed to literal language	✓	✓	✓
Tone	The author's particular attitude either stated or implied in the writing	✓	✓	✓
Sensory language	Words an author uses to help the reader experience the sense elements of the story. Sensory words are descriptions of the five senses: sight, sound, touch, smell, taste.	✓	✓	✓
Setting	The time and place in which a narrative occurs. Elements of the setting may include the physical, psychological, cultural, or historical background against which the story takes place.		✓	✓

Author's Style or Craft (cont.)

Stylistic Devices	ELAR TEKS Glossary Definitions	Expository	Personal Narrative	Literary
Evidence*	Facts, ideas, or reasons used to support the thesis or claim of an author	✓	✓	
Dialogue	The lines spoken between characters in fiction or a play. Dialogue in a play is the main vehicle in which plot, character, and other elements are established.		✓	✓
Point of view	The perspective from which the events in the story are told. The author may choose to use any of the following: • Omniscient/third-person omniscient: The narrator tells the story in third person from an all-knowing perspective. The knowledge is not limited by any one character's view or behavior, as the narrator knows everything about all characters. • Omniscient/third-person limited: The narrator restricts his knowledge to one character's view or behavior. • Objective: The narrator reveals only the actions and words without the benefit of the inner thoughts and feelings. • First person/subjective: The narrator restricts the perspective to that of only one character to tell the story. • Limited: A narrative mode in which the story is told through the point of view of a single character and is limited to what he or she sees, hears, feels, or is told.		✓ ✓	✓

*Definition not included in the ELAR TEKS Glossary.

Authentic Writing Purposes

Topic: _____

Writing Purposes	Related Topics
To inform and explain	❑ ❑ ❑
To express and reflect	❑ ❑ ❑
To persuade	❑ ❑ ❑
To analyze and make inferences	❑ ❑ ❑
To evaluate and make judgments	❑ ❑ ❑
To question and explore	❑ ❑ ❑

REFERENCE: Adapted from Gallagher, 2011.

Example: Authentic Writing Purposes

Topic: golf

Writing Purposes	Related Topics
To inform and explain	❑ Explain the rules of golf ❑ History of golf ❑ Why your short game is important
To express and reflect	❑ Why I learned to play golf ❑ The challenges I've had to overcome ❑ Impact of lessons
To persuade	❑ Need for more lady golfers ❑ Why the local course should be run by the city ❑ Attracting out-of-town golfers
To analyze and make inferences	❑ Why are all golf courses different? ❑ What are the major differences between men's and women's golf clubs? ❑ Why is golf popular for different age groups?
To evaluate and make judgments	❑ How effective are the new golf cleats? ❑ Are the PGA playoff rules fair? ❑ What part of my game needs improving?
To question and explore	❑ Which type of golf cart (battery or gas) requires the lowest maintenance? ❑ What is the history of the LPGA? ❑ What are hybrids?

REFERENCE: Adapted from Gallagher, 2011.

Reading Like a Writer: Charting

Charting is an interactive reading–writing strategy that can be used to help students learn to read like writers and, ultimately, improve their own writing. It generates a high level of student engagement with text and helps them delve deeper into an author's meaning and writing style or craft.

Charting models how good readers stop periodically to think as they read. It helps students to further analyze what they have read and deepen their understanding. It is typically used with expository text and helps students develop metacognitive knowledge, which is an awareness and understanding of how one thinks and uses strategies.

In this version, charting involves mapping or graphically representing different aspects of a text to facilitate analysis and evaluation. After students finish a first reading of a text, they can apply the charting strategy as they reread each paragraph. On a graphic organizer, students identify the key ideas, summarize what the author is saying in the paragraph, and develop a deeper understanding of the author's style of writing.

When teaching and using charting, focus on the thinking and reasoning behind responses. If students do not agree, help them to work toward consensus, citing the text as evidence to support their responses. Foster an understanding that there is more than one way to chart a text.

1. First, conduct a first reading of an expository or persuasive essay. Read through the selection once. The purpose of this reading is to gain a general understanding of what the author is saying.

2. Number each paragraph of the essay (write number in margin or on sticky notes). Then, list the paragraph numbers in the first column of the chart.

3. Then, reread each paragraph. Identify key words/phrases in the paragraph. Write the key words/phrases in the second column of the chart. Ask the following questions:

    - What words/phrases are related to the development of the topic?
    - Which words/phrases occur more than once or most often (ignore pronouns and synonyms)?

4. For each paragraph, summarize the content, or what the author is saying, in the corresponding column on the chart.

    - Use the key words/phrases to write a summary statement of the content, or what the author is saying (the essential information in the paragraph). Link the key words with necessary articles and other words needed for coherence. Students may use any form of the key words and may put the words in any order to create a sentence that makes sense and conveys the author's message of the paragraph.
    - Reread the completed summary sentence. Ask questions that include the following:
        - What is the author's message?

- Have I included key words/phrases in my summary statement?
- Have I paraphrased the essential information?

- Revise your summary statement, if necessary.

5. Reread each paragraph. In the Style/Craft column, write what you notice about the author's writing style/craft OR how the paragraphs are written. Ask the following questions:

- What do you notice about the way the author writes?
- How does it affect you, the reader?
- How does the author interest/engage/motivate you?
- Which stylistic devices do you want to try in your own writing?

6. Discuss in groups or as a whole class how the text was charted.

- Summary statements using key words
- Comments on the author's writing style or craft
- Specific techniques and stylistic devices to emulate in your own writing

REFERENCES: Tompkins & Blanchfield, 2005; Jendian, 2007.

Solidarity and Support

Susan Newman *is a social psychologist, a blogger for Psychology Today Magazine, and the author of "Under One Roof Again: All Grown Up and (Re)learning to Live Together Happily."*

December 26, 2011

Not since the Great Depression have so many young adults turned to their immediate relatives as an economic lifeline. In the 1960s, for example, independence was the strived-for virtue; returning home, "unthinkable." If children didn't grow up, find jobs and live independently, parents were seen as enablers, the children as failures. That stigmatized view has faded fast during the recession.

Family of origin has become a lifeboat for roughly one in five 25- to 34-year-olds who move in with parents to wait out the economic storm. Sure, there are potential complications and emotional minefields left over from the parenting years, but once the kinks are sorted out, the benefits for young and old are clear.

Some argue that living with parents stunts development and prolongs adolescence. I see the camaraderie as an opportunity to get to know each other in ways not possible when living together as parent and child. Delayed maturity in young adults happens only if parents continue to cater to their adult children's needs as if they were still 10-year-olds. Living with parents as young adults provides the chance to know parents as people and similarly for parents to see their adult children as grownups with ideas, skills and talents to admire.

Bunking in with parents allows struggling young adults to save for an apartment or house, to hold out until they find a meaningful job, or to start to pay down student loans — the average being $24,000, but soaring over $100,000 for some. In return, most adult children assist parents in-kind.

Rather than having a negative effect, the recession has renewed values with the emphasis on family solidarity and support. The advantages of the multigenerational family, a model immigrant families have always practiced, will keep more parents and young adults together. Even when young adults can afford a place of their own, many say, "I'm still here." Money will be saved on housing but will be spent on consumer goods, aiding the economy. However, living under the same roof for the long or short haul will remain a configuration that defines American families in the foreseeable future.

REFERENCE: Newman, 2011. Reprinted with permission from *The New York Times*.

Charting Graphic Organizer

¶	Key Words and Phrases	Content (essential information)	Author's Style or Craft (stylistic devices)
1			

Teaching Conventions in Context: Using Model Sentences

The following instructional practices for teaching written conventions in context use model sentences to help students learn how conventions are used by authors to clarify and convey meaning in their writing.

Notice

- Display the sentence with the targeted grammatical point.
- Ask: What do you notice?
- Ask (repeatedly, as needed): What else?
- Nudge students in the right direction to focus on the targeted grammatical point. For example:
    - What's working with the text?
    - Where's the good writing?
    - What is the effect?
    - What is the punctuation doing?
    - What changes if we remove it? Use something else?

Imitate

- Look closely at the model sentence. Deconstruct the sentence, identifying its prominent features, including the targeted grammatical point. Provide a sentence pattern or frame as a visual scaffold (especially for struggling writers and ELLs).
- Model your own imitation (use the targeted grammatical point in your own sentence) and connect back to the prominent features.
- Show students how to insert their ideas and experiences and still imitate the grammatical point in their own sentences.

Share

- Share the imitation sentences sparked by the model.
- Listen, clap, praise, but most of all, be sincere—create a positive environment that lets students know you value what they have to say.

Collect

- Have students look at the texts they have already read and see how other authors use the targeted conventions (grammatical points).
- When students find appropriate sentences, have them write them down.
- After sentences are collected, share a few and celebrate the most powerful ones that exemplify the targeted grammatical point(s).
- Display sentences on the wall as models.

Write/Revise

- Imitate a powerful model sentence using the targeted grammatical point in a longer composition.
- Try a freewrite, using the targeted grammatical point.
- Revise a sentence you have already written, adding in the targeted grammatical point.
- Respond to or summarize readings, using the targeted grammatical point.

Break Apart/Combine

- Together with students, demonstrate how to take a model sentence and break the ideas into several simple sentences. Read and reread the sentence, noticing the conventions used by the author.
- Then, provide students with opportunities to combine a set of simple sentences into one sentence that includes the targeted grammatical point. Have them compare their attempts with those of the author(s) and/or the combined sentences of their peers.

REFERENCE: Adapted from Anderson, 2007.

Using Commas After Introductory Words, Phrases, and Clauses

Certain words, phrases, and clauses that come at the beginning of a sentence are almost always set off from the rest of the sentence by a comma. The comma tells readers where to pause for a moment to avoid confusion of meaning. The comma also indicates to the reader that the introductory part of the sentence is finished and the main part of the sentence (independent/main clause) is about to begin.

Correct comma usage:
After the rain stopped, thunder could be heard in the distance.

No comma:
After the rain stopped thunder could be heard in the distance.

A sentence pattern or frame can provide a visual scaffold to help students imitate and write sentences that begin with introductory word(s), phrases, or clauses.

_____ , _____ .
Introductory word(s), phrase, or clause — independent clause.

Examples of Comma Usage With Introductory Words, Phrases, and Clauses

Note: This section includes some common examples that signal to a writer that a comma is usually needed after an introductory element. These examples are based on the ELAR TEKS for grades 6–8. This section does not represent all of the different types of introductory words, phrases, or clauses that may be included in your grade-level curricula materials.

Words, phrases, and clauses that function as adverbs are the most common type of introductory word groups used by writers. They usually tell when, where, how, why, or under what circumstances the action of the sentence occurs. The following examples include introductory word groups that function as adverbs as well as other parts of speech.

Introductory Words

Words such as adverbs or transitions are often used at the beginning of sentences to "link sentences and paragraphs together smoothly so there are no abrupt jumps or breaks between ideas" (ELAR TEKS Glossary, p. 28).

meanwhile, afterward, later, first, finally, generally, still, however, yet, next, furthermore, basically, yes, no, well, actually, eventually, now

Comma Usage with Introductory Word(s)

Set off the introductory word(s) with a comma to separate it from the rest of the sentence.

> Reporters from all of the area newspapers interviewed the basketball coach. *Meanwhile,* photographers took pictures of the team practicing on the court.

Introductory Phrases

A phrase is a group of related words that function as a single part of speech. A phrase does not have a subject and a verb.

Prepositional Phrases

A preposition is a word that shows the relationship between a noun or pronoun and another word in the sentence. A prepositional phrase begins with a preposition (e.g., *about, as, in, on, of, to, with*) and ends with a noun or pronoun (may include modifiers). Prepositional phrases can function as adjectives that modify a noun or pronoun, or they can function as adverbs that modify a verb, adjective, or other adverb.

An introductory phrase may include more than one prepositional phrase. Place the comma at the end of the entire introductory phrase and before the independent clause begins.

> *On our walk in the woods*, we saw a variety of birds.

Comma Usage with Introductory Prepositional Phrases

A comma is used after a prepositional phrase of four words or more.

> *After six hours on an airplane,* I couldn't wait to walk around and explore the village.

The use of a comma varies for shorter phrases. A comma may be used if it helps to clarify the intended meaning of the sentence.

> On the floor rugs of all sizes were on sale. (Meaning is unclear.)
>
> *On the floor,* rugs of all sizes were on sale. (Comma helps to clarify meaning.)

Never place a comma after a phrase that is immediately followed by a verb.

> Into the raging river plummeted the raft with its frightened occupants.

Comma Usage with Other Common Types of Introductory Phrases

Use a comma after an introductory participial phrase (verb ending with *-ing, -ed, -en* + object) that functions as an adjective or an adverb. A participial phrase may include a prepositional phrase.

> *Looking back on the experience*, I learned a valuable lesson about friendship.

Use a comma after an introductory infinitive phrase (*to* + present-tense verb + object) that modifies a noun or a verb. An infinitive phrase may include a prepositional phrase.

To trick its enemies, the opossum lies completely still and appears to be dead.

Introductory Clauses

A clause is a group of words that has a subject and a predicate. A complex sentence includes "an independent clause and at least one dependent clause" (ELAR TEKS Glossary).

An independent clause is "a group of words containing a subject and a verb that can stand alone as a complete sentence; also called a main clause" (ELAR TEKS Glossary).

However, a subordinate (or dependent) clause cannot stand alone because it does not express a complete thought (even though it contains a subject and verb). In a sentence, a subordinate clause may be used as an adverb, an adjective, or a noun. It modifies the "main or independent clause to which it is joined" (ELAR TEKS Glossary).

Comma Usage with Introductory Adverb Clauses

A comma is used in complex sentences after an introductory subordinate (or dependent) clause that functions as an adverb. Adverb clauses begin with subordinating conjunctions.

after, although, as, when, while, until, because, before, if, since

Since it was raining, my family cancelled our picnic in the park.

Note: Some words—such as after, before*, and* until*—can be used as both subordinating conjunctions and prepositions.*

Teaching Grammar in Context: Sentence Workspace

Use the space below to complete the sentence activities.

Imitate

Imitate the following sentence.

When our class visits the city aquarium, I am reminded of my childhood vacations at the beach.

When _____,

I am reminded of _____.

Collect

Write sentences below that you collected from the readings that include a comma after introductory words, phrases, and clauses.

Write/Revise

Select one of the three quick writes that you drafted. Revise your quick write by adding the targeted grammatical point to one of your sentences, or you may add a new sentence that begins with an introductory word, phrase, or clause.

Break Apart/Combine

Break apart the model sentence into three sentences.

When the weather was nice, the two women would drink their aunt's peach tea and sit in the garden having long, meandering conversations.

Break Apart/Combine

Combine the following sentences into one sentence.

Some people argue that pets are a waste of time and money.

Pets can actually alleviate stress.

Pets can increase the longevity of their owners.

The Whole Family Under One Roof?

Introduction

A Victorian family circa 1860 (Hulton Archive/Getty Images)

If you're like many Americans, you have just spent a few days in close quarters with your parents, grandchildren, siblings, etc. You're ready to go home, or ready for them to go home. But for a growing number of families in which adult children can't afford to live on their own, this is the new normal.

These "boomerang" children have been the butt of jokes on late-night television and even in commercials, but what's so bad about moving back in with your parents? Could extended families under one roof — a common arrangement in years past — be the way of the future?

The Only Faithful Human Institution

John L. Graham *is a professor of business at the University of California, Irvine. He is the co-author with Sharon Graham Niederhaus of "Together Again: A Creative Guide to Successful Multigenerational Living."*

December 27, 2011

I live on a cul-de-sac in Irvine, Calif., that includes eight 2,500-plus-square-foot homes. When we moved into the neighborhood 27 years ago, six of those homes included two baby-boom parents with children and two couples with empty nests. Now there are no longer children on our street, although adult kids are still living in two of the homes. In my house we now have three spare bedrooms — we keep the doors and the heating vent shut to conserve energy.

Houses like mine are a root of the current world financial crisis. In 2006, housing prices in the United States began to crash. That's about when our last daughter left for college. Our house, along with millions of others across the country, literally became worth less when the last kid moved out. The demand for big houses declined even while the new home builders were madly adding more square feet. Circa 2012 housing in the U.S. has lost about a third of its value, down from $25 trillion to $16 trillion by some estimates. This sharp decline in value of the American housing stock has catalyzed a worldwide restructuring of our economic systems. And just wait until 2020 when the full burden of baby-boomer retirement and decrepitude is recognized.

The cure for this demographic disaster is the pooling of resources across generations that we are already seeing in America. The idea of the nuclear family is now obviously obsolete. We are all reverting to the old reliance on the extended family that anthropologist Margaret Mead correctly described as the only faithful human institution. The government won't be there to help on this one. Boomerang kids are actually a blessing in disguise. They're allowing us to relearn how to live in multigenerational arrangements as humans almost always have. Yes, the lessons for balancing proximity and privacy are tough, but such learning is essential for all of us in the 21st century.

I'm Not Seeing a Boomerang

***Michael J. Rosenfeld**, an associate professor of sociology at Stanford University, is the author of "The Age of Independence: Interracial Unions, Same-Sex Unions and the Changing American Family."*

December 26, 2011

One of the stories parents like to tell ourselves is that our young adult children want to move back in with us. Our 20-somethings are referred to as the Boomerang Generation, noted for their failure to launch. There is just one problem with the story of the Boomerang Generation: It is not true.

Census data show that what is really new about young adulthood is the percentage of young adults who live on their own. From 1880 to 1970 the percentage of U.S. born women in their twenties who lived on their own (not with parents and not with a husband) was always less than 15 percent. By 1980, the percentage of young adult women who lived on their own had risen to 27 percent, and to 33 percent in 1990, to 39 percent in 2000, and to 42 percent today. The delay of marriage and the extension of singleness can make it appear as if young people are more likely to return to the parental nest. If one examines single people in their twenties, who are the people who have the option of living with their parents, the percentage who live with their parents is now about 45 percent. That may seem high but it isn't: in the past single people in their 20s nearly always lived with their parents.

The Great Recession has actually had no effect whatsoever on the percentage of young adults living with their parents in the United States. This is not so surprising; the (even greater) Great Depression did not affect family structure much, and neither did the Industrial Revolution. Family structure changes slowly over time. Economic ups and downs have little effect on who lives with whom.

A Sensible Use of Spare Rooms

Sharon Graham Niederhaus *is a co-author with John L. Graham of "Together Again: A Creative Guide to Successful Multigenerational Living."*

December 27, 2011

The direct consequence of the turn of the century residential building boom is that now, in 2012, there are a lot of spare rooms in all those houses. Indeed, the chances are the greatest in the last 50 years that an adult family member is now living in your spare bedroom.

Multigenerational living is ahead for all of us. Baby boomers will be living with their kids as they begin to experience the infirmities of old age. By 2020 they'll need help with their disabilities, and the most sensible helpers will be members of the extended family living close by. The practice now of living together as adults across generations will be a big help.

Boomerang kids and baby boomers are learning about the balancing act between proximity and privacy that will be required in the modern families of the remainder of this century. Both physical structures and financial arrangements are being developed to accommodate such changes. For example, approximately one-third of American homes can be remodeled to include an accessory apartment with a separate kitchen and entrance. The major home builders have finally begun to experiment with such designs as well. Cross-generational financial agreements are burgeoning including shared real estate investments and adult children moving back home while saving money to repay college loans (which are exempt from bankruptcy proceedings).

Extended family members are already creatively designing a new future in these tough times. Indeed, now is the time to get ready for the coming changes in the American family.

REFERENCE: Essay series printed with permission from *The New York Times*, 2011.

Discussion Board: Zooming in on Sentences

Discussion Prompt

Jeff Anderson, in his book *Everyday Editing: Inviting Students to Develop Skill and Craft in Writer's Workshop* (2007), sums up the power of using model sentences to teach written conventions in context:

> Sentences, after all, are chunks of meaning. This small chunk of context allows the students and me to focus. And if we put a spotlight on such a small chunk of meaning, like a sentence, it should be a well-written one, don't you think?
>
> Giving attention to effective sentences breaks down editing skills, giving teachers a basic approach that can be used to teach any editing concept or pattern—grammar, usage, mechanics, and craft. The secret is to let students delve into the sentence. The power comes from students telling you what they see, exactly what is potent, and answering the question: How did the author do that? (pp. 19–20).

Discussion Questions

- Do you agree with Anderson's argument that using model sentences is the most effective way to teach written conventions (i.e., grammar, usage, mechanics) in context?
- What are the major differences between this approach and exercises that focus on finding and correcting all errors?
- How do you teach written conventions in your classroom?

REFERENCE: Anderson, 2007.

General Guidelines for Drafting Essays

Note: These general guidelines apply to the writing of a variety of genres or text types. Specific elements or characteristics of expository essays, persuasive essays, and personal narratives are included as separate handouts. The guidelines are designed to help students become thoughtful and process-oriented, rather than product-oriented, readers and writers. They are not meant as a strict sequence for writing an essay. Writing is a recursive process, and a student may choose to write the body of the essay before writing the introduction or may even start by writing the conclusion.

Beginning of the Essay: Drafting the Introduction

The introduction is the author's chance to grab the reader's attention, show why ideas are worth considering, and give a brief overview of the subject/topic/argument. There are, of course, many ways to write an introduction, and some types are better suited than others for certain essays.

Sometimes, introductions are not as effective as they need to be. Students' essays will get off to a good start when they include the following:

- A "hook" to get the reader's attention
- Background information the audience may need about the topic
- A thesis statement—a central or controlling idea

Begin with a concise, yet intriguing, first sentence.

Remember, the introduction is just an introduction—not the entire essay. Start with something interesting rather than just summarizing the essay.

Be specific.

Being too general can affect the overall quality of the essay. If you generalize, the development of ideas will be weak or minimal. A good essay presents specific and well-chosen ideas and examples that substantially support the main points and the argument/position.

Don't restate the prompt or question.

For most prompts and assignments with specified topics, the reader more than likely knows what the prompt is. Restating it only takes up space and can be interpreted as a lack of creativity.

Avoid using clichés.

Clichés are overused expressions that often are considered boring and uncreative, and may even result in the reader not wanting to read the rest of the essay.

Stay away from dictionary definitions to introduce the topic.

Using a dictionary definition is often a sign that the author is having difficulty beginning the essay. The dictionary also may not be considered an appropriate source for some topics.

Avoid extraneous information on the subject.

Throwing in irrelevant information signals that the author is just filling up the required number of paragraphs or page(s).

Don't drive the reader away.

The introduction should make the reader want to read the rest of the essay. For instance, although beginning an essay with, "This essay is about. . ." may appear straightforward and to the point, it falls short of motivating anyone to read on. Wordiness and simple grammar errors can also leave a poor first impression.

Revisit the introduction after drafting the entire essay.

Have students reread the introduction. As writers develop their ideas and craft essays or texts, their understanding of the topic may have changed. Teach students to make adjustments to the first paragraph and/or thesis, if necessary.

Middle of the Essay: Drafting the Body

In the body of the essay, authors develop ideas that are focused on the topic and the thesis or central/controlling idea. Teach students to fully develop and sustain this focus throughout the essay. Usually, there is no set number of paragraphs that authors need to write.

Here are some tips for writing clear and concise paragraphs and using meaningful transitions and strong sentence-to-sentence connections.

Vary the length of the paragraphs.

A general suggestion for the length of a paragraph is roughly three to five sentences. There is not, though, a set number of sentences. Often for a paragraph to be well developed, it needs more than five sentences; sometimes a one-sentence paragraph is appropriate.

Teach students to consider the white space on the page when writing. Try to break down the thoughts as much as possible. A series of long paragraphs can be intimidating to readers and can make it more

difficult for them to process the argument. Vary the length of paragraphs to make the essay more reader-friendly. Balance the paragraphs according to the length of the essay.

Focus and develop one idea in each paragraph.

A well-written paragraph becomes its own independent "chunk" of writing. Teach students to introduce a thought with an opening sentence, develop it throughout the paragraph, and then wrap it all up in a concluding sentence.

Vary sentence length within the paragraphs.

Avoid entire paragraphs of choppy, simple sentences or lengthy, rambling, complex sentences filled with commas and conjunctions. Teach students to intersperse long and short sentences in their writing. The result will make reading the essay more interesting.

Use meaningful transitions and strong sentence-to-sentence connections.

Meaningful transitions help to establish logical connections between ideas, sentences, and paragraphs in the essay. Meaningful transitions and strong sentence-to-sentence connections enhance the flow of the essay by clearly showing the relationships among the ideas. Transitions also help the reader understand those relationships. A transition can be a single word, a phrase, a sentence, or a paragraph.

Although transitions are not a substitute for good organization, they can make the organization clearer and easier to follow. Transitions help to bind the essay into a unified, coherent, well-developed whole. Transitions help readers connect with what has come before in a sentence, paragraph, or section and help readers anticipate and better comprehend what they will be reading next.

Examples of Different Types of Transitional Words and Phrases

Transitions that mean "to add"	*and, furthermore, in addition to*
Transitions that mean "to compare"	*also, likewise, as well*
Transitions that mean "to contrast"	*but, however, alternatively*
Transitions that mean "to prove"	*consequently, thus, therefore*
Transitions that mean "to show relationships in time"	*first, second, third, finally, then*
Transitions that mean "to give an example"	*for example, for instance*
Transitions that mean "to summarize, conclude"	*finally, in conclusion*

End of the Essay: Drafting the Conclusion

Good conclusions can be tricky to write. They are designed to provide closure and also function as a review of anything that needs reviewing. Conclusions need to accomplish these tasks without being boring, redundant, or off topic. A concluding paragraph supports the thesis or central/controlling idea.

Sometimes, conclusions are not as effective as they need to be. The following list of tips can help your students write a strong conclusion and leave a lasting final impression with the reader/audience.

Don't stretch to fit the page requirement.

Stretching the conclusion until you meet the page limit results in irrelevant fluff that only weakens the essay. If the essay is not long enough, go back and further develop the content by elaborating on the main points. Always add to and strengthen the evidence or idea development rather than simply extending the conclusion.

Avoid adding new information and leaving loose ends.

Teach students not to introduce new information in the conclusion. They will have little time for adequate development and can leave the audience hanging. It's usually best not to bring up something at the end that hasn't been previously discussed or even mentioned. Instead, take the thesis or central/controlling idea a step further (i.e., discuss its implications, reemphasize the significance and relevance of your topic/position/argument).

Don't repeat the thesis or central/controlling idea.

Because the reader has already read the thesis or central/controlling idea statement, it doesn't need to be repeated verbatim. The conclusion should state the thesis in a new way or further develop it. Teach students that they can sum up the important points they made throughout the essay, but for short essays this usually is unnecessary. Students should ask themselves: *Will readers be able to remember what I've said, or do I need to remind them?*

Avoid resorting to clichés.

The conclusion should be memorable. Adding clichés (i.e., old metaphors and tired phrasing such as "In conclusion") often accomplishes just the opposite effect. Clichés typically make the essay sound unoriginal. As a result, a reader may discount what the author has to say. Instead, use vivid images and colorful language that will leave an impression on the readers. Because these are the last words the audience will read, make them count.

REFERENCE: Virgil Undergraduate Writing Center, 2001–2005.

Expository Essay Elements

ELAR TEKS Glossary Definition

Expository essay: a type of informational text that clarifies or explains something

Elements

An expository essay is a multiparagraph essay that conveys information about a topic. The number of paragraphs is not predetermined. The essay includes a beginning, a middle, and an end. The writer explains, describes, and informs the reader about a topic using facts, details, and examples in a clear and concise way.

1. Clear, concise, and defined thesis statement

The thesis is typically stated in the first paragraph of the expository essay. To narrow the focus or topic, writers need to determine which aspect of a topic they will write about. For example, if the topic is music, the writer needs to ask, "What kind of music?" Then, the writer asks, "What do I want my readers to know about that kind of music?"

Common approaches for developing a thesis or controlling idea statement include the following:

- **Make a connection.** Compare your topic/subject with something else that you've learned or studied in class or that you know a lot about. Consider making a connection that the reader might not normally make.
- **Refute an accepted idea.** Try to present new evidence or interpret existing evidence in a new way.
- **Find something new.** Look at a topic/subject from a new perspective. Think of an aspect that's been overlooked.
- **Define.** Offer a definition of a key term that will get readers to see a controversial issue in a new way.
- **Evaluate.** Make an assessment about something's quality or utility.
- **Argue cause and effect.** Explain how something happened or will happen because of something that was done.
- **Propose a change.** Suggest that something needs to be done that has never been tried before.

2. Specific supporting details

Supporting details are included to support the thesis and to help explain the topic. These details are specific; add substance to the essay; and are presented in a logical, organized way. Writers may use their own unique experiences or view of the world as the basis for writing or to connect their ideas in interesting ways.

Details are often brainstormed before the author begins to write. These supporting details help the writer to determine the main points or ideas in the essay that support the thesis and which organizational structure would best suit the topic.

Types of supporting details include the following:

- Examples
- Facts/statistics
- Reasons
- Causes/effects
- Incidents
- Definitions
- Comparisons/contrasts
- Definitions
- Steps in a process

Supporting details are often then grouped into categories based on commonalities. The groupings or categories typically become the main points or ideas that the writer will fully explain in the essay.

Each paragraph should be limited to the explanation of one general idea. This ensures clarity throughout the essay.

Keep the content focused on the thesis. Include paragraphs (no set number) that have topic sentences directly related to the thesis, as well as details that present the following:

- Main ideas that develop or support the thesis statement
- Evidence from the text (embedded quotations) to support these ideas, including examples, illustrations, statistics, and so forth.
- Analysis of the evidence and central ideas in which you integrate your own ideas, values, beliefs, and assumptions

The type of evidential support (whether factual, logical, statistical, or anecdotal) varies. Because students are often required to write expository essays with little or no preparation, the essays typically may not have a great deal of statistical or factual evidence.

Writers should include enough details to fully explain each piece of information. Writers should also try to "show and not tell." They should not assume that the reader has prior knowledge or understanding of the topic of their essays. Writers should try to use words that clearly explain and describe in detail what they are talking about rather just stating their ideas. They should leave no question that their readers might ask unanswered.

Writers should keep their writing interesting and not focus only on "the formulaic nature" of expository writing. Their goal should be to leave their readers with a better understanding and lasting impression of their topic.

There should be no inconsistencies or extraneous information. The details should support the main points or ideas to fully explain the thesis statement.

3. Clearly organized structure

Expository essays need an organizing structure that logically presents the main ideas and supporting details related to the thesis statement. Writers should select the structure that is best suited to a thoughtful and engaging explanation of their topic.

Common expository organizational patterns include the following:

- Description: The writer describes a topic by listing characteristics, features, and examples.
- Sequence: The writer lists items or events in numerical or chronological order.
- Comparison/contrast: The writer explains how two or more things are alike and/or how they are different.
- Cause and effect: The writer lists one or more causes and the resulting effect or effects.
- Problem and solution: The writer states a problem and lists one or more solutions for the problem. A variation of this pattern is the question-and-answer format, in which the author poses a question and then answers it.
- Proposition and support: The writer first asserts an idea or opinion and then provides information to support the idea or opinion.

The writer also uses meaningful transitions and strong sentence-to-sentence connections to enhance the logical movement of the essay and clearly show the relationships among ideas, making the writer's train of thought easy to follow.

4. Strong introduction

Expository essays need an introduction that grabs the reader's attention. The introduction should show why your ideas are worth considering and provide a brief overview of your topic.

Common ways to introduce expository essays include the following:

- **Solve a problem.** Problem solving will almost always grab your reader's attention, especially in an academic context. It is also a good way to set up your thesis statement, which will then help the reader better understand it. This type of introduction can also set up your conclusion by allowing you to return to the same problem and show how the things you've said in your essay solve the problem or could still need further inquiry.
- **Start with an anecdote, a quotation, a question, or an interesting fact.** This form of introduction often will appeal to a reader's emotions. Interesting anecdotes, quotations,

questions, and facts can quickly interest readers and make them want to read more. Try to think of an interesting/shocking/weird fact about your topic.

- **Acknowledge what others have said on the subject.** For some topics, the amount of literature available can be overwhelming. If you are writing on a popular topic, it's best to acknowledge in your introduction that much has been written on the subject. Your introduction needs to convey why your essay is important and how it is different from all the other literature that already exists on the subject.
- **Point out an irony or a paradox.** Paradoxes are logic puzzles, seemingly contradictory statements. They're great to use in introductions as a way to get the reader's attention.
- **Use an analogy.** If your topic is a bit obscure or abstract, try connecting it to something more familiar to your reader.
- **Jump into the content.** This strategy is good for audiences who don't like to read anything they don't have to. Sometimes it can be more dramatic to just start with your thesis.

5. Strong conclusion

The conclusion should not simply restate the thesis, but rather readdress it based on the evidence provided. Because this is the part of the essay that will leave the most immediate impression on the reader, it should be effective and logical.

Do not introduce any new information into the conclusion; rather, synthesize and resolve the information already presented in the body of the essay.

Writers use many types of conclusions. Below is a list of ideas for how you can bring closure to your essay. You can incorporate more than one of these types into a conclusion.

Common types of conclusions:

- Summary: Sums up all of your main points. This is the most basic and popular type of conclusion, but be careful not to repeat your thesis.
- Link to beginning: A nice companion for an introduction that features anecdotes, quotes, problem solving, and so forth. Tying the ending to your beginning gives readers a satisfying sense of closure. You might refer back to a certain image or phrase in your introduction. Keep in mind that this method works better in some essays than in others. In other words, if you try too hard to connect your conclusion to your introduction, it may come off as contrived and artificial.
- Larger context: Good for obscure and abstract topics where the details may have caused the readers to lose sight of the main point. This type of conclusion reminds your readers of the big picture, which means that you're answering the following questions: Why does my topic matter? What are the consequences of what I'm suggesting or proposing?
- Call to action: Common approach for proposal essays that ask your readers to respond to your position/argument with a specific action.

6. Purposeful and precise word choice

The writer's word choice in an expository essay should be accurate, concise, clear, and concrete. Effective word choice reflects a keen awareness of the expository purpose and maintains a tone appropriate to the purpose and audience. Writers often focus on word choice to improve their first drafts.

Examples of how word choice can improve writing include the following:

- Replacing overused words with stronger, more powerful ones
    - Action verbs
    - Adjectives
    - Adverbs
- Inserting phrases and sensory details that describe, explain, or provide additional detail and connections

7. Varied sentence structure

Sentences are the building blocks of writing. The ways sentences are constructed affect the fluency or the flow of the writing. Expository essays are enhanced when the writer uses purposeful sentences that are varied in both length and structure.

Examples of how writers can vary sentences to improve their writing include the following:

- Using a variety of sentence patterns: simple, compound, and complex
    - Combining short sentences with prepositional phrases, appositive phrases, or participial phrases
    - Combining short sentences by linking items of equal importance with a coordinating conjunction
    - Combining short sentences containing ideas that are of unequal importance with a subordinating conjunction
- Varying sentence beginnings by starting sentences in different ways
    - With an adverb
    - With a phrase (i.e., prepositional, participial, or infinitive)
    - With an introductory clause
- Breaking up long, rambling sentences (often run-on sentences) into two or three shorter sentences

Expository Essay Elements Mini-chart

- Clear, concise, and defined thesis statement
- Clearly organized structure
- Strong introduction
- Specific supporting details
- Strong conclusion
- Purposeful and precise word choice
- Varied sentence structure

Analyzing Expository Essays Tool

Note: The questions below are useful when teaching students to read mentor texts like a writer. As the essay is analyzed, help students notice how the author crafts the different elements and how these elements might be used in their own writing.

TITLE:

Expository Elements	Analysis and Responses
Clear, concise, and defined thesis statement	
What is the author's main thesis or central/controlling idea?	
Which approach (make a connection, refute an accepted idea, find something new, define, evaluate, propose a change) did the author use in building this thesis? Elaborate.	
Is this approach effective? If so, what makes it effective? If not, why not?	

Expository Elements	Analysis and Responses
Strong introduction	
What type of introduction does the author use?	
Is the author's introduction effective? If so, what makes it effective? If not, what would improve it?	
Specific supporting details	
Do all of the body paragraphs have a logical connection to the thesis? Is each one limited to the explanation of one general idea?	
List some of the supporting details and explain whether they are effective in supporting the author's thesis. If so, what makes them effective? If not, what would improve them?	

Expository Elements	Analysis and Responses
Clearly organized structure	
Is the essay well organized? Describe the type of organizational pattern that the author uses.	
Are the transitions effective in forming connections among ideas and sections of the essay? If so, what makes them effective? If not, what could improve them?	
Strong conclusion	
What type of conclusion does the author use?	
Is the author's conclusion effective? If so, what makes it effective? If not, what would improve it?	

Expository Elements	Analysis and Responses
Purposeful and precise word choice	
Is the author's word choice effective? If so, what makes it effective? If not, what would improve it?	
Varied sentence structure	
What types of sentences does the author use?	
Is the author's use of sentences effective? If so, what makes them effective? If not, what would improve them?	
Author's style or craft	
Which aspects of the author's writing style do you plan to incorporate in your next essay?	

Model Lesson: Analyzing Expository Essays Tool

Note: The questions below are useful when teaching students to read mentor texts like a writer. As the essay is analyzed, help students notice how the author crafts the different elements and how these elements might be used in their own writing.

TITLE: Solidarity and Support

Expository Elements	Analysis and Responses
Clear, concise, and defined thesis statement	
What is the author's main thesis or central/controlling idea?	Newman's overall thesis seems to both observe a trend and argue that the trend is positive: "That stigmatized view [of adult children living at home] has faded fast during the recession."
Which approach (make a connection, refute an accepted idea, find something new, define, evaluate, propose a change) did the author use in building this thesis? Elaborate.	Newman reveals her plan to refute an accepted idea in the second paragraph when she chooses her side in the debate. She writes: "Sure, there are potential complications and emotional minefields left over from the parenting years, but once the kinks are sorted out, the benefits for young and old are clear." So, in a sense, she is dismissing what some people expect to come out of living under one roof ("complications and emotional minefields") and arguing that, in reality, "the benefits for young and old are clear."
Is this approach effective? If so, what makes it effective? If not, why not?	I do think this approach is effective. The author takes a topic that many people feel anxiety about and gives reasons for hope.

Expository Elements	Analysis and Responses
Strong introduction	
What type of introduction does the author use?	The author jumps into the content by immediately introducing the recent shift in U.S. living arrangements.
Is the author's introduction effective? If so, what makes it effective? If not, what would improve it?	I like the way the introduction puts the topic in its historical context. I do think, however, that more specifics might have made it even stronger. The author also could have hooked the reader with an anecdote, possibly outlining one family's circumstances.
Specific supporting details	
Do all of the body paragraphs have a logical connection to the thesis? Is each one limited to the explanation of one general idea?	Yes. The author uses each paragraph to approach a different element of the larger topic of multigenerational living.
List some of the supporting details and explain whether they are effective in supporting the author's thesis. If so, what makes them effective? If not, what would improve them?	The author uses specifics as evidence to back up her points. In the second paragraph, she says, "Family of origin has become a lifeboat for roughly one in five 25- to 34-year-olds who move in with parents to wait out the economic storm." And later in the essay, she discusses the average student loan debt. These facts and figures make her argument more convincing.

Expository Elements	Analysis and Responses
Clearly organized structure	
Is the essay well organized? Describe the type of organizational pattern that the author uses.	It is well organized. Each paragraph tackles a specific issue. In the third paragraph, for example, the author directly addresses critiques of her argument. In the fourth, she explores the financial effects of the topic. In the fifth, she presents her conclusion, summing up her argument and projecting into the future.
Are the transitions effective in forming connections among ideas and sections of the essay? If so, what makes them effective? If not, what could improve them?	While the author's organization makes the essay fairly easy to read, she doesn't rely on many transition words or phrases. Her essay's readability might be improved if she inserted more transition language between her various points.
Strong conclusion	
What type of conclusion does the author use?	She concludes with a summary and the larger context.
Is the author's conclusion effective? If so, what makes it effective? If not, what would improve it?	The conclusion is effective at summing up her argument and projecting it into the future when the author writes that "living under the same roof for the long or short haul will remain a configuration that defines American families in the foreseeable future."

Expository Elements	Analysis and Responses
Purposeful and precise word choice	
Is the author's word choice effective? If so, what makes it effective? If not, what would improve it?	The author uses strong and powerful words to explain why she thinks multigenerational living arrangements are beneficial. She uses words such as *stigmatized*, *lifeboat*, *economic storm*, *camaraderie*, *bunking in*, *renewed values*, and *configuration*. These words are effective because they help convince the reader that her position has merit.
Varied sentence structure	
What types of sentences does the author use?	The author uses a majority of complex sentence structures. The sentences are rather long and rambling. She does not vary the length.
Is the author's use of sentences effective? If so, what makes them effective? If not, what would improve them?	The author's use of sentences is not that effective. Their complex structure and her overuse of dependent phrases and clauses make it difficult to read and understand. She needs to simplify the structure and provide both long and short sentences.
Author's style or craft	
Which aspects of the author's writing style do you plan to incorporate in your next essay?	I plan on incorporating the use of specific evidence into my work. I also liked how the author used counterarguments to directly address critiques of her argument.

Activity: Analyzing Expository Essays Tool

Note: The questions below are useful when teaching students to read mentor texts like a writer. As the essay is analyzed, help students notice how the author crafts the different elements and how these elements might be used in their own writing.

TITLE:

Expository Elements	Analysis and Responses
Clear, concise, and defined thesis statement	
What is the author's main thesis or central/controlling idea?	
Which approach (make a connection, refute an accepted idea, find something new, define, evaluate, propose a change) did the author use in building this thesis? Elaborate.	
Is this approach effective? If so, what makes it effective? If not, why not?	

Expository Elements	Analysis and Responses
Strong introduction	
What type of introduction does the author use?	
Is the author's introduction effective? If so, what makes it effective? If not, what would improve it?	
Specific supporting details	
Do all of the body paragraphs have a logical connection to the thesis? Is each one limited to the explanation of one general idea?	
List some of the supporting details and explain whether they are effective in supporting the author's thesis. If so, what makes them effective? If not, what would improve them?	

Expository Elements	Analysis and Responses
Clearly organized structure	
Is the essay well organized? Describe the type of organizational pattern that the author uses.	
Are the transitions effective in forming connections among ideas and sections of the essay? If so, what makes them effective? If not, what could improve them?	
Strong conclusion	
What type of conclusion does the author use?	
Is the author's conclusion effective? If so, what makes it effective? If not, what would improve it?	

Expository Elements	Analysis and Responses
Purposeful and precise word choice	
Is the author's word choice effective? If so, what makes it effective? If not, what would improve it?	
Varied sentence structure	
What types of sentences does the author use?	
Is the author's use of sentences effective? If so, what makes them effective? If not, what would improve them?	
Author's style or craft	
Which aspects of the author's writing style do you plan to incorporate in your next essay?	

General Prewriting Guidelines for Essays

Note: These general guidelines apply to the writing of a variety of genres or text types. The guidelines are designed to help students become thoughtful and process-oriented, rather than product-oriented, readers and writers. They are not meant as a strict sequence for prewriting. Writing is a recursive process, and a student may choose to develop the thesis or central/ controlling idea after generating and organizing ideas related to the topic.

Read and Understand the Prompt or Assignment

Prompts or writing assignments are often jam-packed with text. This can make it difficult to locate the key information that tells students what they need to know about the topic.

Suggestions for teaching students to read and understand writing prompts or assignments include the following:

- **Read** through the entire prompt or assignment.
- Then **reread** the prompt, sentence by sentence.
- **Circle words or phrases that are not recognized and understood**. Think about how the words are being used. Try to figure out what the words mean in relation to the words surrounding them. Use a dictionary or thesaurus to determine and/or confirm word meanings.
- **Lightly section off information about writing logistics** (length/page requirements, grading criteria, formatting guidelines, due dates, etc.). This leaves the information directly related to the essay's specified topic and purpose. While the logistical information is important, it can overwhelm and camouflage what the essay is supposed to be about.
- **Underline or highlight any sentences that are either questions or commands**. Look for key words, such as *argue, compare, cover, discuss*, or *list*. For example: "*Discuss* three examples of pollutants, *compare* and *contrast* them, and *argue* which is the worst." These key words also help to establish the purpose of an essay. Optional: Write the questions and imperatives at the top of the page.
- **Identify whether the topic is specified**, or if students have a choice about what will be written about. If it is specified, do your students have a clear understanding of what the topic is?
- **Determine the purpose of the assignment or prompt.** Teach students to use the key words to help them: Is it to explain or prove? Think about how the purpose affects the type of writing your students will do. Teach students to narrow the topic based on the purpose for writing.
- **Look for any information about the audience.** Teach students to ask themselves if there is any information in the prompt or assignment about the audience for whom they

will be writing. Teach them to think about what most people know about the topic.

- **Determine the type of essay required.** Teach students to try to imagine what kind of essay they'll be writing based on the prompt or assignment. Have criteria been established for how the writing will be evaluated? Is a rubric included? Teach students to think about similar types of writing that they have done and to ask questions when they are not sure of the task.

Sample Key Words

Key Word	Description
Analyze	• Break the issue or problem into separate parts. Discuss, examine, or interpret the parts and how they are related. • Look at the validity and persuasiveness of any reasons/supporting facts/ evidence given for a position. Determine if the conclusion is justified on the basis of these claims.
Compare and Contrast	Describe similarities and differences between two or more objects, situations, or ideas. May need to look at a before-and-after comparison.
Define	Tell or explain what a particular word or term means in the essay. Go beyond a dictionary definition to clarify the way in which the term or phrase is being used.
Describe	Give a detailed account, naming characteristics, parts, or qualities.
Discuss	Include explanations, reasoning, pro and con arguments, examples, analysis, and so forth.
Evaluate	Determine the value of something to discover how good or bad it is. May involve arguing that something is good or bad and explaining the logic of the reasoning. Is based on relevant evidence.
Explain	Help the reader understand the reasoning behind a position by showing logical development. May need to demonstrate how something works or how to do something step by step (procedural).
Illustrate	Give examples (not draw pictures) to clarify and elaborate ideas.
Prove	Support opinions with logical arguments and evidence, including facts, expert opinions, quotations, and/or expressions of commonly accepted beliefs.
State	Tell the reader opinions and/or facts in a convincing and concise way.

REFERENCE: Adapted from The California State University Expository Reading and Writing Course, 2008.

Develop the Thesis Statement or Central/Controlling Idea

Note: Specific guidelines for expository essays, persuasive essays, and personal narratives are included in separate handouts.

Tips for developing a clear and concise thesis or central/controlling idea include the following:

- **Get to the point.** Teach students to answer the question "What are you going to write about and why is it important?" Often, the answer to this question becomes the thesis!
- **Be sure of yourself.** Teach students to write like they believe it. Why should the reader believe a thesis or central/controlling idea if students don't sound like they believe it? Teach students to avoid words and phrases like *I think*, *I believe*, *might*, *maybe*, and *possibly*.
- **Don't believe the one-sentence myth.** Teach students that a thesis or central/controlling idea can be more than one sentence long. The thesis statement should be as concise as possible, but sometimes it may take more than one sentence to state the purpose and main focus/point of the essay.
- **Don't be afraid of change.** Teach students that if, while writing the essay, they realize they have lost focus and are writing about something different than what the thesis or central/controlling idea says—and they think the new idea is better than what was originally planned—to go with it and revise the thesis or central/controlling idea!
- **Clearly address the topic or prompt.** Questions to ask include the following:
    - **So what?** Does the thesis or central/controlling idea teach the readers something new or does it challenge an idea they have? Why is it significant? Does it compel the reader to think differently or take action? How much background information do the readers need to understand the topic and the thesis? Why should the reader care about the topic/subject?
    - **What are its implications?** What will have to change if the thesis or central/controlling idea is true? Will people have to think differently, take action, and/or change a policy? Does the essay present a new or different perspective? Teach students to ask themselves if they can support the thesis or controlling idea with evidence.
    - **Is it original?** Nothing is more boring to readers than something they've already heard before. Although the author may believe passionately in something and want to present the argument or position in a certain way, he or she should try to offer something different than what most readers have already heard.
    - **Is it focused enough?** Focus on a sufficiently narrow aspect of the subject area. Topics that are too broad or large need to be limited or narrowed so that the writer has a manageable topic to develop.

Generate and Organize Ideas Related to the Topic

After the topic or subject is identified and/or the thesis is developed, teach students to think about the main points and supporting ideas related to the topic. A variety of idea-generation strategies are typically taught and used to help students come up with these points and ideas. These strategies are designed to help students brainstorm as many related facts, examples, reasons, incidents, comparisons, contrasts, and causes/effects that they can think of before they begin to write their essays.

Typical brainstorming strategies include the following:

- **Free association.** As the most commonly used brainstorming technique, free association is useful for generating topic ideas and developing supporting arguments. This method can help students conceptualize a lot of different thoughts and ideas about their topic. The steps in this strategy include the following:
  - **Write the topic or thesis sentence** on the top of a piece of paper.
  - **Circle the key words.**
  - **List anything that relates to that topic.** Think of related terms from class and from readings. Include ideas that are related to the general topic.
  - **Examine the list**. Are any of your ideas similar or related? Divide these ideas into separate groups, or connect them with lines.
  - **Weigh relevance.** There may be ideas that don't relate to the topic. If these ideas seem to have potential but don't have enough evidentiary support, forget about including them for now. Teach students that they can always come back to them later, if need be.
- **Webbing/Clustering.** Mapping ideas that come to mind about a topic is another popular brainstorming strategy. The strategy typically involves these steps:
  - **Write a key word or phrase** in the center of a page with a circle drawn around it.
  - **Write related ideas** around the circle. Draw lines to signify which ideas should be classified together. Identify subtopics to the main topic during this process.
  - **Add supporting details** that branch off the subtopics.

  By grouping ideas together in this fashion, students automatically begin to order and decide what they want to say and, often, how they want to say it. Once students have recognized how the ideas are clustered or structured in the web or map, they can focus their energy on drafting and explaining the branches or links between the main ideas/points.
- **Informal outlining.** This strategy involves listing main ideas and the details related to the topic in the order in which they will be addressed. If ideas are randomly listed during a free-association brainstorming activity, they can be numbered to show the proposed progression and development of ideas within the essay.

REFERENCE: Virgil Undergraduate Writing Center, 2001–2005.

Model Lesson: Reading and Understanding Prompts

First, I am going to carefully read the entire prompt from "The Whole Family Under One Roof?"

Read aloud the entire prompt.

"If you're like many Americans, you have just spent a few days in close quarters with your parents, grandchildren, siblings, etc. You're ready to go home, or ready for them to go home. But for a growing number of families in which adult children can't afford to live on their own, this is the new normal.

"These 'boomerang' children have been the butt of jokes on late-night television and even in commercials, but what's so bad about moving back in with your parents? Could extended families under one roof—a common arrangement in years past—be the way of the future?"

Now, I am going to reread the prompt one sentence at a time.

Reread the first sentence.

The first sentence reads: "If you're like many Americans, you have just spent a few days in close quarters with your parents, grandchildren, siblings, etc."

Think aloud.

I think this is just an introductory generalization. It states that many Americans have just spent a few days during the holidays with family members/relatives who don't live with them. I am going to circle the words *close quarters*. I think the word *quarters* refers to a place where people live, such as a house or apartment. The author describes the quarters as being close. I wonder if this means close together? Maybe it means that the place seems small when so many people are inside. This makes sense! I think that I need to read the next sentence to get more information to understand why this is important.

Reread the second sentence.

The second sentence states: "You're ready to go home, or ready for them to go home."

Think aloud.

This sentence is easy to understand and seems to be related to the first sentence. I am not sure if either sentence contains key information about the topic. I do think these two sentences are saying that spending time in close quarters with relatives is something that most Americans can only tolerate for a brief period of time.

Reread the third sentence.

"But for a growing number of families in which adult children can't afford to live on their own, this is the new normal. "

Think aloud.

I think this sentence presents another view of families sharing close quarters. Although I am not sure what the two words *new normal* mean. I am going to circle these two words. I am going to try and figure out what these words mean in relation to the first two sentences. I do know what *new* means and what *normal* means. I think that the "old" mindset described in the first two sentences about families coming together and sharing close quarters must be changing. It appears that in today's society, families who have adult children who can't afford to live on their own are becoming more common and accepted (the new normal). Maybe the topic of the essay is children living with their parents. I need to keep reading to be sure.

Reread the fourth sentence.

"These 'boomerang' children have been the butt of jokes on late-night television and even in commercials, but what's so bad about moving back in with your parents?"

Think aloud.

First, I am going to highlight this question. But I don't see any key words that give me clues to the purpose of the essay. This may not be the question I am supposed to answer in my essay. I am confused by the term *boomerang* as it is used to describe children. I know that a boomerang is a weapon from Australia that is curved or designed to return to the person who throws it. But why would you describe children as boomerangs? Oh, I think I understand now. It probably means that some children who have left home are coming back home to live.

The first part of the question is stating that society is making fun of this new trend. The second part of the question seems to be asking me to consider why it would be so bad to move back in with your parents. I wonder if that is what I am supposed to write about. That would be an interesting topic. I need to read the last sentence before I will know for sure.

Reread the last sentence.

"Could extended families under one roof—a common arrangement in years past—be the way of the future?"

Think aloud.

I will highlight this sentence, too. I think the first part of the sentence is summing up the main topic discussed in the first paragraph. It mentions extended families under one roof. I am going to circle the words *extended families* because I am not sure what *extended* means in this context. I know that when something is extended it becomes longer. I am going to look *extended* up in the dictionary.

Here it is: *Extended* also means "to make larger." So, an extended family would be a family that is made larger when children or other relatives move in.

The sentence also says that extended families were common in the past. It must have been a long time ago, because I only know of two of my classmates who have their older siblings or grandparents living with them. I think this part of the sentence, *a common arrangement in years past*, is suggesting that extended families may once again become a widespread and common occurrence in today's society.

I am also going to circle *the way of the future*. But I think that this is just another way to say that extended families will become the "new normal."

I am certain that this last question specifies the topic of the essay. I can also determine that the purpose of the essay is to explain my position on the topic of whether extended families living under one roof will or will not become a widespread and common living arrangement in our future society.

I didn't see any writing logistics or key words in either of the paragraphs. The audience is not specified either.

REFERENCE: Prompt adapted from *The New York Times*, 2011.

Writing an Introductory Paragraph for an Expository Essay

Prompt

Read the following:

> If you're like many Americans, you have just spent a few days in close quarters with your parents, grandchildren, siblings, etc. You're ready to go home, or ready for them to go home. But for a growing number of families in which adult children can't afford to live on their own, this is the new normal.
>
> These "boomerang" children have been the butt of jokes on late-night television and even in commercials, but what's so bad about moving back in with your parents?

Think carefully about the following question: Could extended families under one roof—a common arrangement in years past—be the way of the future?

Write (the introductory paragraph of) an essay explaining whether extended families living under one roof will become a common arrangement for most Americans or remain a temporary solution for only a few.

Be sure to

- clearly state your controlling idea;
- organize and develop your explanation effectively;
- choose your words carefully for the purpose and audience; and
- use correct spelling, capitalization, punctuation, grammar, and sentences.

REFERENCE: Prompt adapted from *The New York Times*, 2011.

Introductory Paragraph

(You may also write on the back of this handout.)

General Guidelines for Revising and Editing Essays

Note: These general guidelines apply to the writing of a variety of genres or text types. The guidelines are designed to help students become thoughtful and process-oriented, rather than product-oriented, readers and writers. They are not meant as a strict sequence for revising and editing an essay.

Revision

Revision is the process of working with the organization and development of ideas (content) to make sure an essay is as effective as possible. Revision serves to clarify ideas, strengthen the organizing structure, and improve overall coherence.

Revision works best based on systematic feedback from others, including peers. As a result of this type of conferring, essays become more "reader based" because the author takes into consideration the needs of the reader as readers review and respond to each other's writing.

Peer Conferencing

Working with their peers fosters your students' metacognition of the writing process as they collaborate together to improve their writing. All students benefit from sharing their work during the writing process. To be most effective, peer conferencing needs to be an established part of your routine for class writing assignments.

For your students to use this process effectively, they need explicit instruction in peer-conferencing procedures and reviewer etiquette (i.e., how to respond to one another's writing). They need to learn what to focus on when working together and conferring about their essays, rather than only editing for spelling and/or grammatical errors. High school students need to be held accountable for their performance as both a writer and a reader (peer reviewer) of essays.

Teacher modeling of the peer conferencing process using a sample (teacher-written) essay displayed for the entire class helps students to learn the procedures and appropriate responses and questions to ask as they meet to review each other's essays.

Note: See the Peer-Conferencing Tool for specific questions that can guide students as they confer with one another when writing different text types.

Reverse Outlining Strategy

Before students meet with their peers to confer, it is often helpful for them to reread their essays and focus on the content. The reverse outlining strategy is one strategy that helps students focus on the development and progression of their ideas. It helps them determine if these ideas are clearly related and focused on their topic. The strategy includes the following steps:

1. Sit down and read over the essay one paragraph at a time.

2. Write a sentence in the margin that summarizes the point that you've made in each paragraph.
3. Now look at each summary sentence and ask yourself if it's relevant to your thesis and strengthens your argument. This is a good way to see if there are any unnecessary tangents (development is off topic).
4. In the end, you should have a good idea about what you've said in your essay and where you have said it.

Rubrics

Rubrics provide specific writing criteria for evaluating products and performance, as well as guidelines for students as they draft their own writing and work with peers to confer about their essays.

Well-designed rubrics are task specific and are used throughout the writing process. That is, they help students as they prewrite, draft, revise, and edit writing assignments.

Teacher and/or class-made rubrics need to be created for and incorporated in curricular-based writing assignments. Because this type of rubric is class and assignment specific, it reflects specific writing prompts, purposes, and criteria for your students to emulate.

When students use rubrics, they have the tools they need to become metacognitive writers who engage in a reflective, recursive process as they work—on their own and with their peers—to draft, revise, and edit their writing.

Editing

Editing helps to improve word choice, spelling, capitalization, punctuation, usage, sentence construction/boundaries, and grammatical errors. These conventions are important because they guide the reader through the text and help make the writer's ideas readable and understandable.

Editing essays typically occurs after the revision process of the content. Utilizing an editing Mini-chart (list of specific areas to review/check), students can self-edit their own essay and then confer with their peers. An example of an editing Mini-chart that involves both self and peer editing can be found at **http://www.readwritethink.org/classroom-resources/printouts/editing-Mini-chart-self-peer-30232.html**.

Self editing encourages students to evaluate specific features of their own writing, increasing their self-awareness of writing conventions.

The peer-editing step heightens the awareness of various print and grammatical conventions for the reader (peer editor) and the author.

Sample editing routines include the fishbowl and monitoring techniques.

Fishbowl Self and Peer Editing

Use a fishbowl technique to allow the class to view a self- and a peer-editing session. Give students each a copy of a sample essay (i.e., one you have written).

Have one student model the self-editing phase using an editing Mini-chart that is displayed for the class to see (i.e., via a document reader or overhead projector). It is helpful to select a student who has a good understanding of the conventions on the editing Mini-chart. This student works through the items as the other students observe.

After the self-editing demonstration phase is complete, discuss the process with the students.

Next, choose another student to serve as the reader (peer editor) for the essay that was just self edited. Have the two students sit in the middle of the class so that all students can see and hear them as they work through this collaborative phase of the editing process.

Discuss the process itself and how this type of editing can help both the author and reader (peer editor) improve their writing.

Monitoring Peer Editing

Assess students' progress in the peer-editing process by creating a simple Mini-chart. List all students' names down the first column and include a row for dates across the top.

Then, as you observe students while they are peer editing their essays, you can rate their level of effectiveness as editors and document their participation and involvement in the peer-editing process.

REFERENCE: Self- and peer-editing and monitoring techniques adapted from ReadWriteThink.org.

Peer-Conferencing Tool for Expository Essays

Name of Writer: Date:

Name of Reviewer: Date:

Directions to the Reviewer

Read the draft. Make suggestions for improvement. Be specific. Consider the questions listed below. Jot down notes for your conference with the writer. Be prepared to share your responses.

What is the writer's purpose? Is it clear?

Is the topic too large to cover in this essay? If so, how can the writer narrow the topic and clearly define and sustain the thesis?

Does the introduction make me want to read the rest of the essay? If not, why?

Are the ideas presented logically and easy to follow? Is the organizational pattern clear? If so, what is it?

Are there places the author can strengthen sentences to connect ideas at the sentence and paragraph levels? Does the author effectively use transitions or need to add more?

Do you wish the author had included more information in some places? If so, where?

Does the writer use interesting, specific supporting details that add substance to the essay? What types of details (i.e., facts, reasons, examples, comparisons) are used to provide evidential support?

Does the author show, rather than tell, to explain the topic? If so, where?

Are there parts that could be left out (extraneous information)? If so, where?

Are there places where the writer could have used more purposeful and precise language? If so, what words do you suggest?

Are there any parts you found confusing? If so, what parts?

Does the conclusion bring closure to the essay? Does the writer leave you with a lasting impression?

Does the essay include a variety of sentence types?

What do you like best about the expository essay? Why?

What could the writer do to most improve this essay?

Are there spelling and grammatical errors?

Persuasive Essay Elements

ELAR TEKS Glossary Definition

Persuasive essay: text written with the intent to persuade or convince the reader of something

Elements

A persuasive essay is a multiparagraph essay designed to influence the attitudes or actions of a specific audience on specific issues. The number of paragraphs is not predetermined. The essay includes a beginning, a middle, and an end.

The purpose of a persuasive essay is to persuade readers to adopt the writer's point of view on an issue and/or agree with a suggested course of action. To accomplish this purpose, writers need to develop a logical and reasonable argument that supports their opinions.

Writers establish a position and include detailed and relevant evidence that is logically organized to support their viewpoint. They differentiate between fact and opinion, consider and respond to the views of others, and anticipate and answer reader concerns and counterarguments. A well-written persuasive essay is based on sound reasoning, detailed and relevant evidence, and a thorough consideration of alternatives.

1. Clear, concise, and defined thesis

In the first paragraph of a persuasive essay, writers should present the thesis. In a persuasive essay, the thesis statement presents the writer's position on a topic/issue.

The thesis statement should clearly and directly state a supportable position—one that people could have differing opinions on—related to the topic/issue that is open for debate. The thesis can include a recommendation for action.

The thesis needs to be narrow in focus. To present an effective argument, the thesis must be supported by evidence. If the thesis is too broad, the writer will typically need more evidence to convince readers of his or her position.

Writers need to think about how they want to approach a topic/issue—what type of position or claim they will take in their essay. This is one way to narrow the focus of a thesis from a broader topic/issue. Writers need to consider their position and knowledge on the topic, their audience, and the context of the essay.

Even if writers begin with one type of claim, they can also use several other types to develop their argument within the persuasive essay.

Persuasive essays can include the following types of claims:

- Fact or definition: things that have already happened, are happening now, or will happen in the future and reasons for such occurrences

- Cause and effect: one person, thing, or event causing another thing or event to occur
- Value: morality of an issue or what something is worth, or a call for a judgment to be made (e.g., right/wrong, good/bad)
- Solution or policy: an advocating for or against a plan of action to be taken

2. Strong introduction

Persuasive essays should include an introduction that captures the audience's attention and presents the debatable topic/issue. The introduction clearly establishes the writer's position on the topic/issue in a thesis statement.

The importance of the topic/issue is clearly conveyed to the audience. Background information related to the topic/issue may be presented. A strong introduction entices the audience to read on and consider the writer's opinion.

Writers may begin their persuasive essays with a startling fact or a probing question. Effective introductions often include sincere and straightforward language, rather than strong or emotional words that may offend some readers.

3. Well-developed argument with strong evidential support

After writers define their position in a thesis statement, they are ready to develop the argument that will defend their thesis.

First, writers should consider their audience. Questions to consider include the following:

- What does the audience already know about the topic/issue?
- What is the audience's point of view about this topic/issue? Do they already agree or disagree with my position?
- What are the chances of changing the opinions and actions of the audience?
- Are there any sensitive issues I should be aware of?

Next, writers develop their argument using specific reasons and evidence to help convince their audience. Writers must create a logical argument by fitting the facts together so that they lead to a reasonable conclusion.

The reasons and evidence the writer uses to support his or her position should be specific and well chosen. The writer may choose to recognize the complexities of the issue, use his or her unique experiences or view of the world as a basis for writing, and/or connect ideas in interesting ways.

Each paragraph should present one of the strong reasons that support the writer's position and logically connect the reason to the thesis statement (presented in the opening paragraph).

In addition to supporting the writer's own opinion, the persuasive essay should also consider and explain differing points of view (counterarguments) regarding the topic/issue. Writers should point

out why opposing opinions do not align with their positions (thesis) and, if possible, expose faulty reasoning. The writer is trying to prove, through the use of factual information, why his or her opinion is better.

Because the reasons must be supported with evidence, it is also important to explain how and why the evidence supports the thesis. Writers should make sure that each supporting reason or fact can be verified either through their own experience or from a reliable source. Writers may include evidence that is factual, logical, statistical, or anecdotal.

Examples of different types of evidence include the following:

- Facts that can be proven
- Expert opinions or quotations
- Definitions that state the meaning of a word or phrase
- Statistics that offer scientific support
- Examples that provide powerful illustrations to support facts
- Anecdotes or incidents that are often based on the writer's personal experiences
- Emotional appeals that are carefully chosen to provide support for reasons (can have positive or negative connotations to sway the audience's emotions)
- Counterarguments that give reasons and evidence to disprove the opposing position(s)
- A call to action that urges the audience to do something

4. Clearly organized structure

The organizing structure of the essay should clearly present the writer's position and ensure that all ideas (pro and con) are strongly related to the position and the topic/issue. By sustaining this focus throughout the persuasive essay, the writer is able to create an argument that is unified and coherent.

The writer's progression of ideas should be logical and well controlled. The most common type of organization used in persuasive essays is order of importance. Writers begin with the least important point or reason and build up to the most important point or reason that supports their position. As a result, the audience is more likely to remember the most convincing and important point that the writer has made in the essay.

Meaningful transitions and strong sentence-to-sentence connections enhance the flow of a persuasive essay by clearly showing the audience the relationships among ideas, making the writer's argument easy to follow. Transitions that are often used in persuasive writing include *although, admittedly, however, still, on the other hand, instead, while it is true that, nevertheless,* and *nonetheless*.

5. Strong conclusion

A strong conclusion does not simply restate the thesis, but rather readdresses it in light of the evidence provided. The conclusion should be logically drawn from the arguments. Writers should not introduce any new information into the conclusion. Instead, they should synthesize the information presented in the body of the essay—restate why the topic is important, review the main points, and/or review the thesis. If writers want to persuade their audience to take some action, they can also make a recommendation in the final paragraphs.

6. Purposeful and precise word choice

The writer's word choice in a persuasive essay should be reasonable and forceful, but also objective. Writers should avoid the use of words that show bias or highly charged emotions. Effective word choice reflects a keen awareness of the persuasive purpose and maintains a tone appropriate to the purpose and audience. Writers often focus on refining their word choice to improve their first drafts.

Examples of how word choice can refine and improve writing include the following:

- Replacing overused words with stronger, more powerful ones
    - Action verbs
    - Adjectives
    - Adverbs
- Inserting phrases and sensory details that describe, explain, or provide additional detail and connections

7. Varied sentence structure

Sentences are the building blocks of writing. The ways sentences are constructed affect the fluency or the flow of the writing. Expository essays are enhanced when the writer uses purposeful sentences that are varied in both length and structure.

Examples of how writers can vary sentences to improve their writing include the following:

- Using a variety of sentence patterns: simple, compound, and complex
    - Combining short sentences with prepositional phrases, appositive phrases, or participial phrases
    - Combining short sentences by linking items of equal importance with a coordinating conjunction
    - Combining short sentences containing ideas that are of unequal importance with a subordinating conjunction

- Varying sentence beginnings by starting sentences in different ways
    - With an adverb
    - With a phrase (i.e., prepositional, participial, or infinitive)
    - With an introductory clause
- Breaking up long, rambling sentences (often run-on sentences) into two or three shorter sentences

Persuasive Essay Elements Mini-chart

- Clear, concise, and defined thesis
- Clearly organized structure
- Strong introduction
- Well-developed argument with strong evidential support
- Strong conclusion
- Purposeful and precise word choice
- Varied sentence structure

Developing a Narrow, Clearly Defined Focus for Personal Narratives: Three Prewriting Graphic Organizers

Brainstorming Chart for Personal Narratives

List ideas based on your own experiences.

Special Places, Trips, or Vacations	**Trials and Tribulations**	**First Time/Day**
Triumphs/Proud Moments	**Friendships**	**Family Traditions**
Growing Up	**Mistakes**	**Other Ideas**

Narrowing the Focus of an Idea

Brainstorming Idea. *Select one brainstorming idea that is really important to you.*

List and Choose. *List specific things that you remember about this experience. Then read over your ideas. Pick one memory and place a check mark in the box before it.*

❑

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Developing the Central Idea of a Personal Narrative

Narrowed Focus/Topic. *Copy your singular, significant event/experience here.*

Important Details. *Visualize what happened. List several important details, focusing on what happened and on your feelings, thoughts, and impressions.*

Significance. *What is the significance (importance) of this event/experience, or what was its effect on you then and/or now?*

Central Idea. *Write the central idea of your personal narrative. The central idea should include the singular, significant event and why it's important or meaningful to you.*

Model Lesson: Prewriting Graphic Organizers for Personal Narratives

Brainstorming Ideas for Personal Narratives

Today we will begin writing a personal narrative. A personal narrative is a true story that really happened to the writer. It is about events and experiences in the writer's life that really matter and are important to him or her.

To help you think of some possible personal narrative topics, let's brainstorm ideas using the Brainstorming Chart for Personal Narratives.

Distribute copies of the chart. Display one on the overhead or data projector.

The categories on the chart can help us recall experiences from our past. First, I will read each category on the chart. Then, I can start adding my ideas related to some of the categories.

Read the categories.

I have an idea for a personal narrative about family traditions. Every holiday season, my family and our neighbors would go look at holiday lights. Everyone would squeeze into the van for our annual drive. I'll add this idea, "look at holiday lights," under the "Family Traditions" category.

Have one or two students share ideas about their own family traditions. Tell them they can add the ideas to their charts.

I also have an idea about a class trip to the museum. I think I'll add this idea under the category, "Special Places, Trips, or Vacations." I'll write "class trip to museum" on my chart.

Does anyone else have an idea for this category?

Ask one or two students to share their ideas. Continue to model and think aloud to brainstorm a few more ideas, and then add them to your chart.

Now it is time for you to brainstorm and come up with some ideas for your chart. Write as many ideas as you can, but you don't have to include an idea for every category.

After approximately 5 minutes, have students share with a partner one or two of the ideas on their charts.

Narrowing the Focus of an Idea

Now you have some great ideas or topics for personal narratives. Let's take a closer look at the elements of a well-written personal narrative. Personal narratives should have a narrow focus or topic, rather than a large one. When you write a personal narrative, it is important to narrow your topic or focus before you begin writing.

To make sure that your topic isn't too large or broad, you need to think about the experience and exactly what happened. Let's use the Narrowing the Focus of an Idea graphic organizer to help us

narrow the focus of one of our ideas.

Distribute copies of the graphic organizer. Display one on the overhead or data projector.

I am going to model first how this graphic organizer can help me find a narrower focus for one of the brainstorming ideas on my chart. I will select one brainstorming idea that is really important and that matters to me. I am going to write "class trip to museum" on my chart.

Now I will list specific things that I remember about this experience.

Model narrowing the topic using the graphic organizer. Narrow the topic by listing "long bus ride to city," "lots of exhibits," "picnic lunch at the park," "IMAX movie," and "the snake on the bus."

Now I have some single events that happened on our class trip to the museum. I need to select which narrowed focus topic I will write about. I think I'll write about the snake on the bus. I will place a check mark in the little box in front of "the snake on the bus."

Now it's your turn to select one of your ideas that you want to write about. Look over the ideas on your chart. Select one that really matters to you and is important.

Allow 5 minutes.

Tell your neighbor which idea you choose to write about.

Write the idea you choose on your graphic organizer. Now you are ready to narrow your focus. List specific things that you remember about your experience. When you are finished, select the one that you want to write about. Place a check mark in the little box in front of it.

Allow time for students to complete their graphic organizer. Have several students share their narrow focus/topic.

Developing the Central Idea of a Personal Narrative

Narrowing the focus is important, but before you start writing, you also need to develop the central idea of your personal narrative. Let's use the Developing the Central Idea of a Personal Narrative graphic organizer to help us determine the central idea.

Distribute copies of the graphic organizer. Display one on the overhead or data projector.

First, I will copy my narrowed focus/topic on the chart: the snake on the bus. To develop a central idea, I need to visualize or picture in my mind exactly what happened. I will list these important details on the chart as I remember them.

List on the chart: First-year teacher; Out-of-town class field trip to the museum; Halfway home with an hour more to go; Several girls start screaming; Snake is somewhere on the bus; Eric had caught a grass snake at the picnic in the park; Snake had escaped from his backpack; Everyone had to get off the bus; Searched for 45 minutes; Found it "hiding" inside a paper bag under my seat.

Now I need to consider the significance or importance of this event/experience and think about its effect on me then and now. Well, I will never forget this experience because it was both scary

and funny. It also taught me a valuable lesson. I learned that, as a teacher, I should never assume anything and should always be prepared for the unexpected. I should always clarify expectations, including what qualifies as a souvenir!

Using this information, I know precisely what my personal narrative is going to be about. I will write the central idea on my chart.

Write: "Be prepared for the unexpected and clarify expectations on out-of-town field trips."

Let me check. Does my central idea include the singular, significant event I chose to write about? Yes, I am writing about finding a snake on the bus (the unexpected) coming home from an out-of-town field trip. Does my central idea include why it's important or meaningful to me? Yes, it states that I learned to be prepared for the unexpected and clarify expectations.

Now it's your turn to develop the central idea for your personal narrative. First, copy your narrowed focus/topic on the chart.

Pause and monitor as students copy their narrowed focus/topic on the chart.

Now try to visualize what happened that day. List on the chart several important details that you remember.

Monitor and provide support as students list details about what happened. Allow 5 minutes.

Before you write your central idea, think about the following questions listed on your chart: What is the significance (importance) of this event/experience, or what was its effect on you then and/or now? Then, discuss these questions with your partner/neighbor.

Allow 2 minutes.

Now, on your chart, write the significance or importance of this event/experience or its effect on you then or now.

Monitor and provide support.

You are ready to develop the central idea of your personal narrative. On your chart, write the central idea. Try to include the singular, significant event that you will be writing about and why it's important or meaningful to you.

Monitor and provide support. Have several students read their central ideas.

Personal Narrative Elements

ELAR TEKS Glossary Definition

Personal narrative: an expressive literary piece written in first person that centers on a particular event in the author's life and may contain vivid description as well as personal commentary and observations

Elements

Personal narratives are based on real-life (true) personal experiences that have significant meaning for the writer. The experience may have resulted in the writer gaining insight or learning a lesson. The writer narrates or tells a story to describe the personal experience. It is written in the first person ("I") point of view.

1. Narrow, clearly defined focus

Personal narratives have a narrow, clearly defined focus. The writer focuses on a central idea (theme or message) based on a singular, significant event and why it's important or meaningful to him or her. This focus is sustained throughout the essay.

The central idea is the point of a personal essay. It is similar to the thesis or controlling idea in expository or persuasive essays, but it may not always be conveyed in one specific place like a thesis. The author may convey the central idea in several places within the essay.

The central idea communicates to the reader a sense of the experience and its significance (meaning, insight, or lesson learned).

Visualization and scaffolds, such as sentence stems, can help writers clarify the significance of a particular event or experience to their lives.

For example, writers may do the following:

- Visualize the events or the experience they will be writing about. They imagine themselves once again in that experience and focus on their feelings, thoughts, and impressions.
- Think about why the experience was important to them
    - This is important to me now because it . . .
    - I will always remember this experience because it . . .
    - This experience is worth writing about because it . . .

2. Character descriptions

Personal narratives include character descriptions for the people involved in the writer's personal experience. The characters are developed through interesting details that describe each character's

appearance, actions, and words. The writer may visualize each character or person in the story and then describe how the character looks, acts, and sounds.

3. Dialogue

Incorporating some dialogue in a personal narrative makes the characters and the description of the personal experience come alive for the reader. Dialogue moves the narrative along and often reveals something about the characters. Dialogue should sound natural and not be overused.

When writing dialogue within an essay, the character's words are enclosed inside quotation marks. Quotation marks are used to signal a direct quotation and are written using the following conventions:

- Opening quotation marks are placed before the first word a character speaks. Closing quotation marks are placed after the last word that a character speaks (even if there are several sentences spoken).
- The writer begins a new paragraph each time the speaker changes or a different character speaks.
- Each sentence of a direct quotation begins with a capital letter.
- A comma is used to separate a direct quotation from a speaker tag, such as "he said." The comma is placed inside the closing quotation marks.
- In addition to commas, periods are placed inside closing quotation marks. All other punctuation (exclamation marks, question marks) are placed outside closing quotation marks. The one exception to this rule is that when a punctuation mark is part of a quote itself, it is placed within the closing quotation marks (for example, "What is the answer to the first question?" the teacher asked the class.).

4. Setting description

Personal narratives also include a description of the setting (where and when the event or experience happened).

The setting needs to be vividly described, using sensory details to bring the experience to life.

The writer visualizes the place/time that is being described. For example, the writer determines which details of the setting are most important in conveying the personal experience and its significance or meaning. What does he/she smell, see, hear, taste, or feel?

5. Strong introduction

Personal narratives include a beginning, a middle, and an end. The beginning of a narrative includes an introduction. The following parts are typically included in an introduction of a narrative:

- **Theme.** In the introduction, the writer may choose to tell what the essay is about (states the central idea, theme, or message). The author also may provide a clue as to how he or

she feels about the experience.

- **Hook.** The introduction also includes a hook to get the reader interested and motivated to read more. Writers can use a variety of different ways to introduce their personal narratives and hook their readers, including foreshadowing (a hint of something to come), action, dialogue, character description, or setting description.

The introduction usually sets the tone or reveals the writer's attitude toward the experience being described in the essay. To establish the tone of the essay, the writer thinks about the effect he or she wants the essay to have on the audience (e.g., to laugh, cry, or share the pleasure of a special time or place). The introduction also establishes why the essay is worth reading.

6. Interesting details

Personal narratives include interesting, specific details that add substance and contribute to the writer's portrayal of the experience. Interesting details, which appeal to the senses and specifically describe what is happening instead of merely telling the facts or listing the actions, draw readers into the story. These details provide the reader with a clear understanding of why an experience is meaningful and help the reader to visualize the experience. The readers may vicariously experience the feelings of the characters (and the narrator) and even feel like they are there. As a result, readers are able to connect with the writer's personal experience and reactions to it.

Writers develop the details or events describing the personal experience most effectively when they use a "show, don't tell" approach. How do writers show rather than tell what is happening? They elaborate and add concrete and specific description, action, and dialogue as they re-create scenes from their experience. This type of writing results in readers being able to clearly picture or visualize what is happening (the scene).

For readers to understand the real import of what they're being shown, it's imperative that writers reflect on what they were thinking or feeling at the time. They should provide plausible motivations for their behavior or actions and also reveal any changes or insights that developed as a result of their experience.

7. Logical sequence

In personal narratives, the writer uses organizational strategies and/or literary devices (story elements) to communicate the importance or meaning of the personal experience.

The organizational structure supports the focus or central idea (message, theme). The writer presents the events that happened in a logical sequence or meaningful order.

Because personal narratives are written to tell about a singular significant event that occurs within a certain time, the most common organization is chronological order.

The organization is often similar to the plot line of a story. The story/narrative typically includes an introduction, a plot, characters, a setting, a climax, and a conclusion. The narrative builds to a climax or the resolution of a problem (usually resulting in personal growth for the author).

Some authors may organize their personal narrative by developing a sequence of events. However, writers should not just list events and then conclude the essay with a lesson learned or an explanation of how the story related to the author's life. To ensure that readers have a clear understanding of why an experience was and is meaningful, the changes, insights, and/or lessons learned should be evident throughout the essay.

The writer should also use meaningful transitions and strong sentence-to-sentence connections to enhance the logical movement of the narrative and reinforce the link between the experience and its meaning. Transitional words and phrases show the relationship of ideas and events. Transitions help connect events so the writing smoothly moves the reader along through the story.

8. Strong conclusion

Personal narratives require a strong conclusion. The conclusion should leave readers with a lasting impression of the personal experience and insight (new or deeper understanding of the experience) that the author has written about.

The conclusion should also give readers a sense of closure and completion.

Conclusions can include a strong action, feeling, or image that shows the author's personal growth and/or emphasizes the importance of the event.

9. Purposeful and precise word choice

The writer's word choice in a personal narrative should be accurate, concise, clear, and concrete. Effective word choice enables the writer to re-create the personal experience in a way that conveys its importance or meaning. Writers often focus on word choice to improve their first drafts.

Examples of how word choice can improve writing include the following:

- Replacing overused words with stronger, more powerful ones
    - Action verbs
    - Adjectives
    - Adverbs
- Inserting phrases and figurative language (e.g., similes, metaphors) that describe, explain, or provide additional detail and connections

10. Varied sentence structure

Sentences are the building blocks of writing. The ways sentences are constructed affect the fluency or the flow of the writing. Personal narrative essays are enhanced when the writer uses purposeful sentences that are varied in both length and structure.

Examples of how writers can vary sentences to improve their writing include the following:

- Using a variety of sentence patterns: simple, compound, and complex

    - Combining short sentences with prepositional phrases, appositive phrases, or participial phrases
    - Combining short sentences by linking items of equal importance with a coordinating conjunction
    - Combining short sentences containing ideas that are of unequal importance with a subordinating conjunction
- Varying sentence beginnings by starting sentences in different ways
    - With an adverb
    - With a phrase (i.e., prepositional, participial, or infinitive)
    - With an introductory clause
- Breaking up long, rambling sentences (often run-on sentences) into two or three shorter sentences

Personal Narrative Elements Mini-chart

- Narrow, clearly defined focus
- Logical sequence (does not need to be chronological)
- Strong introduction
- Interesting details
- Character descriptions
- Dialogue
- Setting description
- Strong conclusion
- Purposeful and precise word choice
- Varied sentence structure

Identifying Personal Narrative Elements Using Mentor Texts

Personal Narrative Elements	Tights and Camo By Brock Clarke

I grew up in a small mill town just south of the Adirondack Mountains, and although I live in Maine now, for many years I lived in places where it didn't really snow, and I would look forward to my trip home for the holidays, when I would go cross-country skiing with my dad. "Look forward" is a bit misleading; "pay obsessive attention to the snow report while ignoring everything else" might be more accurate.

Central idea: Skiing helps the author maintain peace in his relationship with family member.

The main reason for my snow obsession had something to do with the end of the world; never mind about that. The other reason is that I missed my father, and when you miss your parents, the more you try to express it, the more likely you are to get into an argument with them — but it's nearly impossible to get into an argument with your father while you're both cross-country skiing.

I didn't go skiing with my dad last year — he was sick (he's better now, thank you) — and so my wife agreed to go with me in his place, mostly because I begged her. This was Christmas Eve. We were in the deep woods, in deep snow; it was beautiful, and perfectly quiet and empty — until, that is, we heard the baying of dogs and gunshots. A few seconds later, we saw a guy walking toward us. He was wearing camo and holding a gun.

When I see a guy walking toward me holding a gun, I want to turn and run, or turn and ski. But in this case my masculine pride prevented me from doing so, although my masculine pride had not prevented me from wearing ski tights and a hat with a fuzzy ball on top. Anyway, the guy got to within a few feet of us, and before he or I could say anything, my wife blurted out, "You get any deer?"

My wife grew up in New Jersey and doesn't exactly keep tabs on the length of the deer-hunting season in upstate New York, so she had no idea that she'd inadvertently accused this stranger with a gun of being a poacher, which he might well have been. Which was why I then said, loudly and idiotically, "Ha, ha, of course he's not hunting deer!" And then, rather than ask him what he was hunting (if it wasn't deer, it had to be rabbits, unless it was humans), I said, "Cold, isn't it?" — again, idiotically, because it wasn't all that cold and because his camo pants were certainly insulated and for that matter so were my tights.

"Naw," the guy said. "It was 10 below in Speculator last week." Then he eyed

me, over his beard (his beard was red and covered every bit of his lower face until just an inch under the eyes), and asked, "You know where Speculator is?"

I did know where Speculator was — an hour north of where we were standing. I'd been there many a time. And so I said, "I know exactly where Speculator is!" This must have sounded as suspect to him as it sounds to me now, because he said, "Well, you ever been to Bungtown?"

I had not been to Bungtown. I had never even heard of a place in upstate New York with that name. But I was too busy establishing that even though he had a gun and I was wearing tights, I had been to just as many really cold places as he had. So I said, "Yeah, yeah, I've been to Bungtown."

"It's cold there, isn't it?" the guy said, grinning now.

"Sure is," I said. "*Really* cold."

He and I had a good laugh over how cold it is in Bungtown, and then he said his goodbyes and strode away. I watched him go, feeling pretty good about the whole exchange, watched him until he turned into the woods and disappeared. I imagined him finding his dogs, who had found the animal he shot before running into my wife and me. I imagined him putting his dogs and the dead animal into his truck and then driving home. And then I imagined him telling his family about getting this guy in the woods to say he'd been to a place that doesn't exist called Bungtown. I imagined my wife telling the same thing to my family when we got home, and all of them having a big laugh at my expense, and me having a good sense of humor about it and then not and getting ticked off and eventually getting into an argument about something else, anything else.

Strong conclusion: The conclusion leaves readers with a lasting impression of the significance of the experience: Skiing helps the author maintain peace in his relationship with family member.

I turned to face my wife, to begin the inevitable process. But she was already 100 yards away, skis kicking, poles poling. "That's exactly what my dad would have done, too," I thought, and then set off after her, putting as much distance as I could between us and whatever we might have argued about had we not been skiing.

REFERENCE: Reprinted with permission from *The New York Times*, 2011.

Discussion Board: Are You Hiding Behind a Curtain?

Discussion Prompt

In *Write Like This: Teaching Real-World Writing Through Modeling & Mentor Texts*, Kelly Gallagher states that many reading, language arts, and writing teachers are like the Wizard of Oz. What does this mean?

He explains that, like the Wizard, many teachers hide behind a curtain. Before class, they do all the hard work as they prepare for their writing lessons. Although these teachers may save valuable class time when they model using their already written and beautifully polished and sometimes perfect examples, they conceal the difficult steps or strategies that good writers use. As a result, their students see only the product, not the process.

When these teachers do come out from behind the curtain and stand in front of their students, they often convey the idea that writing is an effortless task. The truth about what good writers do to construct meaning has not been clearly demonstrated. So, students get the false impression that writing should be easy. They end up frustrated when they realize that they are unable to emulate the same type of "perfect" writing that their teachers have modeled for them.

Discussion Questions

1. Why is it important for us to come out from behind the curtain and demonstrate/model the difficult steps and processes (the confusion, the messiness, the stopping and starting, the hesitation) that we go through as we try to write?
2. Would you describe yourself as a "Wizard of Oz" writing teacher? Give reasons to support your answer.
3. What are the challenges of using impromptu writing to model writing?

REFERENCE: Gallagher, 2011.

Model Lesson: Drafting Personal Narratives: A Strong Introduction

Section 1

We have been learning about personal narratives. Turn to your partner and discuss: What is a personal narrative?

Allow 1 minute. Ask students to respond to the question. (Answer: A personal narrative is a true story that really happened to the writer. It is about events and experiences in the writer's life that really matter and are important to him or her.)

We have brainstormed ideas, narrowed the topic or focus, and written the central idea for a personal narrative. Now, it is time to start writing our own personal narratives.

Personal narratives include a beginning, a middle, and an end. The beginning of a narrative includes a strong introduction. Today, we will learn how to write an interesting and strong introduction.

Now, let's look at the important parts that we need to include in our introductions. Yesterday, we completed the Developing the Central Idea of a Personal Narrative graphic organizer. Find your graphic organizer.

Pause while students locate the organizer.

This organizer helped us to develop a central idea by visualizing or picturing in our minds exactly what happened during this experience. Remember, the central idea tells the reader what the essay is about (states the central idea, theme, or message). It may also provide a clue as to how you, the author, feel about the experience.

Do you remember the central idea of my personal narrative about the snake on the bus during a class field trip? My central idea is "Be prepared for the unexpected and clarify expectations on out-of-town field trips."

The introduction of our personal narrative needs to include the central idea that you wrote on the graphic organizer. You will *not* include all of the details listed on the graphic organizer. These details will help you sequence and develop the body paragraphs in the middle part of your personal narrative. Write "body" next to the list of details.

Pause.

Section 2

The introduction usually will set the tone or reveal the writer's attitude toward the experience being described in the essay. To establish the tone of the essay, the writer thinks about the effect he or she wants the essay to have on the audience (e.g., to laugh, cry, or share the pleasure of a special time or place).

For example, the tone of my essay about the snake on the bus will be light and humorous. I want my readers to laugh as they read about my experience.

Now, think about the central idea of your personal narrative. What effect do you want your personal narrative to have on the audience or reader? Turn and talk with your neighbor.

Pause for several minutes. Have two or three students share their ideas for establishing the tone of their essay.

Section 3

A strong introduction also needs a hook to get the reader interested and motivated to read more. Let's look at some of the ways that other authors have started their narratives and tried to hook their readers' interest.

Distribute copies of the following examples, or display on the overhead or data projector. Have volunteers take turns reading the examples.

Foreshadowing (a hint of something to come)

It was the time of year Farmer Bailey liked best, when summer turned to fall. He whistled as he drove along. A cool breeze blew across his face through the truck's open window. Then it happened. There was a loud thump.

(*The Stranger* by Chris Van Allsburg, p. 274)

Action

A storm was approaching, but Peter crawled through the strange little hole in the fence anyway.

(*Time Traveler*, p. 189)

Dialogue

"Bet you can't jump over that rille, Runt," Vern challenged. Gary Kandel hated it when his brother called him Runt. "Watch me, Runt," Vern taunted. "I'll show you how to do it."

(*Moonwalk* by Ben Bova, p. 614)

Character Description

Reba Jo loved to twang her guitar and sing while the prairie wind whistled through the thirsty sagebrush.

(*The Horned Prince* by Jackie Mims Hopkins, p. 94)

Setting Description

> As they entered the camp, the longest shadows Marven had ever seen stretched across the snow, and he realized with a start that the shadows were the lumberjacks walking in the moonlight. He could smell hay and manure and saw silhouettes of horses stomping in a snowy corral.
>
> (*Marven of the Great North Woods* by Kathryn Lasky, p. 218)

[Note: You may use these examples or select specific examples from your grade-level anthology.]

Look back over the list of ways to hook an audience (readers). Think about which one you would like to try when you begin writing your introduction. Turn and discuss which hook you want to use in your personal narrative.

Pause for several minutes. Have two or three students share their ideas for including a hook in their introduction.

Section 4

Now, it is time to begin drafting an introduction for our personal narratives. I will show you how to establish tone and incorporate a hook as I draft the introduction for my personal narrative about the snake on the bus. I think that I will begin with some dialogue and foreshadowing to hook my readers.

> "Help, Ms. Smith! There's a snake on the bus!" These are words that no first-year teacher wants to hear. But, I did.

I think I would want to read more. Don't you? I have given them a hint of what is to come. I also used dialogue to tell exactly what was said when one of my students discovered the snake. Now, I am going to include the central idea of my essay in the other sentences.

> There was no doubt that my first out-of-town field trip was about to teach me a valuable lesson: Be prepared for the unexpected and clarify expectations on out-of-town field trips. It's too bad that my college professors had not covered these important principles before I landed my first job in the classroom.

I have added more information about the experience and included my central idea. Let me read the entire introduction:

> "Help, Ms. Smith! There's a snake on the bus!" These are words that no first-year teacher wants to hear. But, I did. There was no doubt that my first out-of-town field trip was about to teach me a valuable lesson: Be prepared for the unexpected and clarify expectations on out-of-town field trips. It's too bad that my college professors had not covered these important principles before I landed my first job in the classroom.

Now, it's your turn. Write the introduction for your personal narrative. Your introduction should include the central idea that you developed yesterday. It should also set the tone by determining the effect you want the essay to have on your readers (laughter, sadness, etc.). And, finally, your introduction should include a hook to interest readers and motivate them to read more.

Monitor and provide support as students write their introductions. Refer students to the Personal Narrative Elements handout and the section on a strong introduction.

Now, read your introduction to yourself.

Pause.

Read your introduction to your neighbor.

Allow 2 minutes.

REFERENCE: Portland Public Schools.

Personal Narrative Essay Draft 1

Teaching Conventions in Context: Using Sentence Models

Dialogue (Use of Quotation Marks)

Write the model sentence:

Model and Think Aloud	Record (Responses and/or Examples)

Notice
• Ask, "What do you notice?"
• Ask (repeatedly, as needed), "What else?"
• Nudge students in the right direction to focus on the dialogue and use of quotation marks. For example, ask the following:
  • "What works in the text?"
  • "Where is the good writing?"
  • "What is the effect?"
  • "What is the punctuation doing?"
  • "What changes if we remove it?"
  • "What changes if we use something else?"	

Model and Think Aloud	Record (Responses and/or Examples)
Imitate Look closely at the model sentence. Deconstruct the sentence, identifying its prominent features, including the dialogue and use of quotation marks. Provide a sentence pattern or frame as a visual scaffold (especially for struggling writers and ELLs). • Model your own imitation (use dialogue and quotation marks in your own sentence) and connect back to the prominent features. • Show students how to insert their ideas and experiences and still imitate the dialogue as they write their own sentences.	
Share • Share the imitation sentences sparked by the model. • Listen, clap, praise, but, most of all, be sincere: Create a positive environment that lets students know you value what they have to say.	
Write/Revise Revise or add a sentence that includes dialogue in the introduction you have already written.	

Strong Action Verbs

Write the model sentence:

Model and Think Aloud	Record (Responses and/or Examples)

Notice
• Ask, "What do you notice?"
• Ask (repeatedly, as needed), "What else?"
• Nudge students in the right direction to focus on the strong action verbs. For example, ask the following:
  • "What works in the text?"
  • "Where is the good writing?"
  • "What is the effect?"
  • "What is the punctuation doing?"
  • "What changes if we remove it?"
  • "What changes if we use something else?"	

Model and Think Aloud	Record (Responses and/or Examples)
Imitate Look closely at the model sentence. Deconstruct the sentence, identifying its prominent features, including the strong action verbs. Provide a sentence pattern or frame as a visual scaffold (especially for struggling writers and ELLs). • Model your own imitation (use strong action verbs in your own sentence) and connect back to the prominent features. • Show students how to insert their ideas and experiences and still imitate using strong action verbs as they write their own sentences.	
Share • Share the imitation sentences sparked by the model. • Listen, clap, praise, but, most of all, be sincere: Create a positive environment that lets students know you value what they have to say.	
Write/Revise Revise or add a sentence that includes using strong action verbs in the introduction you have already written.	

REFERENCE: Anderson, 2007.

Peer-Conferencing Tool for Personal Narratives

Name of Writer: Date:

Name of Reviewer: Date:

Directions to the Reviewer

Read the draft. Make suggestions for improvement. Be specific. Consider the questions listed below. Jot down notes for your conference with the writer. Be prepared to share your responses.

What is the writer's purpose? Is the writer able to communicate the significance or importance of the experience?

Is the topic too large to cover in this essay? If so, how can the writer narrow the topic and clearly define and sustain the central idea?

Does the introduction make me want to read the rest of the essay? If not, why?

Are the ideas presented logically and easy to follow? Are there places the author can strengthen sentences to connect ideas? Add transitions?

Are the characters interesting? Does the writer use an appropriate amount of dialogue? Where does the author need to improve his or her character descriptions?

Does the writer describe the setting using sensory details? How can the author strengthen the setting description?

Does the writer use interesting, specific details that add substance and contribute to the portrayal of the experience? Does the author show, rather than tell about, this experience? If so, where?

Are there parts that could be left out? If so, where?

Are there places where the writer could have used more purposeful and precise language? If so, what words do you suggest?

Are there any parts you found confusing? If so, what parts?

Does the conclusion bring closure to the essay? Does the writer leave you with a lasting impression of the personal experience and/or insight?

Does the essay include a variety of sentence types?

What do you like best about the personal narrative? Why?

What could the writer do to most improve this essay?

Are there spelling and grammatical errors?

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