

125 Ways to Be a Better Writer™

Paul F. Johnson



Roy Thomas
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Skill Area: Writing
Age Level: 6th grade and up

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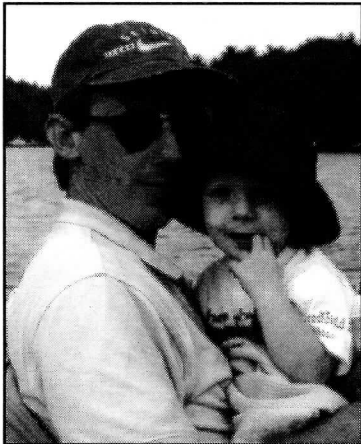
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About the Author



Paul Johnson, B.A., is a writer, editor, and marketing coordinator for LinguSystems, Inc. He's even been known to unclog a toilet and ship a package or two. Paul has worked with students on their writing skills in both classroom and individual settings and has a passion for building writing and literacy skills in both young people and adults. He spends much of his free time writing poetry, bicycling, playing the piano, waiting for his Chicago Cubs to reach the World Series, and watching his daughter grow up too fast.

Paul also developed the *Access Personal Writing Journals* and co-wrote *Kid Times — Stories for Speech, Language and Thinking* for LinguSystems.

Dedication

To Kenya and Maureen, of course. Everything I write is for you. — Paul

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Introduction

“It is not often that someone comes along who is a true friend and a good writer. Charlotte was both.”

— E.B. White, *Charlotte’s Web*

Those are the closing words of the beloved novel that is as much about writing and the writing process as it is about a friendship between a spider and a pig named Wilbur. Charlotte is perhaps the best example of a truly functional writer. Her simple, well-chosen words woven carefully into her web saved the life of her best friend. She avoided flowery prose and passionate appeals for Wilbur’s life, and instead wrote simple, functional statements like “Some Pig” and “Terrific” to draw attention to Wilbur’s worth.

It is unlikely, of course, that your students will ever be called upon to save someone’s life through their writing, but it is apparent that functional writing skills can help lay the foundation for a successful life. Those functional writing skills are what *125 Ways to Be a Better Writer* aims to develop.

As I talk to colleagues and adults in all fields about writing, their first reactions to the subject of their writing abilities is generally the same. “Writing? I can’t write stories or do anything creative. No, I’m not much of a writer.” These are often the same people who, after the conversation progresses, tell you about a difficult eulogy they had to deliver, a challenging performance review that had to be completed, or a sincere letter of thanks they struggled to compose. The common feeling from all these people is that they don’t

consider such everyday tasks to be “writing.” Instead, they lump the bag of tricks needed to complete these chores with all other types of communication rather than as a unique, learnable skill with goals and expected outcomes different from oral communication.

The real-life fact is that functional writing is, like basic computer literacy, a necessary skill to acquire in order to succeed in today’s job market. It is possible, of course, to get a job if you can’t write well, but your chances of advancing beyond the level you were hired at are slim without solid written communication skills. Written communication is the basis for nearly every business transaction. “Put it in writing” is still the cornerstone of commerce, and this book will prove to your students that whether they’re working the line at Burger King or serving an apprenticeship at a local newspaper, being able to write clearly and accurately will not only force others to see them more professionally and treat them with more respect, but their chances of advancement will also increase considerably.

One of the greatest hurdles to overcome in teaching functional writing is your students’ reluctance to even try. Although public speaking is always held up as the greatest fear of all people, I’d suggest that nearly the same number approach any task requiring written expression beyond three sentences with as

much trepidation. It's no coincidence that so many tools are available today that eliminate the need for writing — voice mail systems, home telephone answering machines, even hand-held voice recorders that keep our grocery lists handy. We've gotten around the written word in a lot of ways, but just as many more situations are arising that require clear writing. The proliferation of the worldwide web and easy-access e-mail has opened a whole new vista of development (and abuse) for writers everywhere. E-mail is a mode of writing requiring special skills and is essentially, a new means to communicate. That's why it's included as its own set of strategies in this book on functional writing.

Purpose of this Book

Words are versatile, often confusing, and always around us. The goal of this book is not to put your students in positions where they feel they must live up to the standards of the great novelists, poets, and essayists, but instead to acquire skills that will allow them to communicate clearly through writing. A byproduct of this goal is to help them realize that by organizing and expressing their thoughts clearly on paper, they will begin to reevaluate how they express themselves verbally and nonverbally as well.

The exercises and strategies in *125 Ways to Be a Better Writer* were devised and collected to encourage your students to think about how they communicate and to use what they already know about how they speak and think to write better. Many of the exercises ask students to think and write creatively — not as attempts to turn them into great artists, but as challenges to keep them writing clearly no matter the situation or subject matter. Besides, good describing and storytelling skills are essential to becoming a better writer. For example, book and research reports, performance reviews, and memos are more likely to be read if they're written with

clarity, logic, and sometimes, even humor. Each unit contains strategies for writing better in a variety of situations, activity sheets to practice the skills, and project pages to move the practice into a practical, everyday application.

Components

125 Ways to Be a Better Writer is presented in seven general units. Each unit begins with an overview of the purpose and goals for the skills covered. Each of these specific skills includes the following components.

Handout

These pages are meant to be photocopied and shared with students. The handouts were designed to be appropriate for both instructor-guided study as well as individual exploration. Each handout contains several specific strategies for accomplishing the writing skill.

Activity Sheets

Each set of writing skill handouts is followed by at least one activity sheet. These sheets usually focus on developing or allowing students to practice a specific writing strategy. Some activity sheets are more general and require students to either complete or plan a piece of writing.

Using the Writing Process

A page is included for each writing skill which outlines how students can use the steps of the writing process to accomplish the given writing skill. This page is intended as an outline only. Stress to your students that the writing process is dynamic and more of a map than a set of rules.

Writing Project Page

This page contains specific writing project topics and ideas to get your students practicing the writing skill they've just learned. Even if students don't choose to pursue any of the projects listed, the variety of topics might

inspire them to come up with unique and interesting project ideas of their own.

(**Note:** Units 1 and 2 do not include *Using the Writing Process* or *Writing Project Pages*. The strategies in the first two units cover general writing rather than genre-specific writing as do the other units.)

Finally, there has been only one F. Scott Fitzgerald and one Charles Dickens on this earth. But there are thousands of Paul Johnsons, Maria Lopezes, and Shel

Liebowitzes. I've written this book for those people — the people who often write *it's* when they mean *its*, writers who mix verb tenses without realizing it, and anyone who can't seem to get onto paper what's so clearly in her head. Garbled messages and ill-written mis-sives have toppled nations, businesses, and friendships. This is my small offering to help create confident writers who will lead us all.

Paul



Unit 1

Why Write?

At this point in your students' lives, the concept of writing might have some pretty negative connotations. They may have had failed experiences with expressing themselves through writing or simply view the process as a whole lot of unnecessary work. This is no time to lie about the effort writing requires. Achieving clarity in writing takes work, as does raising your free throw percentage or learning guitar chords.

There are Michael Jordans in the writing world, of course — those few whose talents are so complete and immense that every time they put pen to paper, genius spills from their hand. But there is only one Michael Jordan, and there are probably about as many completely natural-born writers of the same caliber. For the rest of us, that means we have to practice a bit and learn a few skills until we can write clearly and competently. And remember, even Michael Jordan was once cut from his high school basketball team, so it's hard to imagine anyone with completely innate skills.

There are rewards to good writing, though. Those who communicate clearly both verbally and through writing have a far greater chance of success than those who don't. Quite simply, good communicators are generally better workers because they are more easily understood, share their opinions more, and have a better chance of helping a company make more money because of their skills. People who can do those things are highly valued and often well-rewarded for their skills.

What Is Writing?
handout, page 11

Work through the diagram with your students and ask them to compare and contrast each type of communication. Have them brainstorm ways each mode of communication

Goals:

- to recognize the importance of writing in everyday life
- to understand how writing might impact your students' successes outside school
- to see the importance of learning different kinds of writing

Materials:

<i>What Is Writing?</i> handout.....	11
<i>Overview</i> handout.....	12
<i>Different Types of Writers</i> activity sheet ...	13
<i>Writing for Life</i> activity sheet.....	14

might be used in a school, business, or community setting. Then, ask them to think about tasks or jobs that would require a combination of communication skills (written, verbal, and nonverbal). Ask your students to think about how their own skills might fit with some of those situations. Then, have them suggest skills that they could learn better (hopefully writing will come up often).

Overview
handout, page 12

If you plan to work through this book from start to finish, share the *Overview* handout on page 9 with your students. Even if you don't plan to use this book sequentially, though, the handout may still prove a handy resource. It explains the kinds of writing skills that this book will cover and why each was chosen. This handout has been included to give your students a picture of how different writing skills work together to create a complete writer. Students are often asked to write letters or create poetry without a clear rationale for why they are doing it. Creating in a vacuum like that often reduces writing to busywork and allows students to view the

Unit 1: Why Write?, *continued*

exercises as pointless and time-consuming. The goal of this handout is to illustrate how a complete writer can emerge at the culmination of many seemingly unrelated tasks.

Different Types of Writers

Writing for Life

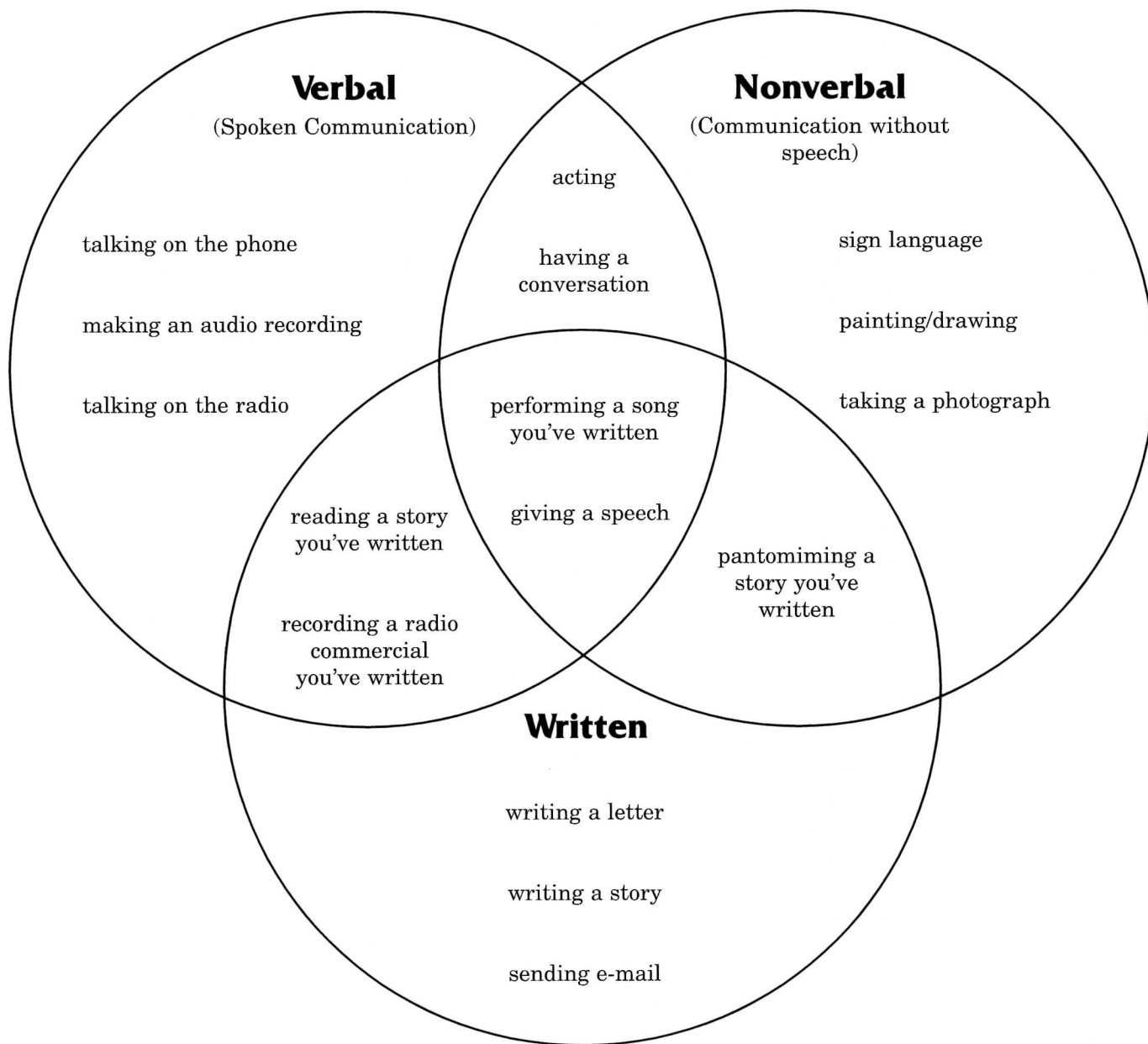
activity sheets, pages 13-14

Have your students complete these sheets and ask their thoughts about the information on these pages. Lead a discussion about the importance of writing in your students' lives. You might also talk about the barriers they face in becoming good writers — lack of confidence, lack of skills, no good ideas, etc., and talk about how you can work together to overcome those barriers.

Note: As your students calculate their survey score for the *Different Types of Writers* activity sheet, make sure they don't include the numbers they wrote for number 7. Have a separate discussion on this item, encouraging students to talk about why they ranked each type of writing the way they did. Focus particularly on the lower ranked items and talk about how learning more about those types of writing might help them become better all-around writers. Also, this survey is not meant as a scientific measurement of where your students are as writers. It is intended as a fun and informal way for your students to begin to quantify their writing skills and see directions in which they might improve their skills.

What Is Writing?

The diagram below illustrates the major types of communication most of us use every day. As you can see, most of what we do is a combination of different types of communication. Compare the types of communication, the skills needed, and the purpose for each as you discuss them. Can you add any examples to the diagram?



Do you agree or disagree with this statement? Why?

“Written communication allows us, more than any other form of communication, to put down our thoughts carefully and clearly in a way that will last for a long period of time.”

Overview

Here are the main types of writing covered in this book. Keep this reference handy to follow your progress and to remind you why learning about each kind of writing is important.

Type of Writing	Skills Needed	Why Am I Learning This?
Sentences	basic grammar something to write about	The sentence is the basic unit of writing. If your sentences aren't good, little else will be.
Paragraphs	basic grammar good sentence skills topic	In longer pieces of writing, good paragraphs keep your writing moving and organized.
Poetry	vocabulary describing creativity	Writing poetry is good practice for putting thoughts into different forms. It helps your writing go in new directions.
Journals	time to write open mind reflection	Writing in a journal helps you learn to write about your feelings, form opinions, and brainstorm writing project ideas.
Opinions	well thought-out opinions research focus	Writing about an opinion helps you think through an issue. People who can think things through are considered fair and open.
Letters	knowledge of formats neatness (business letters) clarity	Letters are something you will write a lot of in your life. Knowing how to write good ones might even mean a better job someday.
e-mail	knowledge of formats computer skills clarity	Good e-mails can help you meet interesting people and get problems solved quickly.
Reviews	perception organization clarity	Writing a review lets you respond to something you've seen, read, or listened to. A review lets you organize and express your opinion and helps others understand your point of view.
Reports	research organization focus	Reports allow you to express your opinion and learn about new things. They also help you learn to organize and share thoughts.
Stories	creativity organization problem solving	Writing stories allows you to create your own worlds and characters. It also helps you practice all kinds of writing skills while doing something fun.

Different Types of Writers

Name _____

What kind of writer are you? Complete this survey by choosing only the best answer that describes how you feel. When you're finished, add together the numbers you circled and turn your paper upside-down to find out your score. *Important:* This is not a test. Be honest and have fun.

1	<p>How would you describe your writing skills?</p> <p>1 good</p> <p>2 okay</p> <p>3 not so great</p>												
2	<p>What's the hardest part about writing for you?</p> <p>1 I don't really have any problems writing.</p> <p>2 Figuring out a good ending</p> <p>3 Coming up with ideas for writing topics</p>												
3	<p>How do you feel about writing nonfiction (book reports, research reports, etc.)?</p> <p>1 I enjoy writing nonfiction.</p> <p>2 I'll do it if I have to.</p> <p>3 I'd rather have my fingernails slowly pulled out.</p>												
4	<p>How do you feel about writing fiction (stories)?</p> <p>1 I like writing fiction.</p> <p>2 I'll do it if it's assigned.</p> <p>3 I'd rather scrub every toilet in the school with a toothbrush.</p>												
5	<p>Are you interested in a career where being a good writer could make you more successful?</p> <p>1 yes</p> <p>2 I don't know</p> <p>3 no</p>												
6	<p>Which one of these statements would you agree most with?</p> <p>1 It's important that everyone learn to be a good writer.</p> <p>2 Everyone should at least know the basics of good writing.</p> <p>3 The only people who need to know about writing are people who will use writing in their jobs.</p>												
7	<p>Rank these types of writing by your preference. For example, put a 1 by the kind of writing you most like to do, a 2 by your next favorite, etc. (If you haven't tried all types of writing, take a guess as to which you would find more or less interesting).</p> <table border="0"> <tbody> <tr> <td>___ poem</td> <td>___ story</td> <td>___ letter/note</td> </tr> <tr> <td>___ e-mail</td> <td>___ book report</td> <td>___ play</td> </tr> <tr> <td>___ TV/radio commercial</td> <td>___ research report</td> <td>___ children's story</td> </tr> <tr> <td>___ TV show/movie script</td> <td>___ journal entry</td> <td></td> </tr> </tbody> </table>	___ poem	___ story	___ letter/note	___ e-mail	___ book report	___ play	___ TV/radio commercial	___ research report	___ children's story	___ TV show/movie script	___ journal entry	
___ poem	___ story	___ letter/note											
___ e-mail	___ book report	___ play											
___ TV/radio commercial	___ research report	___ children's story											
___ TV show/movie script	___ journal entry												

16-18 You and writing aren't the best of friends.
 Maybe this book will help change your mind.
 8-15 You're pretty open-minded about writing and could stand to learn more.
 6-7 You're probably naturally a good writer. This book will give you lots of practice.

Scoring

Writing for Life

Name _____

How important is learning about writing, really? This page shows what might happen if someone weren't a very good writer. Draw lines to match the person on the left with what might be said in a situation where the person wasn't a very good writer.

Clothing Store Sales Applicant

Hey, I ordered a hamburger with no cheese, not a Spamburger with peas!

Gas Station Manager

Sorry, Mr. Bukowski, I'm sure your book store doesn't need these 18-foot steel rods. Guess my boss wrote down the wrong directions again.

Food Server

Well, I'm sorry if your tanks are dry, but we had a hard time reading your fax. I thought it said you wouldn't need another delivery until the twentieth. We'll try to get somebody over there tomorrow.

Truck Dispatcher

You seem like a nice enough person, but I'm afraid this job isn't for you. We need our salespeople to act professionally, and the fact that you misspelled so many items on the job application and used incorrect grammar tells me you're just not ready.

Tell how knowing how to write well would be important for these jobs:

Office Worker _____

Mechanic _____

Unit 2

The Writer's Toolbox

Becoming a good writer doesn't necessarily mean learning and strictly adhering to all kinds of rules and regulations. As painful as it might seem to your students in the short term, though, a good writer must master a few rules and structures before proceeding successfully.

Encourage your students to think of mastering these guidelines as an investment in their future writing. Not only will their new skills pay off in better appreciation of their work (better grades and better pay, for those who prefer the direct approach), but knowing how to put a good sentence or paragraph together means that writing projects will be completed with a lot more ease and speed.

Some of the biggest mistakes young writers (well, all writers, actually) make are ones which can be corrected pretty easily. This unit will both introduce the new writer to some ground rules and help rehabilitate a more experienced writer's bad habits.

7 Ways to Write Better Sentences
handout, page 17

Your students will work through some strategies to improve their sentences in this section. Many of these strategies are mentioned in Strunk and White's *Elements of Style* (New York: MacMillan, 1979), which would be an excellent supplement to this unit for your older students. Remind your students that we need to walk solidly before we can run (or perhaps a better metaphor that won't make them groan), and that once they grasp these basic rules their writing attempts will improve dramatically.

Sentences Under Construction
activity sheet, pages 20-21

Your students will put their practical knowledge of sentence construction to work as

Goals:

- to understand that some basic writing rules and guidelines must be learned in order to become a good all-around writer
- to learn strategies for writing sentences
- to learn strategies for writing paragraphs

Materials:

<i>7 Ways to Write Better Sentences</i> handout	17
<i>Sentences Under Construction</i> activity sheet.....	20
<i>7 Ways to Write Better Paragraphs</i> handout	22
<i>Topical Heat Wave</i> activity sheet.....	25
<i>Under Construction</i> activity sheet.....	26

they repair and create sentences to apply their newly learned (or re-learned) usage guidelines.

7 Ways to Write Better Paragraphs
handout, page 22

If the sentence is the building block of composition, then paragraphing is the superstructure. Your students will learn about some basics in creating paragraphs that will help them get started as writers. As you lead them through practical exercises later, though, encourage them to experiment with the strategies they use to write paragraphs. For example, they might try varying the length of their paragraphs and placing the topic sentence later in the paragraph rather than automatically making the first sentence the topic sentence. There really is no right and wrong way to paragraph and it has become more a matter of personal style rather than formula.

Unit 2: The Writer's Toolbox, *continued*

The most important thing for students to remember is to have some sort of strategy for paragraphing in order to aid the reader.

Topical Heat Wave
activity sheet, page 25

Identifying and creating paragraph topic sentences is often a challenge for young writers. After your students circle topic sentences to complete the activity sheet, challenge them to

create an alternate topic sentence for each paragraph.

Under Construction
activity sheet, page 26

These exercises will allow your students to complete and build some paragraphs based on the basics of paragraphing they've just learned.

7 Ways to Write Better Sentences

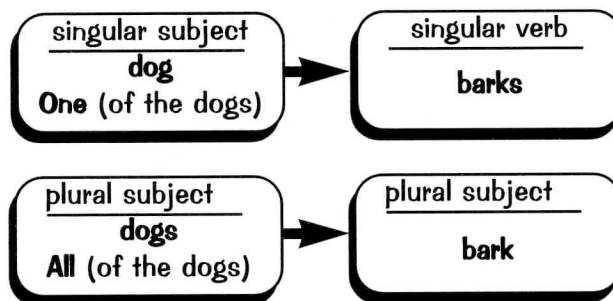
Here are some tips to help you avoid mistakes almost all writers seem to make.

1 Check your subject/verb agreement.

This is one of the biggest mistakes made by many young (and lots of older) writers. Always make sure that a singular verb is used with a singular noun and a plural verb with a plural noun. This is usually pretty easy to keep track of, except in the case of pronouns and collective nouns. Refer to these examples often:

singular subject
The **dog** barks.
One of the dogs barks.

plural subject
The **dogs** bark.
All of the dogs bark.



You'll notice that in the second set of sentences *one* and *all* are the subjects, not *dog* or *dogs*.

2 Check your spelling carefully.

It might not seem fair, but people will often judge how intelligent you are by how well you spell. Use these strategies to make sure your spelling is always correct:

- Always look up a word that “doesn’t look right” to you or if you’re using it for the first time.
- If you’re using a computer, run the spell check program before you print it out — it only takes a second.
- Have a friend look your paper over to see if any misspelled words pop out.
- Read your paper backwards — it will help you focus on each individual word.

3 Choose the right words.

Don’t ever try to use a word that you don’t fully understand, but *do* try to stretch your vocabulary. Try to substitute new words for tired old ones like *good* or *things*.

- Most word-processing programs have easy-to-use thesaurus utilities — learn to use one.
- Use a dictionary to look up words you find in a thesaurus — always make sure you’re using the correct meaning of a word.

4 Use quotation marks correctly.

Quotation marks tell you who’s talking. Use marks to enclose only what’s being said. Notice how quotation marks and commas are used in each of these examples:

“I don’t like Flossie Cola,” Marguerite said.

“I don’t like Flossie Cola,” Marguerite said, “because it tastes like it was strained through old socks.”

7 Ways to Write Better Sentences, *continued*

“Do you think Flossie Cola will ever taste better than gutter water?” asked Marguerite.

(Note: commas and periods *always* go *inside* quotation marks. Question marks and exclamation points go inside quotation marks only if they punctuate what is being said.)

5 Use end punctuation correctly.

Using end punctuation is pretty straightforward. Here are some things to keep in mind:

- Use only one exclamation point at the end of a sentence. Only comic book writers can get away with multiple exclamation points:

This Flossie Cola tastes like old birdbath water!!!

- Double-check your sentences to see if some of them are asking questions and need question marks where you’ve placed periods:

So what are we to do about improving the quality of this cola?

6 Use active voice.

Active voice simply means beginning your sentences with noun/verb combinations to make them sound more alive. Which of these sentences sounds clearer and more active?

From the background Marlena watched.

noun

verb

Marlena watched from the background.

noun

verb

The second sentence sounds more straightforward because the noun and verb aren’t buried at the end of the sentence. Move your noun/verb combinations to the beginning of sentences and your writing will have a lot more punch.



As you write, concentrate on using interesting nouns and verbs rather than loading your sentences with adjectives and adverbs. Dictionaries and thesauruses are full of describing words, but nothing beats a descriptive noun or verb for clarity and power.

7 Get rid of useless words.

Many writers believe that using more words will impress others. Wrong! The only way to impress others is to write as clearly as possible. Always be on the lookout for words in your sentences that don’t need to be there. Here are some examples:

Marcia is a ~~very~~ unique person.

(No one can be *very* unique, *kind of* unique, or *really* unique.)

7 Ways to Write Better Sentences, *continued*

Did you know ~~that~~ Jorge can can play the piano?

(You can almost always drop *that*.)

If it ~~weren't for the fact that~~ she wasn't standing there,
I would've talked to Ms. Marques.

(Phrases that sound awkward to you will sound the same to the reader. If it sounds weird, rewrite it or get rid of it.)

These are just a few instances where unnecessary words can be dropped. Be on the lookout constantly for words to cut from your work.

Sentences Under Construction

Name _____

These activities will help you practice some of the sentence-writing strategies you just learned.

Noun/Verb Agreement

Choose the correct verb and write it in the blank. Remember, singular nouns go with singular verbs and plural subjects go with plural verbs.

1. Akio _____ (march, marches) with the Fleet Street band in summer parades.
2. Each of the students _____ (work, works) after school for the park district.
3. All the computers _____ (has, have) flight simulator programs loaded.
4. "Could one of your teammates _____ (help, helps) me unload the equipment?"
5. We aren't surprised that Kira and Sara _____ (dance, dances) so well.
6. I didn't know one of your aunts _____ (sit, sits) on the city council.

Using Quotation Marks

Place quotation marks in the correct place in these sentences.

1. I hope you enjoy your meal, the waiter smiled.
2. Waiter! the woman shouted. There's a fly in my soup.
3. The waiter snarled, Please keep you voice down or everyone will want one!
4. Well, what is the fly doing in there? the woman asked.
5. I'm not sure, the waiter answered, but I think it's the backstroke.
6. In that case, the woman frowned, bring me another fly so I can at least watch them race.

Sentences

Name _____

Under Construction, *continued*

Using Ending Punctuation

Complete each sentence by adding the correct ending punctuation.

1. That guy claims he can cram two cheeseburgers into his mouth at one time
2. Why, I ask you, would anyone even want to try such a thing
3. Who even has a mouth big enough to cram two cheeseburgers inside
4. I know if I saw such a thing I'd have to stand up and yell, "Wow "
5. Now that I think about it, I'm pretty sure anyone could pull off that trick
6. I mean, nobody said the cheeseburgers had to be any bigger than a quarter, right

Using Active Voice

Rewrite each sentence using active voice. See page 18 to remind you how to use active voice.

1. As well as playing basketball, Marcia races dirt bikes.

2. After the rain stopped, we stomped in puddles along the curb.

3. From the sound of his voice, Dion knew his father was not happy.

7 Ways to Write Better Paragraphs

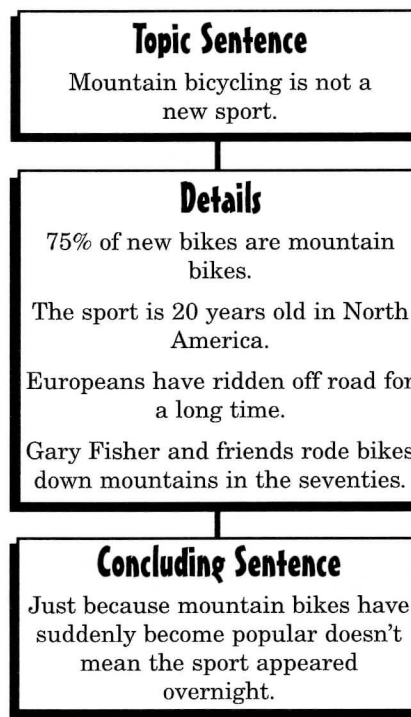
A paragraph is a group of sentences. It's how you arrange those sentences that will make your writing successful. Follow these tips for writing paragraphs and you'll see a big change in your writing.

8 Begin a paragraph with a topic sentence.

A topic sentence tells your reader what is to come in your paragraph. It also focuses you as a writer and keeps you from wandering. When you write a topic sentence, imagine you are introducing a general idea. The sentences in the paragraph will explain the details of your topic. Notice the topic sentence in this paragraph about the general topic of mountain biking:

Mountain biking is not a new sport. Many people think mountain biking is a new thing because about 75% of bicycles bought in the last few years are mountain bikes. The sport in North America is actually more than 20 years old, and riders in Europe have been riding off road for longer than that. American rider Gary Fisher and his buddies in California modified street bikes and began riding down mountains in the early seventies. Just because mountain bikes have suddenly become popular doesn't mean the sport appeared overnight.

As you can see from the chart on the right, this paragraph includes a *concluding sentence*. A concluding sentence either sums up the information contained in the paragraph or reminds your reader of the topic. If your paragraph seems like it needs a sentence to remind your reader of the topic, include a concluding sentence.



Topic Sentences

One of the fastest-growing recreational activities is mountain biking.

Mountain biking is not a new sport.

Mountain bikes and road bicycles are different in many ways.

Mountain biking has sparked a lot of controversy in recent years.

9 Begin a new paragraph with each change of topic.

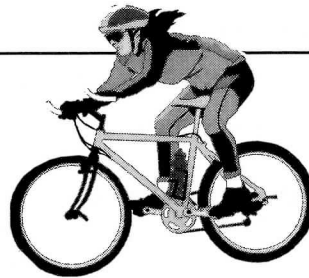
Whenever you begin a new topic or train of thought, start a new paragraph. You'll soon confuse your reader if you begin mixing random information in the same sentence. Make sure all your details fit your topic sentence. If you write something that doesn't fit, get rid of it or begin a new paragraph with a new topic sentence. Notice the different topic sentences listed for a piece about mountain biking. Each topic sentence would be followed by a full paragraph.

10 Use transition words.

Transition words are special words and phrases that can make your writing a lot smoother and easier to read. Some examples of transition words and phrases are *first*, *next*, *then*, *second*,

afterwards, *as a result*, and *finally*. Transition words are especially helpful when you are explaining a lot of details or instructions to your reader. Notice how this reader uses transition words in this paragraph:

Mountain bikes and road bicycles are different in many ways. **First**, a mountain bike is generally heavier than a regular road or racing bike. **Next**, the tires on a mountain bike are wide and studded for traction. A road bike's tires are generally very thin and smooth.



Finally, a road bike's handlebars are curved downward so the rider can stay aerodynamic and close to the bicycle's frame. The handlebars on a mountain bike are straight across so the rider can stay in an upright position. The upright position allows the mountain biker to clearly see obstacles and to lift the front of the bike when needed. **As you can see**, there are many differences between these types of bikes.

Reread the paragraph out loud and leave out the transition words and phrases. You'll easily see why adding these words will make your writing smoother and easier to read.

11 Vary sentence structure.

The best thing you can do for your reader is provide him with variety. One of the best ways to do this is to write sentences of different structure and length. Which group of sentences below is more enjoyable to read?

Mountain biking has sparked a lot of controversy in recent years. Mountain bikers often share the same trails as hikers. Mountain bikers can frighten hikers if they meet them on the trail. Hikers have complained about bicycles on trails that were meant to be hiked. Mountain bikes have been banned from many hiking trails. Mountain bikers are now having trouble finding places to ride.

Mountain biking has sparked a lot of controversy in recent years. Mountain bikers and hikers often share the same trails, and a mountain bike speeding on a trail can frighten a hiker. Many hikers have complained about bicycles on trails that were meant to be hiked, and mountain bikes have been banned from many hiking trails. As a result, mountain bikers are now having trouble finding places to ride.

The writer of the first paragraph has used an active noun/verb combination to begin almost every sentence. The sentences are active and clear, but as a group they make very boring reading. The writer of the second paragraph has used a transition phrase, combined sentences, and rearranged sentences to make a much more readable, interesting paragraph. You'll notice that both writers used almost the same number of words with very different results.

12 Keep paragraphs a readable length.

The length of your paragraphs have a lot to do with how people will read them:

- Long paragraphs are hard and boring to read.
- Short paragraphs cause your reader to read faster.
- Medium-size paragraphs allow your reader to read at a steady speed.

Keep your paragraphs a size that you wouldn't mind tackling as a reader. Generally, paragraphs that are 7-12 lines long seem to work best. If you find you have a lot of details that are stretching a paragraph's length, consider splitting your topic in two and creating two paragraphs instead of just one. On the other hand, if your paragraph only consists of a topic sentence and one detail, consider whether that information is really important enough to keep. If you need to keep that information, try to combine it with something else to make a longer paragraph.

13 Don't overwrite.

Don't exaggerate or try to make something sound more important through your words. Here are some examples of overwriting:

This sounds gross!	Sounds better this way!
That bike is so comfortable it feels as if I'm riding in a marshmallow recliner through clouds of cotton candy and there's nothing between me and the road but whipped cream elves who carry me softly over each bump.	That bike is the most comfortable one I've ever ridden.
Not only is the Statue of Liberty one of the tallest statues in the world, but it's also the most beautiful, wonderful, meaningful symbol of freedom in the entire world.	Not only is the Statue of Liberty one of the tallest statues in the world, but it's also a worldwide symbol of freedom.

14 Don't be too casual or too formal.

As you write, try to use simple, straightforward language. Don't write to impress anyone by writing formally, and avoid phrases like *I so much look forward to the favor of your reply*. Instead, write *I look forward to your call*.

Don't be too casual in your writing, either. Try to keep slang and expressions you might use around your friends out of your writing, except in the cases of personal letters and dialogue in a story. Your writing should always sound conversational and easygoing, but slang and nonstandard English aren't widely accepted forms of nonfiction writing.

Topical Heat Wave

Name _____

Read each group of detail sentences below. Circle the best topic sentence for each paragraph. Make sure your topic sentence fits for *all* the detail sentences in the paragraph.

Although there are a lot of shows on TV that feature violence, there are also many educational programs. PBS, The Learning Channel, Arts & Entertainment, and The Discovery Channel are just some of the cable outlets that feature educational programming several hours a day for both children and adults. TV programmers are also doing a better job of putting more adult-oriented, violent shows on later in the evenings when children are in bed.

Topic Sentences

There are a lot of shows to watch on TV.

There are lots of options for people who don't want their children watching violence on TV.

There should be more educational programming on TV.

Topic Sentences

Musicians will soon be out of work.

Music has changed a lot over the years.

Some bands today don't play instruments in their songs.

Instead of playing instruments, a band might use a *sample* in its song. A sample is a piece of someone else's song that is *looped*, or played over and over again. Often a new beat is added and singers will rap over the sample or create a new melody and words. The result is a brand new song out of something old. Some people really like this approach to making music, but others think it's simply cheating the audience.

Topic Sentences

Lightning is more dangerous than you might think.

Don't stand under a tree in a lightning storm.

We don't know much about lightning.

You should always be cautious when lightning flashes in the sky, even if you think it's not near by. In fact, lightning can strike from clouds as far as two miles away. The best thing to do when you see storm clouds approaching is to take shelter. There's no reason to take chances with lightning.

Now, write your own topic sentence for the paragraph details below.

When people get tired of these strange pets, they often let them go. Recently construction workers were amazed to find a three-foot-long alligator in a drainage ditch in Chicago. Other people have been known to set monkeys free in forests where they can't find food. The pot-bellied pig craze of several years ago resulted in many orphaned pets ending up on farms. People need to think about the future before purchasing an odd or exotic pet.

Topic Sentence: _____

Under Construction

Name _____

Each chart below contains notes for the sentences in a paragraph. Use each chart to write a paragraph. Remember to use transition words where appropriate, combine details in the same sentence, and keep your paragraphs a readable length.

General Topic: Baseball Parks

Paragraph Topic

Wrigley field in Chicago —
a unique baseball park in U.S.

Details

surrounded by brick apartment
buildings and homes

outfield walls covered with ivy

huge, hand-operated scoreboard
in center field

green, natural grass field

General Topic: African Bullfrog

Paragraph Topic

African Bullfrog can really eat a lot

Details

has a huge mouth

has fat, round belly

isn't happy with just flies

eats large frogs, rodents, and birds

swallows meal whole in one gulp

Conclusion

is an animal with a big appetite

Unit 3

The Writing Process

Probably the greatest reason for the success and acceptance of the *writing process* in education is its flexibility. Both the newest and most experienced writers can fit their skill levels into its prescribed steps of *prewriting*, *writing a first draft*, *revising your work*, *proofreading*, and *publishing*. There are as many approaches to use to complete each step as there are writing styles, so even though the writing process seems like a set of rules, it's really more of a road map. Your students can decide whether they'll walk, bicycle, or take the bus to travel the same route.

The goals of this unit are to acquaint students with the writing process who have little experience with it and to provide several strategies and approaches for completing each phase of the process. Your students will learn that they can approach writing in terms most comfortable to them, rather than being forced to follow a single approach. For students acquainted with the writing process, this unit will provide them with new strategies to approach each step in the process.

The writing process acts as sort of a to-do list for writers. In the past, young writers were often told simply to write to form — a book report, personal letter, or research paper. There was little instruction on how to formulate ideas or follow a scheme for completing the project. As a result, most writing assignments were often completed in an evening's flurry of researching, note card preparation, and finally, writing (in whatever time remained). The incremental steps of the writing process allow the writer to spread the work naturally over time. As each step is completed, a young writer can see that her work will lead to a finished product. As a result, a young writer is less apt to feel "up against the wall" with a deadline looming and no place to start.

Goals:

- to familiarize students with the five-step writing process
- to impress upon students that the writing process is only a guideline, not a set of rules
- to give students specific strategies for making their writing a process

<i>The Writing Process</i> handout	30
<i>3 Ways to Use Prewriting</i> handout	31
<i>Cluster Time</i> activity sheet	33
<i>4 Ways to Write a First Draft</i> handout	34
<i>I Can Read Clearly Now</i> activity sheet	36
<i>6 Ways to Revise</i> handout	37
<i>It's Good, But . . .</i> activity sheet	39
<i>3 Ways to Proofread</i> handout	40
<i>Eagle Eyes I</i> activity sheet	42
<i>Eagle Eyes II</i> activity sheet	43
<i>3 Ways to Publish Your Work</i> handout	44

Throughout this unit, encourage your students to be flexible in their approaches to the writing process. Help them look beyond the strategies in this book to create their own exercises for areas like prewriting and editing. One of the most valuable steps a writer can take is to own her own writing as well as her methods for approaching it. Emphasize this idea of ownership and personalization by asking your students to explain the thinking they used to complete each step of the process.

Notes: The handouts and activity sheets in this unit follow the progress of hypothetical research papers on Sharks and NBA Basketball vs. College Basketball. Although research papers won't be covered until later in the book, they lend themselves well to the

Unit 3: The Writing Process, *continued*

steps of the writing process. Also, since your students will not be producing a tangible product as a result of this unit, you may want to work through it quickly with students who are familiar with the writing process and refer to it as your students need to review these skills while working through the remaining units in the book.

The Writing Process handout, page 30

Use this handout to walk your students through the steps of the writing process. Encourage your students to keep this sheet as a reference until they are familiar with the steps of the writing process.

3 Ways to Use Prewriting handout, page 31

This section includes several strategies to overcome the biggest hurdle most young writers face — getting started. Beyond getting started, the prewriting phase is a good time for students to begin to organize their research and ideas in preparation for writing a first draft.

Cluster Time activity sheet, page 33

This activity sheet basically asks students to do some brainstorming about a topic by clustering it. Clustering is one of the best ways for students to explore a topic and find details and subtopics to write about.

When your students have completed their clusters, ask them to complete an outline or detail boxes for one of the topics and clusters they've just created. Have them talk about how clustering helped them define their topic. Talk about how using this prewriting exercise might help their future writing efforts.

4 Ways to Write a First Draft handout, page 34

It is in writing a first draft that most students begin to fail as writers. This section attempts to focus your young writers on getting something — anything on paper. Emphasize that a first draft is only a beginning, and work to condition your students to expect little successes in writing rather than a finished product in one effort.

I Can Read Clearly Now activity sheet, page 36

Your students will need to critically read the piece on sharks to pull out the necessary details. Encourage them to “go with their gut instincts” as they identify the parts of this piece. Then, ask them to justify their choices by pointing out details in the piece and suggesting ways it might have been better written. Students who are able to identify good and sub-par writing efforts are well on their ways to becoming better writers themselves.

6 Ways to Revise handout, page 37

Learning to revise effectively is one of the most difficult writing skills to learn. It's difficult because most students don't even know where to start. This section aims to provide some specific, basic strategies to give students a starting point for their revising efforts. As students become more comfortable with the act of revising, they will begin to become very critical of their own work.

It's Good, But . . . activity sheet, page 39

Before cutting students loose to use this review sheet, you might provide a little coaching. Many peer review sessions with

young writers tend to degenerate into discussions about personal preference. The review sheet itself steers reviewers in the direction of specific feedback, but your class or group of students might want to work together to set its own ground rules for reviewing one another's work. They might decide to only deal with written comments, or they might say the writer can not ask questions of the reviewer. As you well know, your students will more likely follow the rules of reviewing if they set the rules themselves.

3 Ways to Proofread
handout, page 40

Suggest that your students use a combination of proofreading approaches to make sure their work is free of mistakes. Also, impress upon them the fact that they need to read carefully through their work more than once to proofread thoroughly.

Eagle Eyes I and II
activity sheets, pages 42-43

These sheets allow your students to practice their proofreading on actual pieces of writing. *Eagle Eyes I* gives your students individual sentences to proof and provides them with the types of errors they'll find in the paragraph context of *Eagle Eyes II*. Ask students to talk about the kinds of errors they find to check their understanding of grammar.

3 Ways to Publish Your Work
handout, page 44

These pages give your students a variety of ideas for sharing their work. These choices will often be limited by the type of assignment students are completing, but students should get a good idea of the wide range of presentation modes their writing might take. Helping to match a student's publishing vehicle with her particular talents and interests can really help her reach a whole new plane of creativity.

The Writing Process

You probably wouldn't go on a long driving trip without a map or travel around a new town without a bus schedule. A map and a bus schedule are tools that help you get where you're going. The Writing Process is a tool to help you complete writing projects and do your best work. This sheet will help remind you of the steps in the writing process.

•Prewriting•

You gather ideas and organize them in this step by:

- ✓ brainstorming
- ✓ researching
- ✓ freewriting
- ✓ clustering
- ✓ outlining
- ✓ taking notes

•Writing a First Draft•

Your first draft is just to get your ideas on paper. You'll fix the mistakes later.

•Revising•

In this step, you decide what works and what doesn't in your writing. Often, a partner can help you make decisions about what needs to be changed in your writing. You might revise your work several times before moving on.

•Proofreading•

Now that your writing makes sense, you check it for spelling, capitalization, and grammar.

•Publishing•

The final step is to share your work with others in a way you choose. Here are some ideas:

- | | |
|---------------------|--------------------------------|
| ✓ play | ✓ poster |
| ✓ video | ✓ song |
| ✓ newspaper article | ✓ comic strip |
| ✓ book | ✓ piece of artwork |
| ✓ enter a contest | ✓ speech or group presentation |

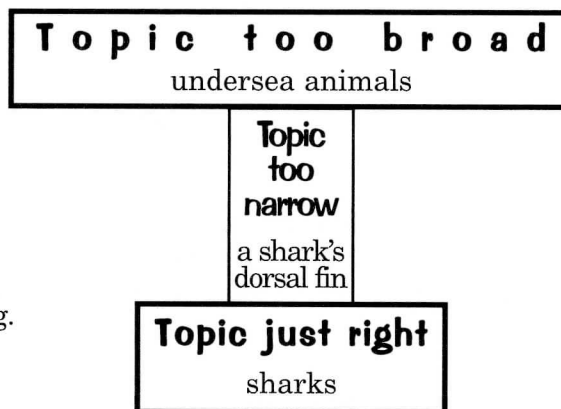
3 Ways to Use Prewriting

Prewriting includes all the things you do before you actually begin writing. One of the best things you can learn is to invest quality time in the prewriting stage. During this time, you'll be coming up with your topic, researching it (if necessary), and organizing your research and details.

15 Choose a topic.

Whether you're writing a research paper, a letter, or a story, you need a *topic*. A topic is simply what you're writing about. A topic that you're interested in and works well will make your writing easier and more enjoyable. Whenever you're able to choose your own topic (one that you're not assigned), keep these things in mind:

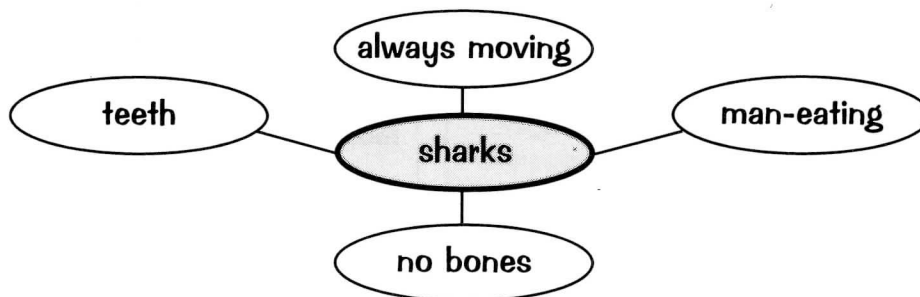
- Don't choose a topic that's too broad, like *undersea animals* if you're doing a research paper, or *everything that happened to me last week* if you're writing a letter. There might be so much to write about that you won't know where to start.
- Don't choose a topic that's too narrow, like *a shark's dorsal fin* if you're writing a research paper. There might be so little to write about that there won't be much to your piece of writing. If you're writing a letter, don't spend a lot of time telling someone all the tiny details of one thing that might have happened to you. Most people will get bored reading a lot of detail.
- If you're writing a research paper, choose something you know you can easily research, like *sharks*. If you're writing a letter, brainstorm a list of specific things that have happened to you recently.
- Most importantly, choose a topic that will interest you and that you want to spend time working on.



The best way to choose a topic is to brainstorm a list of things you're interested in. Then, cross out ideas until you have some that really interest you.

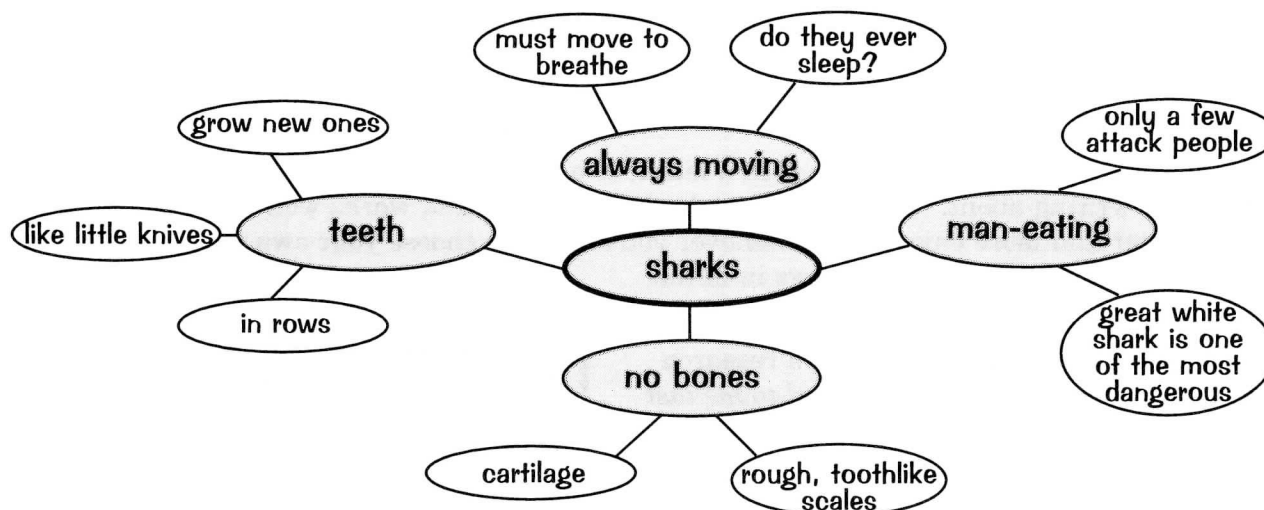
16 Cluster your topic.

Clustering means you write words and phrases that pop into your mind as you think about your topic. Clustering helps you come up with details that you can either research later or write about in your piece. Here's a simple cluster for the topic of *sharks*.



3 Ways to Use Prewriting, *continued*

Here's a cluster that goes a step further. As you can see, this writer has added lots of details that he may or may not use in his piece of writing.



Notice that this writer even asked a question in his cluster — “Do they ever sleep?” A cluster shouldn’t be planned. It should be something you do quickly as one thought leads you to another. It should contain things you know about a topic as well as things you’d like to know.

17 Organize your cluster.

Once you’ve created a cluster for your topic, you need to organize your thoughts. One way to do that is an outline. Another way is simply to create some detail boxes. Here are examples of detail boxes and an outline. You’ll notice the writer has changed some of the thoughts from the cluster above as he thought more about what he would include in his writing.

Outline for *Sharks*

- I. What do they look like?
 - A. teeth
 - 1. like little knives
 - 2. grow in rows
 - 3. new ones replace old ones
 - B. skin/body
 - 1. no bones
 - 2. body made of cartilage
 - 3. rough, tooth-like scales
- II. What do they do?
 - A. always moving
 - 1. must move to breathe
 - 2. Do they ever sleep?
 - B. How do they swim?
- III. What do they eat?
 - A. people
 - 1. only a few attack people
 - 2. great white is dangerous
 - B. meat
 - 1. fish
 - 2. other sharks

Detail boxes for *Sharks*

appearance	<i>teeth — look like little knives, grow in rows, new ones replace old ones</i> <i>body/skin — no bones, only cartilage; tiny, tooth-like scales</i>
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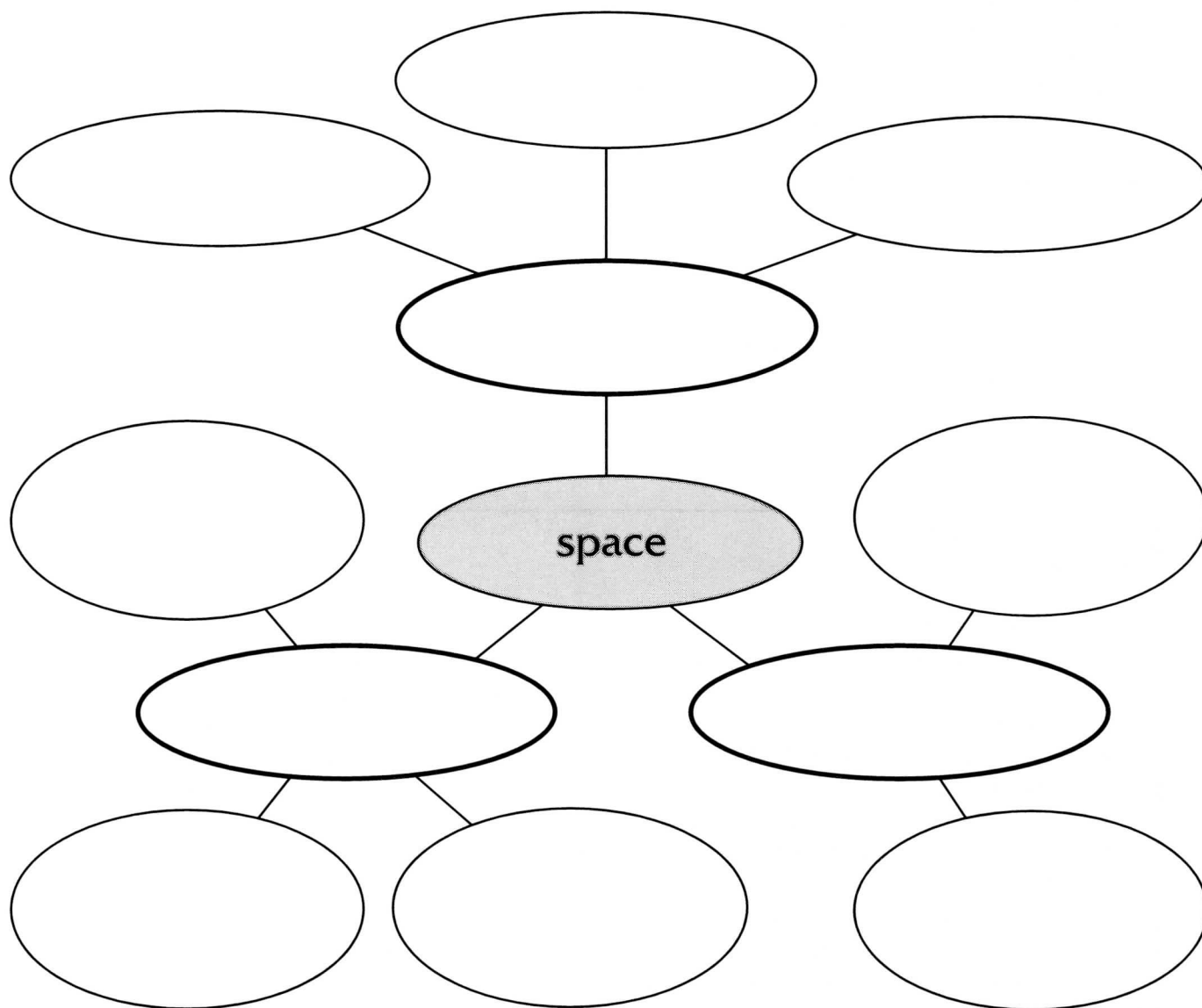
actions	<i>always in motion — must move to breathe, don't know if they sleep</i> <i>swimming — How do they swim?</i>
----------------	---

food	<i>man-eating — only a few kinds eat people, great white shark is very dangerous to people</i> <i>meat-eater — eat fish and smaller sharks</i>
-------------	---

Cluster Time

Name _____

Clustering is a great way to explore a topic. Practice clustering by filling in the circles below with your ideas about the topic in the center. Open your mind and write whatever pops into your head as you think about the topic. Add more circles and lines if you have more ideas.



On another sheet of paper, practice clustering one of these topics:

- ✓ the environment
- ✓ education

- ✓ foods
- ✓ staying healthy

4 Ways to Write a First Draft

Once you have generated ideas, done some research, and organized your ideas, it's time to write. A first draft is sometimes called a *rough draft*. It is often a rough first attempt at getting your thoughts down on paper.

18 Take some think time.

Before plowing into your first draft, allow yourself some time to prepare. A lot of writing fails because writers get too uptight about what they're doing. Relax and do some of these things:

- Look over the prewriting activities you've done, including your clusters, focus statements, and outline.
- Take a few minutes to think about what you're going to write and clear your mind of other concerns.
- Once you feel absolutely clear about what you're writing and feel prepared, continue.

19 Write like crazy!

If writing a first draft were a track event, it would be a sprint. Approach writing your first draft in the same way you approached clustering. Working from your outline or detail boxes to structure your paragraphs, write quickly and listen to what's in your head. Don't try to overwrite or overthink anything. Just let it come out. It may sound awful in spots, but it will sound great in others. Here's part of a typical first draft (you'll notice it isn't exactly perfect!):

The Basketball Debate

by Trevor Johnson

Which brand of basketball is best — professional or college? It seems like as everyone has an opinion on this subject. Both kinds have 3-point shots and shot clocks even though the college clock is shorter. But some will still say that one is better than the other.. They think NBA players get paid too much money and don't try as hard. Others think college players just aren't as good as NBA players. Maybe this paper will help you decide which kind of basketball is best.

College basketball used to be real popular TV spectator sport. Although a lot of people still watch men's college basketball on TV, it doesn't seem as popular as once. Maybe because many of the best players in college basketball are going to the NBA before they graduate. So fewer great players playing in college. Another reason men's college basketball may be losing popularity is that women's college basketball is becoming more popular. Some people think that women play harder and are more competitive than men. Others think the women's game is just too slow.

So many college players take off for the NBA before they graduate because they want to make big money. Critics of college basketball say that some players are so worried about getting injured in college that they don't even play their hardest. They want to stay healthy so pro teams will pay them millions of dollars. Some say college players should be paid to keep them from going to the NBA so soon. Others say college athletes already get paid — through scholarships, room and board, and the ability to travel all over the country for free playing basketball.

Don't Stop!

20 Don't stop writing until you're done.

This sounds a little crazy but don't put down your pen, push your paper aside, or take a long break until you've written your piece at least all the way through one time. Even if you're completely unhappy with what you're writing, keep going. Stick to your notes and outline and put it all together.

Your finished product will look a lot different from your first draft, and you have lots of time to fix everything. This part of the process is often the most painful and frustrating. Don't let it be. Have fun with it!

21 Concentrate on the major parts, not all the details.

Once you've quickly written your first draft and feel you have some good ideas on paper, it's time to take a little closer look. Rather than focusing on individual sentences, though, look at the *big picture*. Can you identify a strong beginning, a solid middle, and a strong ending in your piece?

Divide a sheet of paper into three parts like the one on the right. Write 1 sentence that describes your beginning, three to four sentences that describe your middle, and one sentence that sums up your ending. Here are some ways to judge if the parts of your writing are strong:

- Your beginning should grab the reader's interest right away, state the main topic, and give them an idea of what is to follow.
- The middle gives your reader some details about your main topic and gives her the information you promised in your beginning.
- The ending summarizes everything the reader has just read and gives the reader a natural stopping point.

If you can't easily identify these areas in your piece, write what you would like to have happen in each part of your piece.



Even though it's called a *first draft*, it's not unusual to do more than one draft before moving on. Although the next step in the writing process is *revising*, you may want to immediately rewrite your piece after the first draft if it lacks a clear beginning, middle, or end. Then you can focus on more of the detail in the revising phase.

Topic: NBA vs. College Basketball	
Beginning:	Which kind of basketball is better — NBA or college?
Middle:	College and NBA basketball are alike in a lot of ways. Men's college basketball seems to be losing fans; women's college basketball is gaining fans; the NBA continues to gain fans. The biggest difference between NBA and college players is the money they receive.
Ending:	After hearing all the evidence, which kind of basketball do you think is best?

I Can Read Clearly Now

Name _____

How did this writer do in establishing a clear beginning, middle, and end? Read the piece about sharks. Then, complete the chart on the right with what you found to be the beginning, middle, and the end. Remember, write one sentence each for the beginning and end, and two to three sentences for the middle.

Strange Swimmers by Elisa Aguilar

Even though a lot of people don't care for sharks, no one can deny that they are pretty amazing creatures. Sharks are fish, but there are a lot of things about them that aren't very fishy. In this paper, you'll find out how sharks are unique from other kinds of fish. When you're done, you might not like sharks any more, but at least you will know more about them.

Although a shark is shaped like a lot of fish, there are things about its body that are very different from a fish. First of all, sharks don't have bones. A shark's skeleton is made of cartilage. Cartilage is the stuff that your nose is made of. Also, a shark's scales are different from most fish. A lot of fish have fairly large, rounded scales. A shark's scales are so tiny its skin looks smooth. But there are scales there, and each one is jagged and tooth-shaped. These jagged scales make a shark's skin feel rough.

The biggest difference between sharks and fish, though, has to do with their breathing. Sharks and fish both get oxygen from water passing over their gills. A fish is able to pump water through its gills while it is "standing" still. Most sharks can't pump water over their gills. Instead, they need to constantly swim to keep air moving into their mouths, over their gills, and out the gill slits on the sides of their heads. If sharks sleep, they do it while they swim or they'd stop breathing.

As you can see, even though sharks and other fish share the same water, there are a lot of other things they don't share. Sharks may not be the most loved creatures in the ocean, but they are some of the most interesting.

Beginning:

Middle:

Ending:

Something to Think About:

Can you think of any ways this writer might have written clearer? Are there details she could have added to make the middle stronger?

6 Ways to Revise

Each writer is different. Some writers can't stand revising their work. Changing anything in their work once it's been written makes them feel as if they've failed. Others love to revise. Some writers take scissors to their work. They cut whole sentences and paragraphs out and tape them back together in a new order. No matter what kind of writer you are, these strategies will help you approach revising your work with one thought in mind — success. A good job of revising usually produces an excellent piece of writing.

22 Check your ego. Be ready to change *anything*.

One of the worst things a writer can do is fall in love with her own words. The best way to approach revising your work is to realize that anything can be changed.

23 Look for the weak spots.

Of course, the goal of revising your work is to make it stronger. The checklist to the right contains things to look for as you read and ideas for making those problem spots stronger. Many of these tips are similar to the strategies for writing better sentences and paragraphs in Unit 1.

- ☐ Add topic sentences to make paragraphs clearer.
- ☐ Put details with the correct topics and paragraphs if your work is wandering.
- ☐ Strengthen the beginning and ending with stronger, more specific sentences.
- ☐ Use active voice whenever possible.
- ☐ Don't have a bunch of similarly constructed sentences together.
- ☐ Add transition words if a section sounds rough or awkward.
- ☐ Keep your paragraphs a manageable length.

24 Read it out loud.

The idea of reading your work out loud to people might scare you a little, but calm down. This strategy isn't suggesting you read aloud to others. Find a nice *private* place (the bathroom usually works great), close the door, and read out loud. You'll be amazed at the things you might change after hearing your words. Our minds have a tendency to smooth over rough spots for us when we read silently that our lips find when we read aloud.

Another way to approach this strategy is to give your paper to someone else and have him read aloud to you. As you hear rough spots, stop the reader, make the change, and have your partner reread the section until you're happy with the way the words sound.

25 Share with a partner.

It's easy to miss things when we look at our own work too long. We're also often unable to fix things we don't like because we're just tired of thinking about it. If these things happen to you, it's time to share your work with a partner (or several people). Encourage your reviewer to write comments directly on your paper. In addition, ask your partner to complete the *It's Good, But . . .* review sheet on page 39. If you want more than one opinion, give several people copies of the review sheet and invite their comments.



Before sharing your work with a partner, prepare yourself for criticism. A good reviewer will give you suggestions to make your piece better, as well as pointing out places where it's already good. If you think you might have trouble hearing criticism of your writing, you aren't ready to work with a revising partner yet.

26 Double-check your research and details.

Writing about fact-based material (like an essay or a research paper) carries a responsibility with it. You need to get your facts right before calling your work finished. Here are some things to do to double-check the accuracy of your material:

- ☐ Look over your notes and compare them (especially dates and other numbers) with your writing piece. Does everything match up?
- ☐ Skim through your original research material (books, magazines, etc.) to confirm that your notes are correct. This is also a good time to compare your piece to original material to make sure your writing sounds different from the sources you used.
- ☐ If you've used an interview, check your interview notes. Call the person you interviewed if you have a question about the accuracy of what you wrote. Ask her to answer the question again to make sure you've quoted her correctly.

27 Give only your best to your work.

Revising your work over and over can be pretty frustrating. At some point you may just want to say "It's good enough. I'm tired of working on this! I'm done!" If you feel it's really not going to get better, then by all means stop. If you don't know how to make it better, ask for help. If you're just tired of working on it, set it aside. It's amazing how clearly you'll see your work after getting away from it for a while. The most important thing to remember, though, is that you are creating something, and giving it your all will only make you feel great when it's done.

It's Good, But ...

Name _____

Read your partner's work and respond to it below. Keep in mind two things:

- **Be honest.** If you like something, say so; if you don't like something, speak up, too.
- **Be constructive.** Give specific reasons and suggestions for things you don't think work.

Your Name _____ Title: _____

Focus

Write what you think the focus of this piece is. (What is the main message the author is trying to give to the reader?)

Could the writer's focus be clearer?

☐ Yes

☐ No

How? _____

Details

What's something you learned from reading this piece?

Did the author do a good job of explaining new things?

☐ Yes

☐ No

Are there things you wish the author had spent more time explaining? What?

Summary

In one sentence, tell what you like most about this piece.

Give two specific suggestions for making this piece stronger.

1. _____

2. _____

3 Ways to Proofread

Of all the steps in the writing process, proofreading is the most cut and dried. These strategies will provide you with a procedure you can use over and over again to make sure your writing is accurate and mistake-free. Successful proofreading strategies are pretty easy to learn. The most important skill to learn in proofreading is discipline and concentration. One way to concentrate is to remember that a well-proofread piece of writing is well on its way to being successful. In fact, the most wonderfully-written piece in the world can be ignored if it is filled with punctuation and grammar mistakes. A well-written piece becomes even stronger when it is carefully proofread.

28 Design your own process.

We all write using different methods. It only makes sense that we all develop our own styles of proofreading, too. Here are some ideas for reading your work and looking for mistakes:

- **read backwards** — Start at the end of the page and work your way up. You'll catch a lot of things because you won't be focusing on the paper as a whole but its individual parts, like punctuation and spelling.
- **read aloud very slowly** — Go as slowly as you can stand, and as you read, include punctuation. For example, you would say "Even though a lot of people don't care for sharks *comma* no one can deny that they are pretty amazing creatures *period*." Speaking each part of the sentence out loud will help you make sure everything is in its proper place.
- **read syllable by syllable** — This is another form of the reading aloud strategy, but it forces you to look at the spelling of each individual word. You might read like this: "E-ven though a lot of peo-ple don't care for sharks, no one can de-ny that they are pret-ty a-ma-zing crea-tures." This strategy works well if you're reading silently (you may even find your head nodding in time with the syllables). You can combine the syllable by syllable technique with speaking the punctuation as you read.

Don't try to catch all mistakes in one reading. The most successful proofreaders read once to pay attention to spelling only. Then they read again to look at punctuation. Finally, they might read one or more times to look at the piece as a whole. The checklist below highlights some common things we all seem to miss in our writing. Be on the lookout for these!

- ☐ **terminal punctuation** — Make sure each sentence ends with the correct punctuation. Two common mistakes are to forget to put a period at the end of a sentence and to place a period rather than a question mark at the end of a question.
- ☐ **misspelling** — Nothing makes your work look sloppy like misspelled words. Reading your work syllable by syllable will help you catch misspellings.
- ☐ **verb tense changes** — Don't mix verb tenses. If you're writing in the past tense, make sure you aren't using the future and present tenses in the same sentence.
- ☐ **capitalization** — Take special care to make sure each sentence begins with a capital letter and that all proper nouns are capitalized.
- ☐ **repeated or dropped words** — It's amazing how often we end up missing repeated or dropped words in our writing, like *he went to the the store* or *he went to store*. The best way to catch repeated words is to proofread slowly.

29 Exchange papers with a partner.

Not only are partners great for helping you revise work, they're also great proofreaders. Someone with "fresh eyes" reading your work may find mistakes you've overlooked in 10 readings. When you exchange papers, you do one another a favor.

30 Use resources to check your work.

Don't put the entire burden of proofreading on yourself. There are lots of resources available that will save you time, misery, and frustration:

- **dictionary** — When in doubt about a spelling or word use, look it up. *Never* gamble!
- **spell check** — It's the writer's best friend. If you're writing on a computer, use the spell check. Use it as you revise, and run it one more time before you feel you're finished.
- **thesaurus or WordMaster®** — As you proofread, you might realize you've used the word *nice* three times in one sentence. Use a thesaurus or Wordmaster® to find an alternate word.
- **teacher** — Sometimes it's difficult to find answers to grammar or punctuation questions. Don't be afraid to ask your teacher to advise you as you proofread.

Eagle Eyes I

Name _____

Use your eagle eyes to proofread these sentences. In addition to regular grammar and punctuation concerns, be on the lookout for these things:

- terminal punctuation
- misspelling
- repeated or dropped words
- verb tense changes
- capitalization
- proper treatment of quotations

As you proofread, practice the strategies included in the handout. Cross out incorrect words and write the correct ones above. The number in parentheses tells how many errors are in the sentence. Insert correct words and punctuation where needed. Circle punctuation when you insert it. The first one is done for you.

1. "I'm not sure where ^{to} go when I get there." ^{Javier} javier said. (4)
2. Mondrian looked over the montain and spies smoke from the the enemy camps. (3)
3. the basketball friday night was relly close. We only won three points in overtime. (5)
4. "That wasn't Terrel I saw last night, Dad said. I think it is his brother." (3)
5. Mozart was composing and performing music at Age of six (3)
6. Zoe sat looking at principle's door wondering if if she had done the right thing. (3)
7. bicyclists who ride against traffic only living on on borrowed time. (4)
8. Do you stop liking really loud music when turn thirty. (2)
9. Although Im a big fan of that director, his new movie, *chump*, is awful. (3)
10. Stefano lookd the crowd over and began, I am not here to to amuse you." (3)

Use your eagle eyes to proofread this piece of student writing. Use the marks you learned on page 42 to mark the mistakes. Remember, read it more than once, and use your strategies and proofreading checklist to find all the mistakes. Good luck!

The Basketball Debate

by Trevor Johnson

Which brand of U.S. basketball do people thinks is best. some people prefer college baskebtall. Other think pro basketball is better. Everyone seems to have an opinion on this subject. Of course, both both kinds of basketball had 3-point shots, shot clocks, and greaet players. But some still says one kind of play is better than the the other. Maybe this paper will help you decide which kind of basketball are better.

Colege basketball used to to be one of the most popular TV spectator sports. Although a lot of people still watch men's colege basketball on TV, the sport doesnt seem as popular as once was. This might be because many of the best college players are going to the NBA before they graduate. they would rather make millions of dollars than play for they're schools. Another reason men's college basketball may be losing popularity is is the rise in popularity of women's college basketball. Some people think that women plays harder and are more competitive than men. Others think the women't game is just too slow.

NBA fans are some of the most loyal around. They believe NBA players are the best in the world, and the performances the "Dream Teams" in the the olympics seems to prove it. although many NBA fans also watches college basketball, they think the NBA game is fasterr, higher scoring, and more entertaining than college play.

As you can can see, fans of the NBA and college basketball only seems to agree on the fact that they love baskjetball. So what do you think? Which kind of basketball is your favorite.

3 Ways to Publish Your Work

Congratulations! You've almost reached the end of the process. In the publishing step, you share your work with others. There are lots of ways to do that, and this section will help you prepare and share what you've written.

31 Decide on a format.

Before sharing your work, you need to decide what form it will take. Many times, the assignment you're given will determine how you share your work. For example, your teacher might require you to type your piece and turn it in. Other times, you'll be able to choose how you'll present your writing. A typewritten or neatly handwritten sheet is a great way to share, but here are some other ideas:

- **video/movie** — Turn your story into a movie and use your classmates as actors. You could also present your research report as a documentary or news broadcast.
- **song** — Poems and stories often lend themselves to becoming songs. If you can't write the music, ask a musician to help.
- **booklet** — Experiment with different typefaces and layouts on a computer or find someone who can help you to create a booklet or pamphlet of your work.
- **poster** — Book reports, movie reviews, and research papers can all be turned into posters. A poster allows you to mix illustrations and text into something really interesting.
- **radio show** — Write a script, add some music and interviews, and tape record your piece as a radio show. This approach works great for current event pieces and biographies.
- **newspaper article** — Write your piece as an article or series of articles to create your own newspaper. Use a computer to make your piece look like a newspaper article. Add illustrations or photographs to make your story come alive.
- **create a comic strip** — A comic strip is a great way to present historical or biographical information, or a fictional story.
- **speech** — Present your piece as a speech to your class. This approach scares a lot of people, but if you're a good talker it might be right for you.

32 Gather your resources.

The resources you need will depend on which publishing format you chose. You might only have to find a typewriter and paper, or you might need to gather a video camera, actors, props, and costumes. Take some time to get what you need to share your work, especially if others will be helping you. For example, if you want someone to help you write a song, don't approach him the day before you are supposed to share your work. Allow others the time they need to help you.

33 Polish and share your work.

This is the time to do some final polishing of your work. If you are simply presenting your piece as written, follow these tips:

- **Rewrite your piece.** Make all your proofreading and revising changes as you rewrite.
- **Use ink.** Your final copy should be written in ink. Papers written in pencil smudge.
- **White paper is best.** Colored paper might seem like a fun idea, but it's hard to read words on colored paper.
- **Don't use fancy typefaces.** If you're typing on a computer, don't be tempted to use fancy typefaces.
- **Don't use more than two typefaces.** A mistake new computer users make is using too many typefaces in a small space. You might choose one for your headings and titles and another for your body. If you use more, your paper will start looking like a real mess. See the examples to the right.

If you are presenting your piece in another format, now is the time to rewrite it as a video or movie script or song lyrics. No matter how you present your final product, do it as neatly as possible.

Finally, present your final product to your class, friends, or family. As you're sharing your work, take a minute to think about all the time you've put into it. Then, make sure you let yourself feel good about what you've created.

IS THE WORLD REALLY ROUND?

Ask almost anyone you meet, "What shape is the earth?" and you'll probably get the same answer: "Round, of course."

But not everyone would agree that the world is round. Members of an organization called *The Flat Earth Society* would tell you that the world is flat. This organization is made up of thousands of people from around the world who claim they believe that the world isn't round. To some, membership in the society is kind of a joke. Other members, though, are very serious about their organization's beliefs.

▲ Too many weird typefaces make this hard to read.

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▲ Just two readable typefaces make this easier to read.

Unit 4

Expressing Yourself

Grasping the mechanics of writing is an important goal for your students to achieve. The logical next step is to have something to write about. This unit will help your students to both recognize the feelings they have about things and write about them.

We all have opinions, thoughts, and feelings on almost any issue. Unfortunately, few of us feel that we can comfortably write about the things that matter most to us. Our letters sound flat or overwritten. Opinion papers and persuasive essays sound wishy-washy once we've completed them and never come across as forceful as the thoughts which inspired them.

Too often our words get in the way of writing about how we feel. Ideally, our thoughts should dictate our words. This unit will lead your students through exercises and strategies in writing opinions, keeping a journal, and writing poetry to put them in charge of their words.

8 Ways to Write About Your Opinions handout, page 49

Writing opinion papers is something students really seem to enjoy. Unfortunately, their zeal is often channeled into emotional discourse and poorly conceived arguments. These strategies will help your students be less impulsive about forming opinions and gain credibility in the process.

A good way to apply these strategies right away is to identify things in your own school or community your students can write opinions about. Follow up that opinion writing by sending letters to your local government or newspaper. Showing your students that expressing their opinions clearly can create positive change is an incredible lesson to learn.

Goals:

- to help students develop and translate thoughts into written forms
- to write about opinions and feelings through opinion papers and journal entries
- to practice description and specific writing through poetry

8 Ways to Write About Your Opinions handout49

That's What I Said! activity sheet.....53

Using the Writing Process – Writing About Opinions handout54

Project Ideas – Writing About Opinions handout55

7 Ways to Keep a Journal handout.....56

A Private Matter activity sheet.....59

Using the Writing Process – Keeping a Journal handout60

Project Ideas – Keeping a Journal handout61

8 Ways to Write Poetry handout62

A Topical Solution activity sheet.....66

Similes and Metaphors activity sheet.....67

It Can't Get Much Verse activity sheet.....68

Using the Writing Process – Writing Poetry handout69

Project Ideas – Writing Poetry handout70

That's What I Said!
activity sheet, page 53

This page urges students to look at both sides of an issue before forming a final opinion. When finished, you might have students use

Unit 4: Expressing Yourself, *continued*

their reasons to stage debates about the issues listed. Giving them the opportunity to argue a side of an issue they don't support will help them become more open-minded.

7 Ways to Keep a Journal handout, page 56

Keeping a journal is something your students may rebel against at first, especially if they realize that journal-keeping doesn't really produce a tangible end product. You might inspire them by stressing the fact that journal-writing is a pressure-free way to write. There are no expectations or forms to follow. The only thing they need to draw from is their own minds.

To make journal-writing more meaningful, really stress that a journal is a good place to deal with personal problems. Some of the best poems, stories, and essays have come from random thoughts about people's personal lives. Another way to motivate your students to use their journals is to share your journal-writing experiences if you keep one or ask around your school or family to find a journal-keeper. Ask this person to talk with your class about what keeping a journal has meant to his life.

A Private Matter activity sheet, page 59

The goal of this page is to ease your students into writing some journal entries. When they've finished, ask your students if they felt they had more to write on some of the subjects than they thought when they started. Encourage students to extend these entries in their own journals.

8 Ways to Write Poetry handout, page 62

Poetry is a great way to practice some of the most important writing skills in a short time.

A poem allows a writer to write very meaningfully on a specific subject. As you work through the strategies, continually stress that students choose specific topics only to write about. Also, steer their work away from sentimentality as much as possible. Good poems are descriptions about feelings, not outpourings of emotion. The best way to illustrate this to your students is to share some good descriptive poetry with them. (Emily Dickinson and Robert Blake are great places to start.)

A Topical Solution activity sheet, page 66

This sheet combines a topic-generating activity and practice for adding sensory detail. Encourage students to create a sense chart like the one at the bottom of the page for each poem they write.

Similes and Metaphors activity sheet, page 67

This page simply gives your students practice with two of the most common forms of figurative language. After completing the activity, have students compare their answers. Then, encourage your students to work as a class to create wild or unexpected similes and metaphors, like *Her singing sounded like the last gasp of a sickly bird stuck with an arrow*. Explain that the more unexpected, descriptive, and strange figurative language is, the more it will be remembered by readers.

It Can't Get Much Verse activity sheet, page 68

Students will dissect another poet's work on this page. Explain that looking closely at the work of other poets is often the best way to improve their own writing. Encourage students to collect a few poems on their own and present them to the class by *topic*, *figurative language*, and *sensory details*.

8 Ways to Write About Your Opinions

You have important things to say! You think the cafeteria's tacos taste like Alpo and should be improved immediately. You also want your favorite radio station to quit playing the same five songs over and over again. These are issues you could write about so changes can be made. But how do you write about your opinions and make the whole thing sound good? This section will help you pour your opinions onto paper so people will stand up and take notice.

34 Form an opinion.

The first thing you need before writing is a well thought-out opinion. You probably already have opinions about a lot of things like what TV show is your favorite or which NBA team is the best. Those kinds of issues are more a matter of personal preference and don't make for good opinion writing. Instead, you need to have a solid opinion about an issue that can be debated by people without personal preference.

For example, an issue that is debatable is *curfews*. Some cities are considering an 8:00 P.M. curfew for anyone under 18. Communities believe that keeping young people inside at night will reduce violent crime. If you were to form your opinion about curfews, you would:

1. Have an immediate, gut reaction to the issue. (*"That sounds like a good idea"* or *"Curfews are silly."*)
2. Consider reasons it might be a good idea and why you might be for the idea or against it. (See chart on the right.)
3. Consider both sides carefully and finally decide where you stand on the issue.
4. Put your opinion into a statement that clearly expresses both your opinion and the issue. (*I think the idea of an 8:00 curfew for anyone under 18 to reduce violent crime is a bad idea and won't lower the violent crime rate.*)

Curfews	
for	against
keeps young people at home with family and out of trouble	it takes away kids' rights
keeps young people safe from violent crime	tells kids they can't be trusted
kids won't get involved with people who might be bad influences	it's like imprisoning people for doing nothing wrong
makes community safer for people who fear gang activity at night	8:00 is too early and keeps kids from some activities, like sports

Too many people skip steps 2, 3, and 4 and simply go with their gut reaction to an issue. You will find it difficult to write clearly about your opinion if it is not fully formed. Take the time to make your opinion solid and you will write much clearer.

35 Aim your opinion in the appropriate direction.

Before you begin writing, decide how you will present your opinion. Here are some ways you might offer your opinion and examples of issues you might tackle:

- Write a letter to your school newspaper or local newspaper. (*amount of food you're served in the cafeteria, traffic on your street*)

8 Ways to Write About Your Opinions, *continued*

- Write an opinion paper or essay as a classroom writing assignment. (*stiffer penalties for drunk drivers, violence in your school or community*)
- Write a letter to your school principal. (*amount of time for lunch or recess, grading policies*)
- Write a letter to a local politician. (*lack of good jobs in your area, lack of public transportation*)

No matter where you choose to aim your opinion, remember that the reason to write about your opinion is to change other people's minds to your way of thinking. Writing about an opinion is a way to make a big change. People have written letters expressing their opinions and have seen big changes as a result.

36 Be emotional, but not rude or simplistic.

The language you choose to use as you write about your opinion is very important. The words you use should be emotional and strong, but not rude or simplistic. Which statements below show a serious opinion? How do the serious opinions differ from the other statements?

- ☐ An 8:00 curfew is a bad idea because lots of kids play baseball and other sports at that time of night when the weather is good.
- ☐ I can't think of a more stupid or idiotic idea than a curfew.
- ☐ The argument that a curfew will keep kids away from gangs is just not true. There is more gang activity in school during the day than at night.
- ☐ What am I supposed to do all night at home — stare at the wall? No way!

The first and third statements are clear opinions. The second and fourth statements are just simple statements that show little thought. Always test an opinion by making sure what you are saying is something other people would be able to agree with.

37 Don't argue both sides of the issue.

The biggest mistake any writer can make is to try to argue both sides of an issue. Arguing both sides of the issue means you write about your opinion, but you also write about why someone might disagree with your opinion. Here's an example:

Eight o'clock is just too early for a curfew because it is still daylight at that time for at least half of the year. There are still a lot of things kids can do outside at that time, like play baseball and ride their bikes. I realize that it is dark at 8:00 for the other half of the year and it might be more dangerous during those times. So maybe a curfew during that time of the year isn't such a bad idea.

As you can see, this writer would have a much stronger piece if the last two sentences had been dropped. The best thing you can do when you're writing about your opinion is to stick to reasons that support your opinion only. Don't even mention arguments from the other side. Once you've formed your opinion, forget about statements that don't support your opinion.

38 Support your opinion.

Whether you're writing an opinion essay or letter, you need to support your main opinion with several supporting reasons. Make a list of reasons that explain why you have chosen your opinion. A good opinion piece usually contains two to four solid reasons to support your opinion.

Notice the reasons the writer chose to support her opinion about an 8:00 curfew.

Reasons for not supporting an 8:00 P.M. curfew to reduce violent crime

1. Most of the violent crime in our community is the work of people over the age of 18.
2. Much of the gang activity and drug dealing takes place during school hours and often in school.
3. An 8:00 curfew will weaken our community.

39 Format your opinion piece.

There is a simple format to follow for making sure your paper or letter is well-organized and easy to follow. It consists of these parts:

Opening

You introduce your opinion strongly.

Supporting Paragraphs

You write a separate paragraph for each of your supporting reasons. (Each reason is highlighted here.)

Conclusion

You restate your opinion and summarize your reasons.

Curfew?

Our city should not adopt an 8:00 curfew for anyone under 18. I don't believe this action would reduce violent crime, drug use, and gang activity as politicians have suggested. An 8:00 curfew is simply a bad idea for several reasons.

First, most of the violent crime in our community is the work of people over the age of 18. A curfew for people under 18 would have little impact on reducing violent crime. Of all violent acts last year, 89% were committed by people over the age of 18.

Second, much of the gang activity and drug dealing takes place during school hours and often in school. Also, police statistics show that the most active gang members are over the age of 18, so the proposed curfew would not affect them.

Finally, an 8:00 curfew will weaken our community. By forcing our young people indoors so early we are surrendering to criminals and giving them the streets. A much better solution would be to focus law enforcement efforts on the biggest part of the problem rather than making our young people pay the price for others' crimes.

As you can see, there are many reasons for not beginning an 8:00 curfew. Apparently our lawmakers think such an action is easier than tackling the crime problem directly. I suggest they begin to focus law enforcement efforts more strongly on criminals. Curfews will not solve our crime problems.

40 Use facts, statistics, and quotes to back up your opinion.

A good way to make your opinion piece stronger is to use facts, statistics, and quotes from authorities to support your opinion. In the piece above, the writer uses the sentence *Of all violent acts last year, 89% were committed by people over the age of 18.* This information adds a new dimension to the piece. Here are some other ways to support your opinion:

Quote an authority: Why would we punish our youth with a curfew? Just last summer, Mayor Donohue said, "Our young people are doing so much to rebuild our inner cities. They are the future of our success."

8 Ways to Write About Your Opinions, *continued*

Add a fact:

Psychologists will tell you that breaking down a young person's self esteem with a curfew will do more harm than good. In the long run, the message we're telling kids is we don't trust them.

You can find statistics, quotes, and facts in newspapers, magazines, and other reference materials. Just be sure that the information you include in your opinion piece is 100% accurate.



Facts, statistics, and quotes will make your piece stronger, but too many will make it hard to read. Don't load your opinion piece with information from a lot of other people. Soon it will start looking like their work and not yours. Also, people are less likely to take you seriously if your reasons aren't original.

41 Call for action when necessary.

A "call to action" is something you write to ask other people to act or to provide another solution to the problem you're writing about. Sometimes you'll write about issues that need immediate action. When action from your readers is needed, include a call for action. The writer of the curfew opinion on page 51 included this call for action in the conclusion:

"I suggest they [politicians] begin to focus law enforcement efforts more strongly on criminals."

That call to action is more of an open suggestion. Some calls, however are more specific. Here are some examples of other kinds of calls to action the writer might have included.

- I suggest you write a letter to the mayor today urging him to not consider this curfew.
- Please join me in a demonstration at city hall next Tuesday morning at 10:00 to protest this curfew proposal.
- Call the "No Curfew" hotline at 555-1257 to voice your opinion on the curfew issue. We'll collect all opinions and send them to city hall next week.

The call to action is usually placed in the conclusion. Your readers are more likely to act on your suggestion after they've read all your reasoning.

That's What I Said!

Name _____

Forming a solid opinion is an important skill to learn, and these exercises will help you practice forming opinions. Read each issue. Then, make a list of at least two reasons you might be for the issue and at least two reasons you might be against it. Then, write what your opinion on the issue is. An example is done for you.

Issue: Computers will soon replace books in schools.

for	against
<i>Schools need to keep up with technology.</i>	<i>Reading will become less important.</i>
<i>Wouldn't have to keep buying new books every year.</i>	<i>Would be too expensive to buy new computers for everyone.</i>
<i>Students would be better prepared for the workplace with computer experience.</i>	<i>Computers go out of date too soon; schools couldn't buy new ones to keep up with technology changes</i>

Opinion: *I don't think computers should totally replace books in schools.*

Issue: Each TV network must air three hours of educational programming a day.

for	against
_____	_____
_____	_____
_____	_____
_____	_____
_____	_____

Opinion: _____

Issue: Everyone must do two years of military service after high school graduation.

for	against
_____	_____
_____	_____
_____	_____
_____	_____
_____	_____

Opinion: _____

Using the Writing Process

Writing About Opinions

This sheet shows how the writing process can be used to create an opinion paper. Refer to this sheet to help you write about your own opinions.

•Prewriting•

Your first step is to form and develop an opinion on a topic. Once you've decided on an issue to write about, follow these steps:

1. What is your immediate reaction to the issue? (Are you for it or against it?)
2. Brainstorm reasons to be for and against the issue.
3. Consider both sides and decide where you stand.
4. Write your opinion in a clear statement.

Decide who will read your opinion. You'll need to write with that person or group of people in mind. Your paper or letter will be different if you are writing it for a class debate or as a letter to your city's mayor.

Come up with two to four reasons to support your opinion. Each of these reasons will be the topic sentence for a separate paragraph.

•Writing a First Draft•

Follow the format of an opinion piece as you write — *opening, supporting paragraphs, and closing*.

Consider adding facts, statistics, and quotes from experts to back up your opinion.

Use emotional language, but don't be rude.

Add a call for action in the closing, if necessary.

•Revising•

As you read and revise, make sure you aren't arguing both sides of the issue.

Make sure your opinion is stated strongly in the opening and closing.

•Proofreading•

Check your paper for spelling and grammar mistakes. Also, double-check to make sure your facts, statistics, and quotes are correct.

•Publishing•

Rewrite your piece neatly in ink or type it on the computer. If your piece is a letter, get the address you need and add the correct postage to the envelope. Make sure you include your own address on the letter or the envelope.

Consider presenting your opinion as a class debate topic.

Project Ideas

Writing About Opinions

This page contains several controversial scenarios. You might choose topics from this page to write opinion pieces, or the topics here might make you think of your own subjects to write about. Good luck!

1 Some religious and parent groups are trying to force the music industry to be more responsible for the music it produces. Leaders of some groups say too many hard rock and rap groups glorify drugs, crime, and abusing women. The recording industry has started putting warning labels on music that might contain adult material. Some groups want the music business to go a step further. They want record stores to not sell CDs and tapes by some artists to kids under the age of 18. The community groups say much of this music is nothing more than pornography and shouldn't be bought by youngsters. Other people say we should all be able to listen to whatever kind of music we want to. What do you think?

2 The cost of health care is getting out of hand. Even a minor injury or brief illness can easily cost thousands of dollars. Health insurance costs that companies pay for their employees are also getting extremely high. As a result, companies have an interest in their employees staying healthy and out of the hospital. Healthy people keep costs down for insurance companies since they don't have to pay to help them get better. Some companies have considered not hiring employees who smoke and requiring all employees to take part in structured exercise programs at work. Employees who refuse to take part could lose their insurance. Some people think forcing employees into a certain lifestyle goes against each individual's right to live as she wishes. What do you think of the ideas discussed in this paragraph?

3 It seems people are always trying to change something about education. One idea people have always talked about is getting rid of grades. Instead of receiving grades on individual assignments, students might work on several big projects over the course of a school year. At the end of the year, students would present their projects and give oral presentations on subjects they've studied. A group of teachers and community members would decide, based on the student's work, what his grade for the year would be. Some think this idea is great because it takes the pressure of grades off of students and lets them work at their own pace. Others think it's a bad idea because students might just goof off for the year and not learn anything. What do you think?

4 Every four years the nations of the world gather for a summer Olympics. During the two and a half weeks of the games, millions, perhaps billions of dollars are spent on athletics. Some think the Olympics is a time when the world can come together in peace and competition. Others feel that the amount of money and attention spent on the Olympics could be better spent on things like providing shelter and food for the millions of starving, poverty-stricken people on earth. What do you think?

7 Ways to Keep a Journal

A journal, sometimes called a *diary*, is a private place to write your thoughts and feelings. Lots of people keep journals to help them work through difficult things in their lives. For example, writing privately about something that has happened to you can help you get all your feelings on paper. As a result, you often feel better or at least understand what has happened a little more. People keep journals for a few days or for a lifetime. One of the best things about writing in a journal is that no one but you ever has to see it. Another reason to keep a journal is that it's a great way to practice your writing skills in private.

42 Get a journal.

Some journal writers buy beautifully bound, hardcover blank books for their journals. On the other hand, just as many writers use simple spiral or loose leaf notebooks for their writing. Where you choose to keep your writing is your preference. Just make sure you have a book or notebook totally dedicated to your personal writing. Having a separate book for your journal will make it more personal and meaningful.

43 Decide when you'll write and stick with it.

When you decide to keep a journal, the best thing you can do is set aside 15 minutes a day or so to write. Many people find the best times to record their thoughts are the first thing in the morning or the last thing at night. Once you've selected a time to write each day, force yourself to stick with it for at least a week or two. It can be tough to stick with writing in a journal and not everyone will want to keep doing it. The only way to find out if journal writing is something you'll enjoy is to commit yourself to doing it for a while.

Times to Write

- ☐ first thing in the morning
- ☐ while riding the bus
- ☐ during lunch
- ☐ before homework in the evening
- ☐ right before falling asleep

If you find that writing in a journal is something that you'll make a part of your life you'll soon find yourself reaching for it more and more often as things pop into your head to write about.

44 Write as if no one else will ever read it.

At this point, you're probably wondering "So what do I write in this crazy journal anyway?" Good question. The answer is simply *anything that pops into your head*. Approach writing in a journal as if no one will ever read it again. In fact, many people who keep journals admit that they burn a notebook as soon as they finish it. They say their personal writing is just that — personal and no one's business. Other journal writers line their shelves with the books they've filled and like to read their thoughts over and over.

	June 14
	I made a real idiot of myself today. Why do I just
	blurt out what's on my mind before I even realize
	what I'm saying? I probably made Emilio feel like
○	garbage because of what I thought would be funny.

Journal entries are often very personal and the best way to write about your feelings is to realize that no one else will read what you've written.

45 Look for inspiration all around.

A journal is a place to write about your thoughts and feelings and to practice writing. That means you can write about anything you see around you. Here are some ideas of things to write about and a couple of journal entries:

- your relationships with other people (friends, family members, significant others)
- thoughts about issues in the world (homelessness, gangs, starvation)
- reactions to things you read (poems, stories, newspaper articles)

March 14

Today we read a poem in Mr. Juarez's class. It was called "The Raven." Actually, it was pretty scary. It was about this guy who is sitting around thinking about his dead girlfriend when a raven comes into his room and starts talking to him. It was pretty weird, but kind of fun because it was scary. It was written a long time ago and some of the ways they used words makes it hard to read, but that's also what makes it so scary.

August 13

I don't know if she even notices me.
Well, she does notice me because she
says hi every day but that's about it.
Whenever I try to talk to her I forget
what it was I was going to say and just
end up staring. It's not just that she's
pretty, either, she's someone I'd really
like to get to know.



Remember that a journal entry is just your random thoughts. You're not writing a formal essay or story. Just write! Notice how different the information in the entries above is.

46 Listen to yourself and reflect.

As you write, really think about what you're writing. If you had an argument with a friend or family member, don't just tell what happened. Try writing as if you were the other person when the argument happened. What were they thinking? Why did they say what they did? How would they like to make up?

If you're writing about something around you, think hard about what it means to you. How does a bag of garbage poured into the street affect you? Why do you get upset when your favorite football team loses? Find a quiet spot and listen to your thoughts as you think about what you're writing. Write all those thoughts in your journal. Even a leaf or an ant can inspire you to write something very interesting. Notice how the writer on the next page has taken something ordinary and turned it into a good writing topic.

7 Ways to Keep a Journal, *continued*

	October 27
○	Today I sat on the steps and watched a crumpled piece of paper blow around on the street. It looked like a regular piece of notebook paper. Maybe it was someone's math homework assignment. Did it drop out of the kid's bag on the way to school?
	Did he spend 10 minutes searching for it, knowing that he did it the night before?
	Did he cry a little when his teacher told him he'd have to stay inside during recess and redo the assignment? I watched the piece of paper blow against the curb, then fly into the air for a second as a truck went by. If it hadn't been a homework assignment, then what was it? There's so much stuff flying around this world. Every piece of paper and every banana peel has a story to tell.

47 Experiment, experiment, experiment.

Writing in a journal isn't like any other kind of writing you might do. Your journal entries should be unique, like you. Include poems, drawings, pressed flowers, ticket stubs, candy wrappers, or anything that means something to you.

As you write, don't limit yourself to paragraph-type entries. Some journal writers fill their notebooks with newspaper headlines, quick thoughts on all kinds of subjects, poems, or even groups of words that seem interesting.

Look at the sample journal page on the right. As you can see, this writer is more interested in getting thoughts and feelings onto paper quickly than writing long paragraphs. Use a mixture of types of writing in your own journal.

What will be left of the world
when I'm ready to make
decisions about it?

I'm not sure if I'm a good friend or just
too nice of a person to tell people how I
really feel. What if I really told people
how I feel about things? Would that be
safe? Why do I always play it safe?

I think zoos are fun to visit,
but they're really cruel when
you think about it. But I
think we need them.

48 Use your journaling to fuel your other writing projects.

Many professional writers use their journals to work on their other writing projects. They might make notes about a story's plot or characters in a journal over a long period of time before they begin writing. Poets use the personal

Where did it come from?

A piece of paper on the street,
A soda can lying on the walk,
Two rotted tomatoes against the wall,
Where did they come from?
Who put them there?
The paper flies away as I wonder.

experiences they've written about in their journals to get ideas for poems. Other writers use their journals to experiment with ideas or keep track of the thoughts they have every day.

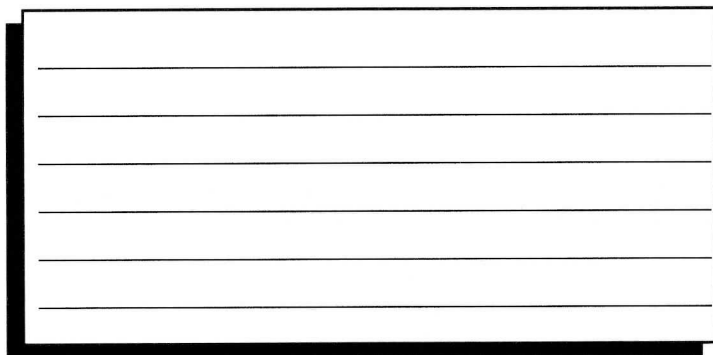
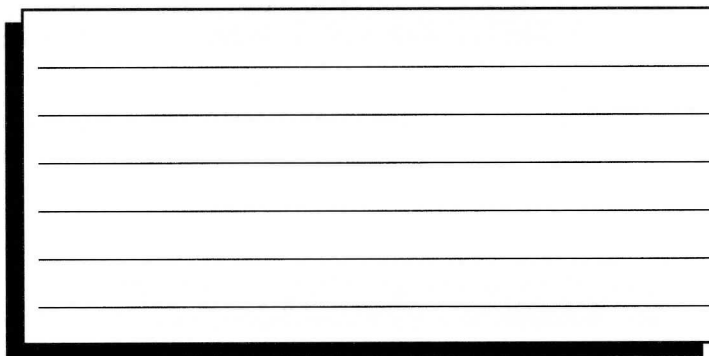
Look for ways you can use your journal to write thoughts for book reports, research reports, stories, and poems. Notice how the writer of the crumpled paper piece turned his idea into a short poem.

A Private Matter

Name _____

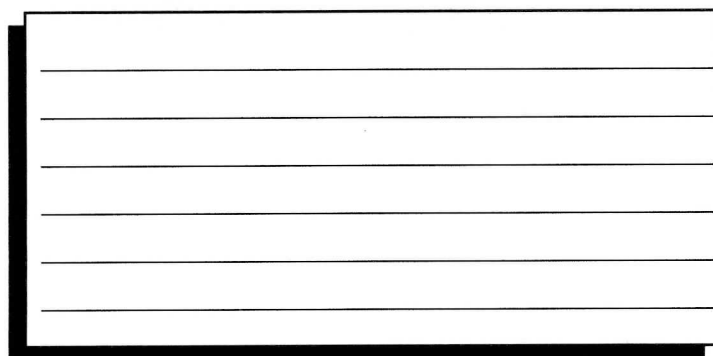
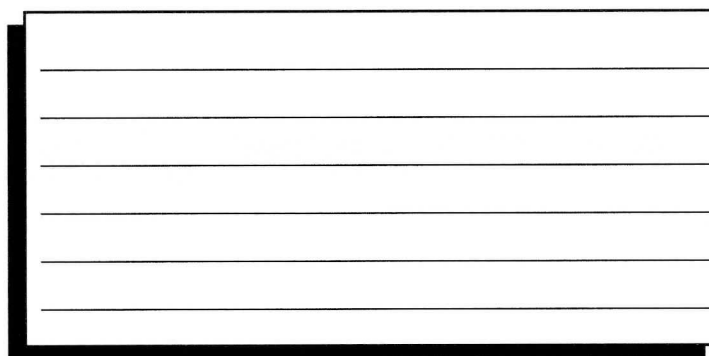
Practice writing some short journal entries. Read each subject. Then, close your eyes and think about it for 30 seconds. Write the thoughts you had during that time as quickly and as briefly as you can. When you have completed all the subjects, read what you have written. Choose one entry and write for five minutes more as you think more about the subject.

Subject: a discussion you had with a family member



Subject: something you've done that you're proud of

Subject: something a friend said to you recently



Subject: how you feel when you are in a storm with lots of thunder and lightning

Using the Writing Process

Keeping a Journal

This sheet shows how the writing process can be used to write journal entries. Even though a journal entry is an informal piece of writing, you'll still use parts of the writing process. Refer to this sheet as you write in your journal.

•Prewriting•

First, pick a time when you will write every day. Then, before writing, sit quietly and think. Listen to your thoughts and look around until you get an idea of something to write about.

•Writing a First Draft•

Write quickly and don't worry about using complete sentences, correct grammar, or spelling. Concentrate more on trying to capture as many thoughts and feelings as you can.

•Revising•

The amount you revise your journal entries is up to you. You might choose to just leave them as they are, or if you've written something you'd like to explore more, rewrite it a few times until you're happy with what you've written.

•Proofreading•

Most people don't proofread their journal entries.

•Publishing•

Most people will choose to keep their journal entries secret. If, however, you are writing about an idea that you really like, consider turning it into a story, essay, letter, or poem.

Project Ideas

Keeping a Journal

Here are some ideas for topics to write about in your journal. Maybe some of these ideas will help you come up with topics of your own.

- ✓ what careers you think are most important to the world
- ✓ someone in history you wish you would have met, and what you would say to him or her
- ✓ how you feel about school
- ✓ your life goals (what kind of person you want to be)
- ✓ what you see when you look out your window
- ✓ what ought to be done about some specific problem in the world (hunger, war, etc.)
- ✓ what you think of when you look at a certain photograph of your family or friends
- ✓ how a poem or story made you feel
- ✓ something you did that you're proud or not proud of
- ✓ a quick review of a movie or TV show you've seen
- ✓ how you think technology is affecting the way we live
- ✓ a description of a scene you're a part of (park, baseball game, playground)
- ✓ a description of someplace you've only read about
- ✓ how you feel about things like gangs, drugs, or violence in your school
- ✓ how you feel about writing or other subjects in school
- ✓ the place you'd like to visit most
- ✓ a letter to a famous person
- ✓ jokes, riddles, puns
- ✓ why you really like a song or music group
- ✓ new words you've just learned

8 Ways to Write Poetry

Writing poetry is a form of writing that allows the author a lot of freedom. When you write poetry, you can choose to focus on one tiny detail, like a bug's wings, or something huge, like the universe. There are lots of forms of poetry to try and lots of opportunities to create your own forms. These strategies will help you write poetry that's interesting, unique, and effective.

49 Open your mind.

As you consider topics for poems, look beyond what you think people write poems about. It's true that many poems have been written about falling in love and flowers, but poems have been written about baseball, fishing, and cars, too. Almost anything you can think of has had a poem written about it.

Nature and relationships are always popular topics, but think about all the other possibilities there are. The best way to approach writing a poem is to look at it as expressing *your* thoughts, not what someone thinks your thoughts ought to be. Look at the list of possible topics on the right. Which ones do you think would be interesting to write about?

Poetry Topics

- ☐ frogs
- ☐ the faces your little sister makes
- ☐ homework
- ☐ the smell of your neighborhood
- ☐ the last day of school
- ☐ how your mom talks on the phone
- ☐ your favorite basketball player

50 Choose a single topic.

Whether you've written a lot of poems or are about to tackle your first, the best way to start is to choose a single topic. Too many poets try to write about a lot of things at once. That's a mistake. Your poem will mean a lot more and be easier to write if it focuses on a single topic. Your topic must be specific and not too broad. Here are some examples of topics that are too broad and ones that are specific enough to make good poems:

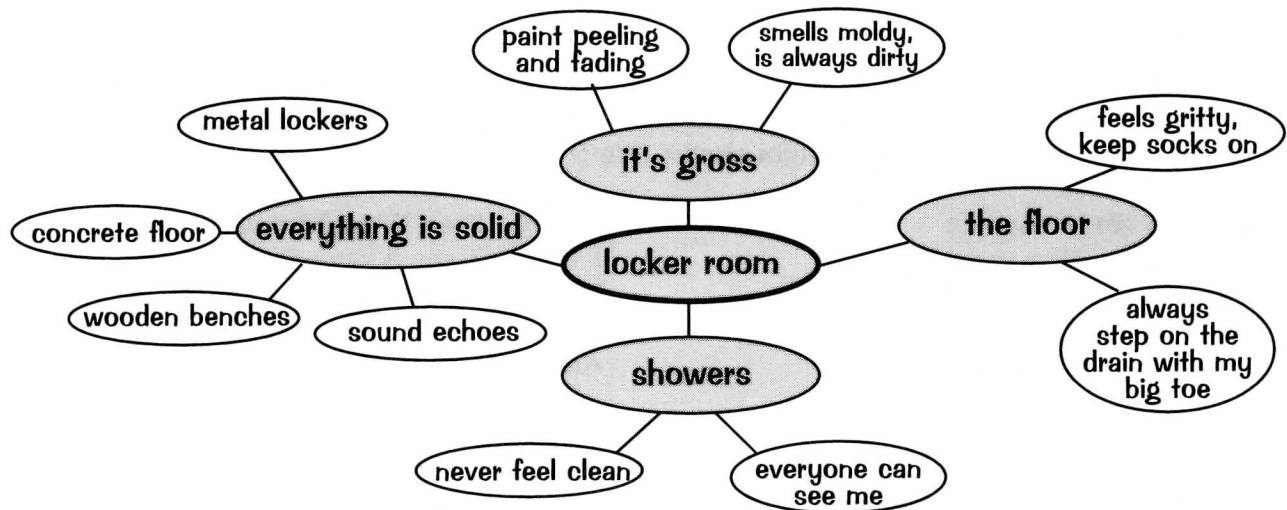
Too Broad	Just Right
your family	the apron your grandma always wears
school	the locker room
music	the guitar hanging in the pawn shop window

51 Brainstorm ideas about your topic.

Once you've chosen a topic, you probably already have some ideas in your head to write about. The next step is to explore your topic a little further. You can do that by *clustering*. For more thoughts on how to use clustering, see pages 31-32 in Unit 3.

Do a cluster with your topic in the center. As you work, think about sights, sounds, smells, and all your feelings about your topic. You'll be surprised at all the things that jump into your head. Cluster until you think you have some ideas that would make a good poem.

Look over the cluster for *locker room* on page 63. Are there any things you might add? Are there some things listed you hadn't thought about?



52 Begin with a first line.

The first line of a poem often determines how the rest of the poem will be written. Look over your cluster and think about describing your topic. This will be your first line. Write it as soon as you “hear” it in your head. Then, look over your cluster again. Write another first line. Write several “first lines” on a sheet of paper. Here are some examples of first lines.

- It's gross in this locker room.
- I hate the locker room. I never get clean and it smells.
- The locker room is full of solid things.
- The floor in this locker room is always gritty.

53 Build your poem line by line.

Choose the first line you like best and begin building your poem around it. Let your first line lead to another. Then, let that line lead to another, much like clustering. Don't worry about rhyming or anything at this point except placing your ideas, line by line, on the page.

The Locker Room

The locker room is full of solid things.
 Lockers are metal, floors are concrete, benches solid wood,
 Sinks and toilets are shiny, hard porcelain,
 The showers are tiled and slippery.
 Everything in this locker room is solid but me.
 My body is muscle and skin and soft,
 I am not solid wood or metal and I am not strong like them.
 The locker room is full of solid things and soft people.

54 Let your poetry follow a form.

Now that you have ideas on paper, think about how you want to present your poem. Look over the lines you've written and your cluster. Begin writing your poem again, thinking about what form it might take. Your poem might rhyme like these:

Pairs of lines rhyme:

I know the locker room well,
The hard red floors and awful smell.
I spent a lot of time there
breathing the steamy, damp air.

Every other line rhymes:

I wouldn't say it's my favorite spot
With its wooden benches and showers.
The locker room was always hot
And smelled of anything but flowers.

Lots of poetry is rhymed like the examples above, but just as much is unrhymed. Here are some examples of unrhymed poetry. You'll notice the language is a lot more conversational and casual:

Unrhymed lines of about the same length:

I never felt safe in that room
But I have to say that it was
One of my favorite spots.
The smell of old gym clothes
And the sound of the coach's
Whistle are things I will never
Forget about the locker room.

Single words or small groups of words as lines:

metal
wood
concrete
room filled
with steam
and me
after
gym

You'll notice that the poem on the right is a little different from the others. It doesn't really contain any sentences but uses single words to describe the topic. You'll also notice that all of the poems on this page come from the same cluster for locker room on page 63. Your poem can go in many different directions. It's up to you to decide which is best.

55 Use sensory detail.

Sensory detail means writing about your five senses: sight, sound, touch, taste, and smell. A poem is a lot more fun to read if it contains some sensory detail. Read over the sample locker room poems in this section again. Notice the sensory details in the poems:

sight	red floors, room filled with steam
sound	coach's whistle
touch	slippery tiles, gritty floor
taste	breathing steamy, damp air
smell	old gym clothes, doesn't smell like flowers

56 Use similes and metaphors.

Similes and metaphors are types of figurative language that poets often use:

simile	a language device which uses <i>like</i> or <i>as</i> to make a comparison	She's as sly as a fox. The sunset was like a giant scoop of orange sherbert melting. That book is as heavy as a rock!
metaphor	a type of comparison in which the author uses <i>is</i> or <i>was</i> to make a direct comparison	That newspaper is a rag. The sunset is a giant scoop of orange sherbert melting. That game was a war.

Look for ways to use similes and metaphors in your poems. One way is to look for things that seem ordinary in your poems and try to make them sound interesting with a simile or metaphor. Can you find the similes and the metaphor in this short poem?

Our Mess

Our locker room is a pit,
The lockers smell like rotting garbage,
The showers are as slimy as snail skin,
And the floors feel like sandpaper.
But we kind of like it that way.



As with most things in writing, too much of something can ruin your work. Don't get carried away with too many similes or metaphors. Use them once in a while and they will be very effective. Also, don't feel you have to use *every* sensory detail in every poem you write.

A Topical Solution

Name _____

Poems are usually most successful when they focus on a single, specific topic. For each broad topic below, write one specific topic which you might write a poem about. An example is done for you.

Broad Topic	Specific Topic
technology	<u>a computer screen</u>
the city	_____
vehicles	_____
entertainment	_____
exercise	_____
sports	_____
friends	_____
buildings	_____

Now practice brainstorming sensory details for one of the specific topics above. Write two details for each sense below that you might include in a poem about the topic you chose.

Topic: _____

sight	
sound	
touch	
taste	
smell	

Similes and Metaphors

Name _____

Similes and metaphors can really bring a poem to life. Remember the differences between similes and metaphors:

similes	a comparison which uses <i>like</i> or <i>as</i>	<i>He's strong as an ox.</i>
metaphor	a comparison which uses <i>is</i> or <i>was</i>	<i>That place is a dump.</i>

Complete each simile or metaphor below with words that you think make a good comparison.

- simile* 1. "I can't believe you like that group!" Margo shouted. "When they sing, they sound like _____."
- metaphor* 2. "Oh come on," Nikki said, "their new CD is a _____."
- simile* 3. "Nikki, even you have to agree they're a little strange," Margo laughed. "The lead singer's hair is as wild as _____."
- metaphor* 4. "You're just jealous because you didn't see the concert last week, Margo. They played long and loud. That show was a _____."
- simile* 5. "Maybe you're right, Nikki," Margo said. "I should probably give them a chance. Sometimes I act just like a _____ when I think I'm right."

Look at the topic you chose to write sensory details for on page 66. Write a simile and a metaphor to compare your topic to something else.

simile _____

metaphor _____

It Can't Get Much Verse

Name _____

One of the best ways to learn how to add sensory details to your poems is to read carefully what others have written. The poem below contains sensory details, similes, and metaphors. Read the poem carefully. Then, complete the chart below with the details from the poem.

On my desk

I see it there every day like an old friend.
Its little screen is a squashed TV
and its whistle is a one-note song.
I touch the screen and feel fuzzy static
and watch as my fingers on the keys
make letters and pictures dance.
I sniff and smell its electrical heat
and wonder if it eats, if this computer
part tastes anything but numbers.
The screen is an eye that watches
everything I do.

Topic of the poem: _____	
sight	
sound	
smell	
taste	
touch	
simile	
metaphor	

Using the Writing Process

Writing Poetry

This page shows how you can use the writing process as you create poetry. Refer to this sheet as you write poems.

•Prewriting•

Choose a single topic. As you brainstorm topics, don't pick something too broad like *school*. Try to narrow down your topic to something specific like *school locker room*.

Cluster your topic for ideas to write about.

•Writing a First Draft•

Work from your cluster and begin your first draft with a single line. Write it as soon as you "hear" it in your head.

Continue working from your cluster and let one line lead to another and then another.

•Revising•

Once you have a first draft written, rewrite it in a specific form:

- rhyme pairs of lines
- rhyme every other line
- unrhymed poem
- very short lines of single words or groups of words

As you rewrite, add sensory details to help your reader see, hear, feel, taste, and touch your subject.

Think about using similes and metaphors in your poem to make it more interesting.

•Proofreading•

Look over your poem for misspelled words. There are no rules for punctuation when you're writing a poem. Some poets put a comma at the end of a line, others write without any punctuation. Write your poem the best way you see fit.

•Publishing•

Poems often become great songs. Work with a musician to put your words to music.

Poems are often best when they're spoken out loud. Read your poem aloud to your family or class.

There are lots of poetry contests every year. Have your teacher help you find a contest to enter your poem.

Project Ideas

Writing Poetry

Here are some ways to come up with ideas for poetry topics. Remember, a poem is best when it is about a specific, rather than general topic. Poems are also better when they are about something that isn't obvious. For example you could write a poem about how much you like your mom or you could write a poem about how she looks in the morning. You'll find a specific topic will almost always make a better poem than a general topic.

1

Think about the people in your life (including parents, siblings, relatives, friends, classmates, teachers, neighbors).

- What's something interesting or unique about one of these people you could write a poem about?
- What memorable experience did you have with someone that you could write a poem about?
- What's something you'd like to tell someone in your life that you don't feel comfortable telling her? Who in your life would you like to get to know better and why?
- What's something you wish other people knew about you? What's something you wish other people knew your feelings about?

2

Find an ordinary object, such as a skillet, pencil, or chair. Spend some time just looking at the object and let your mind wander.

- What would this object say if it could talk? What experiences would it talk about?
- Describe the object in more detail than you ordinarily would. Look at everything about the object and write in depth about it.
- What are some things you could do with this object besides what it was made for? For example, what could you do with a chair besides sit on it?

3

Check out an oversized book of paintings from the library. Leaf through the pages until a painting catches your eye. Spend a few minutes looking closely at the painting.

- What catches your eye right away? Is it something you could write a poem about? Are there details that are almost hidden? Why? Write about them.
- If there are people in the painting, create a story about why they are there and write it in the form of a poem.

Unit 5

Everyday Writing

Our days are filled with words — we see them on billboards, hear them on TV, and read them in our mail. This unit addresses the types of writing your students are most likely to contribute to the daily onslaught of words we all face.

Everyday writing includes the things we might write and send in order to urge another person to act on something or provoke a reaction from him. For example, a thank-you note often causes the receiver to feel pleasure, an e-mail might urge a reply to a question, or a complaint letter will hopefully motivate a company to rectify an unpleasant situation.

A solid writer of letters, thank-you notes, and e-mails is someone who can make a lot of things happen in this world in a short amount

of time. Most people will respond urgently and with feeling to something they see in writing (if it's done well). Credible complaint letters produce better service and well-written, sincere thank-you notes often guarantee future gifts (a crass viewpoint, but generally a true one).

5 Ways to Write Personal Letters handout, page 74

After talking about times when students might write personal letters, have students read through the strategies for writing better letters. As an additional point, lead a discussion about the importance of how a letter looks and talk about such things as kinds of paper students might use to make their personal letters more appealing.

Goals:

- to give students functional writing skills in the areas of thank-you notes, personal and business letters, and e-mails which they can use throughout their lives
- to help students understand that well-written communications can both cause change in their lives and make their lives easier

5 Ways to Write Personal Letters
handout74

Take a Letter activity sheet.....76

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4 Ways to Write Thank-You Notes
handout79

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Using the Writing Process — Writing Thank-You Notes handout.....83

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handout84

6 Ways to Write Business Letters
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6 Ways to Write E-mails
handout91

What's the Subject? activity sheet94

Did You Get My E-mail? activity sheet.....95

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Project Ideas — Writing E-mails
handout97

Unit 5: Everyday Writing, *continued*

Take a Letter

activity sheet, page 76

This activity sheet allows your students to practice their letter-writing skills on an imaginary person. Two profiles are given for your students, but, depending on their skill levels, you might allow students to create profiles for people they know to make the exercise more functional.

When students have completed their letters, encourage them to read them aloud to partners. Remind your students that their language should be conversational and natural-sounding. Encourage them to make any changes that would make their letters more natural-sounding. Talk about how reading the letters aloud helped them make changes they might not have thought of before.

4 Ways to Write Thank-You Notes

handout, page 79

Talk with your students about difficulties they might have had in the past with writing thank-you notes. Encourage your students to recognize that we often feel dumb and sappy writing thank-you notes and rarely think the end result is genuine. As you work through this section, continue to remind your students that good thank-you notes sound like the people who wrote them, and steer your students away from using tired clichés and platitudes.

Thanks Again!

Get Your Thanks in Order

activity sheets, pages 81-82

Encourage your students to use variety as they complete Part 1. For instance, suggest several beginnings to them like “Thanks so much,” “Thanks for,” or “I appreciate,” instead of just “Thank you for . . .”

If students have trouble with *Get Your Thanks in Order* on page 82, have them cross out each

section as they use it or physically cut the pieces apart and put them back together.

6 Ways to Write Business Letters

handout, page 85

Give your students some idea of the scope of times when a business letter might be used — to apply for a job or volunteer position, to request information from an agency or company, or to compliment a company on its service or products.

As you read through the handout together, closely examine the different examples presented. Point out the clear, simple language in these effective letters. Emphasize to your students that big words do not impress people. Many young writers, especially when attempting business letters, often make the mistake of trying to sound too formal, which usually results in unclear, garbled messages.

State Your Business

activity sheet, page 88

This activity sheet challenges students to identify types of business letters which would be appropriate for different situations. Although this task does not directly address writing skills, it does serve to model a variety of situations in which your students might use a business letter and asks them to complete the thinking task of identifying a result in a given situation.

6 Ways to Write E-mails

handout, page 91

The Internet has provided an opportunity for all of us to meet people, tap into worldwide resources, and take part in a global community which only a few years ago seemed impossible. But the explosion in the number of Internet users has brought a problem: lots of people who don't know how to communicate effectively through e-mail. Inevitably these

people often waste their own and others' time by displaying garbled, incoherent messages which others must try to decode. Knowing a few basics of e-mail etiquette and format will help your students go a long way toward being embraced (and not embarrassed) by the on-line community. A few tips on e-mail content will allow their messages to actually be read and responded to in the way in which they intended.

As you work through these strategies, encourage your students to think of and discuss good and bad e-mails they might have encountered in the past. If your students' experiences with e-mail have been limited, the examples in the unit can be dissected in order to reach the same goal.

What's the Subject?
activity sheet, page 94

This page asks your students to summarize short e-mail messages into brief subject lines.

When your students are finished, have them each write two subject lines out of the blue. Then, have them exchange their lines with a partner and write a brief e-mail message for each subject line. Have the partners discuss their messages. Do the messages match the subject lines? Do the subject lines need to be changed to make them more accurate?

Did You Get My E-mail?
activity sheet, page 95

Including reply information might be a little tricky for your students to understand. This is best to see when they are actually on a computer. You might walk through the activity on this sheet with your students, then have them practice writing messages and replies to one another.

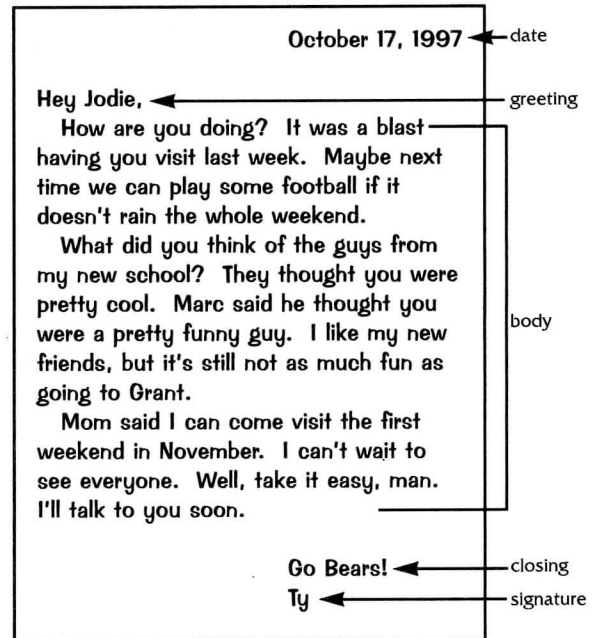
5 Ways to Write Personal Letters

A personal letter is like a conversation with someone in writing. For a few cents (the cost of a stamp), you can share a lot of information that would cost lots more if you used the telephone or traveled to see the person. Another great thing about a personal letter is that you're in charge of the conversation, so the better your writing skills, the better your chances of receiving an interesting letter in return.

57 Know how to format a personal letter.

There are no hard and fast rules about formatting a letter, but here are some guidelines for making your personal letter more readable:

- Write very neatly, type, or prepare your letter on a computer.
- Write big enough or use type large enough to read without squinting.
- If you use colored paper, don't use paper so dark in color it might be hard to read. (Test it on someone else before using it.)
- If you used colored ink, test it on someone else, too. Some colored inks are very hard to read.



58 Use an appropriate greeting.

The greeting is the phrase that opens a letter. Here are some greetings you might use if you're writing to one of your friends:

- Yo Mario,
- What's up, Lisa?
- Hey Filipe,

Your greeting might be a little different if you're writing to an adult relative, though:

- Hello Uncle Kristo,
- Dear Grandma Campo,
- Hi Aunt Adelle,

59 Start by telling something that happened recently.

Many people start letters by saying "It's boring here" or "Nothing is happening with me." If that were true, you wouldn't have a pulse! A letter is a time to be positive and have fun. Before writing your letter, make a short list of things you might be able to write about. Then, choose the most interesting thing to start your letter. In the letter above, Ty talked about Jodie's recent visit. That's something that would be interesting to both of them.

Here are some things you might list before writing. Which would you choose to write about? Why?

- ☐ Our dog got loose this morning.
- ☐ We went on a field trip to a recording studio.
- ☐ I forgot to close my window last night.
- ☐ My mom's looking for a bigger apartment for us.
- ☐ Our soccer team won the division final.
- ☐ My sock has a hole in it.
- ☐ It was a little cloudy yesterday.

60 Ask some questions and answer questions from a previous letter.

Include a few questions in your letter to encourage the person to write back. You might ask about the person's family, interests, or opinions on subjects you both have an interest in. Ask about things you'd really like to hear about when the person writes back. Here are some examples of questions:

- ☐ Is your band still playing together?
- ☐ What can the Knicks do to win the title next year?
- ☐ Does your Uncle Eugenio still have that old red truck?

Along with asking questions, look over the last letter you received from the person you're writing to. Did she ask you some questions? Take time in your letter to answer questions, too. Some other things you might include in your letter are jokes, opinions, or some secrets (if you dare!).



Ask questions, but don't turn your letter into a questionnaire. People want to hear about you mostly, so only include a few questions.

61 Use a fun closing.

A personal letter should be fun to write and should sound like you. One way to inject some personality into a letter is to add a funny or memorable closing. The closing is the part of the letter right before you sign your name. In letters to some grownups and in more serious cases, you might just write "Sincerely" or "Yours truly" as a closing. But if you're writing to a friend or someone you know really well, you might try a more creative ending, like these:

Yours till the end,
Marisa

Tons of hugs,
Teresa

*C. U. Later,
Dinos*

Later gator,
Hiroshi

Take a Letter

Name _____

Practice writing a letter to an imaginary person. Here's some information about two people you might write a letter to. First, complete the brainstorming lists below each person. Then, choose one person and write a complete letter to that person on another sheet of paper.

Name: Cesar Lopez Age: 13 Interests: rock group REM BMX biking Atlanta Falcons fan playing the piano Family: Mom Stacy, Dad Luis, brother Tito (10), brother Marco (16)	Name: Anne Carswell Age: 43 Interests: painting pictures L.A. Dodgers fan marathon runner Family: husband Paul, daughter Sarah (8), German shepherd named Bruiser
---	--

What would be an appropriate opening for a letter to this person?

What are some things you might tell this person about yourself?

What are some questions you might ask?

What would be an appropriate closing?

What would be an appropriate opening for a letter to this person?

What are some things you might tell this person about yourself?

What are some questions you might ask?

What would be an appropriate closing?

Using the Writing Process

Writing Personal Letters

Using the writing process can make your personal letters sound more organized, clear, and interesting. Follow these tips when you write personal letters.

•Prewriting•

Make a list of topics you might talk about in a letter.

Look at the last letter the person you're writing to sent to you. Did she or he ask you any questions you'd like to answer in your letter?

Gather the materials you'll need to write your letter, including pen, paper, envelope, address book, and stamp.

•Writing a First Draft•

Follow the format of a letter as you write. The example on page 74 will help remind you what a personal letter looks like.

Use a fun greeting to open your letter if you're writing to a good friend.

Start by telling some interesting things that happened to you recently.

Ask some questions, tell some jokes, give some opinions, and generally be yourself as you write.

•Revising•

Look over your letter and pay special attention to these things:

- Does your letter have an interesting beginning?
- Did you include only things your reader would find interesting?
- Make sure you didn't ask too many questions.

•Proofreading•

Check your letter for misspellings and correct grammar. Even though you might only be sending this letter to a friend, you should make it as readable as possible.

•Publishing•

Rewrite your letter neatly in ink on paper that's easy to read or prepare it on a computer.

Address the envelope and add your return address.

Put the correct amount of postage on the envelope and send your letter.

Project Ideas

Writing Personal Letters

We often want to write letters to friends, but as soon as we start, we seem to run out of ideas. Here is a list of things you could talk about in a personal letter to a friend or relative.

- ✓ something funny that happened at school or something that really made you mad
- ✓ things that have happened in your neighborhood
- ✓ people you've recently talked to whom the receiver of your letter might know, too
- ✓ a TV show or movie you just saw and whether you liked it
- ✓ a CD, song, or band you recently heard and whether you liked it
- ✓ news about your family and things they're doing
- ✓ information about a hobby you enjoy
- ✓ your thoughts about your favorite sports team
- ✓ a project you're doing in school
- ✓ how you're doing in a sport or other after school activity
- ✓ remind the person of what you talked about or did the last time you saw one another
- ✓ include something you've written (poem, story, or song) or drawn recently
- ✓ how you feel about something that's going on in your country or the world
- ✓ somewhere you've visited recently
- ✓ something you're looking forward to doing
- ✓ a joke or funny story you've heard
- ✓ the weather (it's not an exciting topic, but often gets you talking about other topics)
- ✓ something new you or your family just got
- ✓ a recent visitor to your home
- ✓ news about your pets

4 Ways to Write Thank-You Notes

A thank-you note is an important type of letter. It lets others know you appreciate the favor they've done for you or gift they've given you. Thank-you notes are often hard to write because:

- we think they sound stupid or sappy
- they don't sound like us
- we're embarrassed to write something so personal
- we don't really care for the gift we received

Even if you're uncomfortable or embarrassed to write a thank-you note, remember that the person receiving the note usually feels as good about getting a thank-you as you did about getting the gift. Thank-you notes are small things you can do that will make others happy (and help ensure they'll keep doing nice things for you!).

62 Know how to format a thank-you note.

A thank-you note looks a lot like a personal letter, except that it's usually shorter and is written inside a small card. If you don't have a card, though, just use a regular sheet of paper. Write neatly in ink and send it as soon as possible after you received the gift or favor.

Watch Out!

Although it's very common to type a personal letter or print it out from a computer, a thank-you note should probably be handwritten. A handwritten note is much more personal, but don't sweat it, you'll see that a great thank-you note can be just a few sentences long. There's little chance your hand will cramp up!

March 3, 1998	← date
Mr. Jordan,	← greeting
Thanks for feeding my cat while my Dad and I visited my Grandma last week. I know Chazz appreciated being fed at his regular time!	body (1 or 2 short paragraphs)
You always seem to be around whenever we need a favor, Mr. Jordan. Thanks again for taking care of Chazz.	
Sincerely,	← closing
Ty	← signature

63 Start by thanking the person for the gift or favor (be specific).

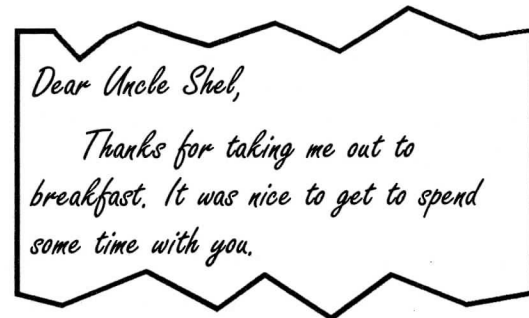
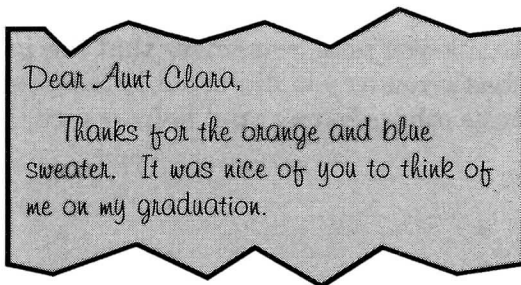
Mention exactly what you received and why. Then, tell why you like it or how it will be used (if you received a gift). If you are thanking someone for a favor they've done, talk about why you appreciated it. Here are some examples:

Thanks so much for the book on jet fighters you gave me for my birthday. You must have known that I really like planes. I can't wait to show it to my friend Anna.

Thanks a lot for taking me to the Red Sox game. It was really a fun day, and seeing Danny catch that foul ball was cool!

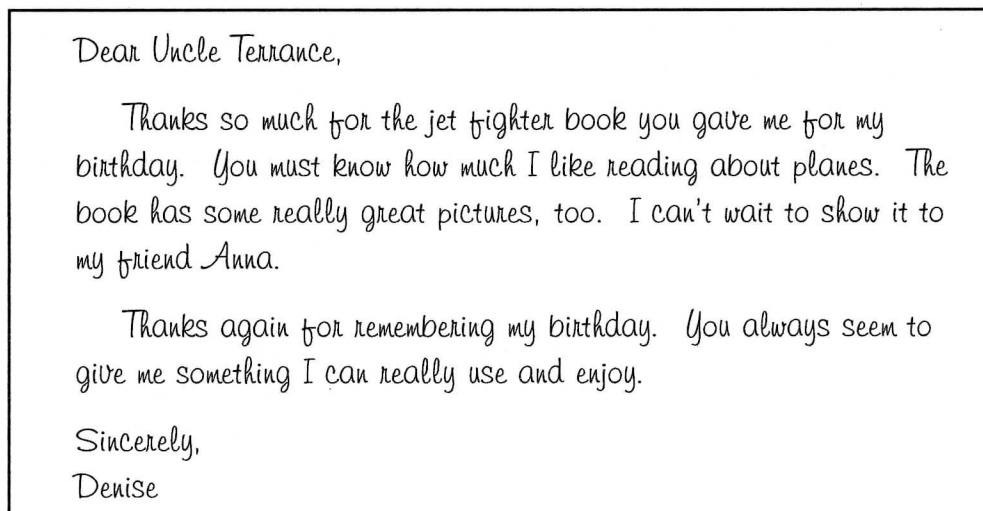
64 Even if you don't like the gift or favor, thank the person for the effort.

A hideous sweater or childish toy might not be the greatest gift in the world, but the thought does count for a lot. Even if you aren't entirely pleased with a gift or a favor you still need to say thanks. Just because someone isn't great at picking out gifts doesn't mean he likes you any less. Here are some ways to say thank you that focus more on the thought than on the gift.



65 Close your letter with a personal touch.

One of the things that makes a thank-you note special to receive is that it is personal. As you close your note, thank the person again for his gift or favor, then mention something about the relationship between you and the giver. Notice how this note closes:



Don't exaggerate your thanks. That's when thank-you notes start sounding phony. Just tell the truth, be yourself, and avoid phrases like these:

- I really, really, really appreciate it!!!
- It's the greatest gift I've ever gotten.
- I'll never know how to thank you for what you've done.
- The earth stopped turning because of what you did.
- You're the greatest friend anyone on Earth has ever had.

Thanks Again!

Name _____

Practice writing beginning paragraphs for some thank-you notes. Imagine you have received each gift or favor. Write a sentence or two thanking the person. Tell what the gift or favor was, what it was for, and why you appreciated it (even if it wasn't something you particularly liked).

1. **What:** cap of your favorite team

Why: going away gift

Thanks so much for the going away gift of a Colorado Rockies baseball cap. How did you know they are my favorite team? I'll think about you whenever I put it on to watch the Rockies play.

2. **What:** CD of your favorite band

Why: holiday gift

3. **What:** drove you to soccer practice

Why: your mom was working

4. **What:** loaning you books about the universe

Why: for a science project

5. **What:** babyish Superman pajamas

Why: birthday gift

Get Your Thanks in Order

Name _____

Practice putting together a complete thank-you note by rewriting this note in the correct order.

Thanks again for remembering my birthday, Grandma. You always seem to know exactly what I want.

August 14, 1997

Thanks a lot for the basketball shoes you gave me for my birthday. You know I've been needing a new pair and you bought just the right kind. I'm breaking them in now and they feel great.

Love,
Brandon

Dear Grandma Zaleski,

This image shows a single sheet of white paper with horizontal blue or grey ruling lines. The lines are evenly spaced and run across the width of the page. There are approximately 20 lines visible. The paper appears to be a standard notebook page or a sheet of stationery designed for writing.

Using the Writing Process

Writing Thank-You Notes

A thank-you note is a pretty brief piece of writing, but using the writing process can still help. Follow these steps and keep this sheet handy as you write thank-you notes.

•Prewriting•

Write your thank-you note as soon as possible after you've received the gift or favor.

Take a few minutes to really think about what you received and how you feel about the person you are writing to.

Gather your materials — paper or thank-you note card, pen, envelope, address book, stamps.

•Writing a First Draft•

Follow the format for writing a thank-you note. The example on page 79 will help you remember the proper format.

Begin the note by thanking the person specifically for the gift or favor in a sentence or two. Mention why you appreciated her effort and if it was a gift, how you will use it.

Close your note by saying something nice about how you feel about the person.

•Revising•

Check your note to make sure your thanks was specific. Also, be on the lookout for exaggeration. Don't over-thank the person. That just sounds phony.

•Proofreading•

Check your note carefully for spelling and grammar. A thank-you note can make a big impression on someone and make him feel really good. A misspelled word or grammar mistake can distract the reader.

•Publishing•

If necessary, rewrite your thank-you note neatly in pen. Although using a computer is fine for personal letters, thank-you notes mean more when they are written in your own handwriting.

Put your note in an envelope, write the address, include your return address, add a stamp, and send it off.

Project Ideas

Writing Thank-You Notes

It's a good idea to practice writing pretend thank-you notes. Even though the thanks aren't necessarily coming from the heart, once you've mastered writing notes in imaginary situations, your own thank-you notes won't be so tough to write. Use the information below to practice writing thank-you notes.

- ✓ Maria just received a holiday gift from her Uncle Berto. She really likes her Uncle Berto because he always has a good joke to tell. But the gift he gave her was an awful-smelling set of perfume and powder. (You can decide on what holiday she received the gift.)
- ✓ When Paolo was working on a research report on the Planets, his neighbor Mr. Petrov loaned him a book on Saturn. The book told a lot about the rings of Saturn and had lots of pictures. Mr. Petrov often stops by to talk to Paolo and his family.
- ✓ Keith is learning to play the guitar but doesn't have the money for guitar lessons. The science teacher at his school, Mr. Wilkins, is a great guitar player. He has stayed after school a couple times to help Keith get started playing. Last year Keith was in Mr. Wilkins' class and thought he did some cool experiments.
- ✓ Kyra graduated from junior high a couple weeks ago. Instead of giving her a gift, her Grandma and Grandpa Livingston gave her a party at their small restaurant. They closed the place and invited all her friends and family. Kyra's grandparents have owned their restaurant for over 45 years and are going to retire soon.
- ✓ Chad's stepbrother Darren Cook is a lot older than him and lives far away. For a holiday gift last year, Darren sent Chad a model race car kit. Chad is 13 years old and the model is for 8- to 10-year-olds. Darren is always really nice to Chad whenever he visits, but they don't have much in common.
- ✓ Dominique is the best player on her seventh grade team. She would have had to quit playing, though, when her mom started working until 6:00 because Dominique needed to be home after school to watch her little sister, Kirsten. Fortunately, Dominique's neighbor, Ms. Thomas, said she would watch Kirsten so Dominique could play basketball. Ms. Thomas is a nice women who is always there to help the girls when their mom isn't home.
- ✓ It's the end of the summer and Trae just finished his part-time job working for Mr. and Mrs. King in their hardware store. He saved half of the money he made through the summer and plans to buy a new bike to ride to school this fall. The Kings gave Trae his first job even though he was young and didn't have any experience.

6 Ways to Write Business Letters

A business letter is a letter you write to a company or organization. It's more formal than a personal letter or thank-you note. You usually write a business letter because you want results. You might write a company to ask for a job, request information, make a complaint, or compliment the company. Knowing the basics of writing business letters is one of the most important skills you can learn. It will make your life easier and could help you become more successful.

66 Know how to format a business letter.

Whatever your purpose, the basic format of a business letter is the same. Remember, formats aren't just meaningless rules to learn. A properly formatted letter automatically earns you respect and helps the chances of someone actually reading your message.

- Make sure your address is included and is correct. You might even include a telephone number and an e-mail address.
- If possible, type or word process a business letter. Typed letters are easier and faster to read than even the neatest handwriting. The person reading your letter is likely to be very busy. A neatly typed letter will get picked up and read before a handwritten one.
- If you must handwrite, don't use spiral notebook paper with a ragged edge. Instead, use stationery or plain 3-hole punched notebook paper. (Lined paper will help your writing stay even and aligned on the page, which will make it more readable.)
- Keep a copy of your letter so you can follow up if you don't hear an answer after a few weeks.

The diagram shows a business letter template with the following components and labels:

- your address**: Points to the sender's address: Chad Juarez, 304 Jackson, Baltimore, MD 10001.
- date**: Points to the date: May 1, 1997.
- inside address (the person you're writing to)**: Points to the recipient's address: Haley's Bike Stop, 506 13th St., Baltimore, MD 10001.
- greeting (Begin the letter simply with the person's name here or a "Dear" before it. If you don't know the person's name, the greeting should just be "To Whom It May Concern." Place a colon after the greeting in a business letter.)**: Points to the greeting: Dear Mr. Haley:
- body (Notice there is no indenting at the beginning of paragraphs. In a business letter you simply leave a space between each paragraph.)**: Points to the main text of the letter, which consists of three paragraphs.
- closing ("Sincerely" is usually best here.)**: Points to the closing: Sincerely,
- your signature (If you're typing, sign the letter in your own handwriting.)**: Points to the signature: Chad Juarez.

6 Ways to Write Business Letters, *continued*

67 Introduce yourself.

A letter is a type of conversation, and a business letter is like a conversation with someone you don't know. The most natural and polite way to begin a conversation is to introduce yourself and tell a little about your background. Here are some examples for three different types of business letters:

complaint letter
to a store owner ★

My name is Chad Juarez. I'm 12 years old and have been in your store many times.

application letter
to a volunteer
organization ▲

I am 14 years old and really like spending time with younger kids.

request for
information letter
to the Wisconsin
tourism bureau ●

My name is Elena Popov. I am 11 years old and have just moved from Europe to Canada with my family.

68 State your purpose clearly.

After you've introduced yourself, get right to the meat of your letter. Say clearly and specifically, why you're writing this letter.

complaint letter
to a store owner ★

I'm writing because I have purchased several things from your store, and the other day I had a bad experience there. I planned to buy a water bottle for my bicycle. Before I could pick one out, though, the salesperson yelled at my friend and me and told us to get out of the store because we were wasting too much time.

application letter
to a volunteer
organization ▲

My teacher suggested I write this letter to tell you I'm interested in becoming a member of the Jackson Neighborhood Center Teen Mentor Program.

request for
information letter
to the Wisconsin
tourism bureau ●

My family is planning to travel to Wisconsin this summer to visit relatives.

69 Tell what you would like to have happen next.

After telling your problem or purpose, begin a new paragraph and ask for a specific action. Notice how clearly each person requests to have something happen in each example:

complaint letter
to a store owner ★

In the future, I'd like to know that I will be able to shop for what I need in your store without being hassled. I would appreciate it if you could assure me that I can shop without any problems from now on.

application letter
to a volunteer
organization ▲

Could you please send me some information and an application for the Teen Mentor Program?

request for
information letter
to the Wisconsin
tourism bureau

I'd appreciate it if you could send me some tourist information about your state. I'm especially interested in the Milwaukee area.

70 Restate your purpose before closing.

For your letter to have its biggest impact, you should close with a paragraph which repeats your reasons for writing. Most people need to hear or read the same information at least twice before it really sinks in.

complaint letter
to a store owner



Once again, Mr. Haley, I've always been a good customer of your store. It was very disappointing to me that I was treated so poorly. I know you don't want all your customers to be treated like I was.

application letter
to a volunteer
organization



As I said before, I really like helping younger kids in any way I can. I look forward to becoming a part of the program.

request for
information
letter to a
tourism bureau



Our family looks forward to visiting Wisconsin. I'll be watching the mail for the information. Thanks again.

71 Sound businesslike but be polite.

Make your letter sound conversational, but don't use a lot of slang or informal language. It's unlikely you'll be treated seriously if you don't sound businesslike. Also, be polite, even if you're making a complaint. Few people have ever gotten the results they desired by being rude.

Amazing things often happen as the result of well-written business letters. Negative situations are often turned into positive ones because of the way people handle their complaints in letters. For example, how might the bike shop example turn into a positive experience as a result of Chad's letter?




Don't try to impress your reader with a big word when a smaller word will do. Use language and words you're comfortable with. A good rule to follow is to never use a word until you're absolutely sure of its meaning, and don't use words in a business letter that you wouldn't use in regular conversation.

State Your Business

Name _____

Read each situation below. Decide which type of business letter you would send in each case. Draw the symbol for that type of letter next to the situation. Then, write what action you'd like to have taken as a result of your letter. An example is done for you.

- ★ letter of compliment/complaint
- ▲ letter of application
- letter of request for information

Situation	Action you'd request
1.  You have written a story and want to enter it in a contest.	<i>Please consider the story I've written and enclosed for the writing contest.</i>
2. _____ A park district employee helped you report your stolen bike to the police when it was taken from the pool parking lot.	<hr/> <hr/> <hr/>
3. _____ You are doing a report on nuclear energy and would like to know more about nuclear safety.	<hr/> <hr/> <hr/>
4. _____ A friend of yours just moved to Alaska, and you want to learn more about the state.	<hr/> <hr/> <hr/>
5. _____ None of the cars on your street obey the stop signs or speed limit.	<hr/> <hr/> <hr/>
6. _____ You would like to become an assistant coach for the youth basketball league.	<hr/> <hr/> <hr/>

Using the Writing Process

Writing Business Letters

A business letter is an important piece of writing. Use the writing process to help create business letters that are neat, clear, and effective. These tips should help keep you organized.

•Prewriting•

Gather your thoughts and decide specifically what you will write about and what action you want to request.

Gather your materials, including the full name and address of the person who you will be writing to. You may need to do some phone calling to find the correct person.

•Writing a First Draft•

Follow the format for writing a business letter. The example on page 85 will help you write in the proper format.

Begin the letter by introducing yourself. Then, state your purpose clearly and tell what action you'd like to have taken as a result of your letter. Restate your letter before closing.

•Revising•

As you look over your letter to make sure you're satisfied, make sure your purpose and request are both very clear. Let someone else read your letter to make sure your reader will understand exactly what you want to say.

Make sure your language is businesslike and polite. Don't try to sound too formal or use a lot of big words. You want this letter to sound like yourself.

•Proofreading•

Of all the things you might write, a business letter needs to be proofread the most carefully. You probably won't be taken as seriously if your letter contains misspellings and grammar mistakes. You want your letter to sound as professional as possible.

•Publishing•

If possible, type your letter or prepare it on a computer. A neatly typed letter is much easier to read than even the cleanest handwriting. If you must handwrite your letter, use ink and regular three-hole punched paper.

Put your note in an envelope, write the address, include your return address, add a stamp, and send it off.

Project Ideas

Writing Business Letters

This page contains several situations which might require business letters. Choose situations from this page to practice writing business letters or make up some scenarios of your own.*

1

You've just opened a box of your favorite cereal — Crusty O's. You love them for their light, sweet crunch and lack of artificial coloring. What you don't like is the big dead beetle you've just seen perched on top of the pile of cereal as you cracked open the plastic. Something needs to be done about this! You decide to write a letter of complaint to:

Ms. Lucinda Jefferson
Chief Executive Officer
Crater Cereal Corporation
1 Crusty Drive
Grain City, MI 10001

2

Your dad has made it clear that you won't be sitting around watching cartoons and eating cheese crackers all summer. He insists you get involved in something. You hear that the youth center is looking for volunteers to coach baseball. You like baseball, so you decide to apply. You write a letter of application to:

Mr. Felipe Vargas
Program Coordinator
Cooperative Youth Center
1557 14th St.
Baltimore, MD 10001

3

You and a partner have decided to do a science project on clean water. You want to test water in different places around your city to see how clean it is. You have heard that the National Water Project gives out free water testing kits to people who write to them for information. You decide to give it a shot and write a request for information letter to:

National Water Project
820 Hydro Spillway
Washington DC 10001

4

Last week you were riding your bicycle home from an after-school activity and got a bad flat. You were at least five blocks from home and it was going to be a long push uphill. Just as you started pushing, a squad car pulled up and Officer Carol Dupree offered you a ride home. You tossed your bike in the trunk and in a couple minutes, you were home without even breaking a sweat. You decide to send a letter of compliment to her boss at:

Sergeant Davis Walker
Centertown Police Dept.
38 State Ave.
Centertown OK 10001

*All addresses on this page are completely fictitious.

6 Ways to Write E-mails

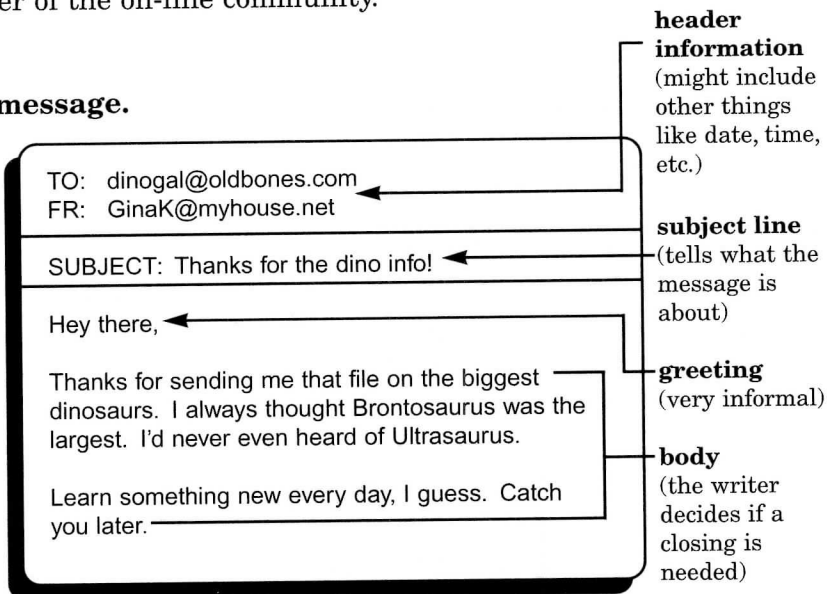
An e-mail (electronic mail) message is really just a special type of letter. Many of the things you've already learned about letters applies to e-mails as well. There are, however, a few guidelines that are specific to e-mail.

The messages you place on the Internet could be read by thousands of people. Writers who post clear, relevant e-mails are likely to be respected and responded to. There are a lot of people posting on the Internet who aren't aware that their messages are irrelevant, ignored, and ridiculed. Worse, some of these writers actually think their e-mails are clever! The following tips will help you become a productive, responsible member of the on-line community.

72 Know how to format an e-mail message.

E-mail formats will change depending on the type of software you use. The basics of a message, though, are pretty universal. Here are some basic format tips:

- Don't use all capital letters. In netspeak (the unofficial "language" of the Internet), all capitals mean **YOU ARE ANGRY AND ARE SHOUTING YOUR MESSAGE**. It's considered impolite and annoying. All capitals are also hard to read, so don't expect *anyone* to pay attention to messages written in all capital letters.
- Keep your paragraphs short. Long paragraphs make your message look hard to read. Making your message look easy to read will increase the chance that people will actually take the time to read it.



73 Know the rules of e-mail etiquette.

E-mail ground rules help everyone by creating an environment where time isn't wasted and where everyone can clearly read messages sent. If you haven't come across some of the following references yet, you will if you are on-line for long:

- **Watch your tone of voice.** Remember that the person reading your message can't see your facial expressions or hear your tone of voice, so teasing and sarcasm rarely work. Keep your message to the point and you won't have to worry about being misunderstood.
- **Never "flame" or take part in a flame war.** One of the biggest complaints, aimed at younger users especially, is the time and space wasted in flaming. A *flame* is when you send a message for the sole purpose of criticizing someone. Flames are usually aimed at new users who make mistakes. If you receive a flame, don't respond with meaner words. Do what you can't do in a conversation — delete the message and forget it.
- **Always double-check your "TO:" line.** Be absolutely sure you're sending to the right address and group or posting to the correct bulletin board.

- **Be polite.** It's the easiest rule. Rudeness won't get you friends, admiration, or even self-satisfaction. Being polite and intelligent just might get you all those things.

74 Complete the subject line.

The subject line gives your reader an idea of what is to follow. Don't leave the subject line blank. When people have several messages to scan, the subject lines let them know which messages they want to read first. Here are some examples of brief, informative subject lines:

- SUBJECT: New bike route to your house.
- SUBJECT: Party this Saturday at 7:00.
- SUBJECT: A question for hockey fans . . .

75 Don't try to cover too many topics.

An e-mail is meant to be a brief note in most cases. Think of it as leaving a note on someone's locker door. Keep your message clear and to the point, and don't ask a lot of questions or give a lot of personal information like you might in a personal letter. Notice how the writer stays on topic in this message:

TO: JulieT@hercomputer.net FR: Margo123@hernetwork.net
SUBJECT: New bike route
Hey Jules! Wanted to let you know about the bike route I discovered between my house and Leanne's. Take 40th and turn right on Madison. Then, follow Madison to NewGate Park and use the path to cut through the park. Hop on 52nd and turn right on Exeter to her house. It's a great route and none of the streets are busy. Talk to you soon!

76 When replying to a message, include some of the original text.

Most e-mail programs let you copy pieces from mail you've received and "paste" them in a new message. Some people receive a lot of e-mail and just replying to their message often isn't enough. If you don't remind them of what they said to you first, your reply might not mean anything.

To include information from the original e-mail (as shown in the example on the next page), you usually highlight the text you want and choose COPY from the EDIT menu. Move to your new message and place your cursor inside the new box. Choose PASTE from the EDIT menu and the text will show up. Sometimes pasted text will be set off by arrows.

TO: Margo 123@hernetwork.net FR: JulieT@hercomputer.net
SUBJECT: REPLY TO: New bike route
<p>Thanks Margo,</p> <p>On June 14, you wrote:</p> <p>> Wanted to let you know about the bike route I discovered between my house and > Leanne's.</p> <p>I'm going to try the new route next Tuesday. I'll go down to Leanne's on Exeter, then take the route to your place. Will you be home?</p> <p>> It's a great route and none of the streets are busy!</p> <p>Sounds a lot safer than riding on Washington. I'm always afraid I'll be squashed like a bug on that street.</p> <p>Let me know if you'll be home on Tuesday. I'll try to be there about 2:00.</p> <p>See ya!</p>

77 Understand the language of the Internet.

Internet users often speak in a language all their own known as *netspeak*. Netspeak consists of symbols, abbreviations, and combinations of the two. Here are some examples of netspeak. You'll surely come across a lot more:

IMHO	In My Humble Opinion	IMHO, Boyz to Men is the best group of the 90s.
LOL	Laughing Out Loud	usually written after someone has told a joke
TTFN	Ta Ta For Now	TTFN, see you later.
snail mail	traditional paper mail	I'll drop that tape in the snail mail tomorrow.
<g>	grin	Don't you just love black socks with sandals <g>?
BTW	By The Way	BTW, have you seen Tom Cruise in any good movies?
"smileys"	Smileys are almost a language all their own. People use them to add personality and emotion to what they write. Practice making these faces with the keyboard and make up your own:	
	:) <i>happy</i>	:(<i>sad</i> ;) <i>winking</i> 8^ <i>happy (with glasses)</i>



Using some abbreviations and symbols is okay, but don't overdo it. Your messages will start to look like military reports and no one will be able to understand you.

What's the Subject?

Name _____

Read each brief e-mail message. Write a subject line that might describe the message. An example is done for you.

SUBJECT: *Favorite TV show list*

I've volunteered to put together a list of favorite TV shows for our e-mail group. Please send me your 5 favorite shows by November 13. I'll post the list by the 15th.

SUBJECT:

I visited your web site two months ago and requested that you send me a catalog. I haven't received anything yet and am really looking forward to looking at your CDs and tapes. I'll look for your catalog soon.

SUBJECT:

Dude, you wouldn't believe the concert last Wednesday. Smashing Melons played free in the park and we all jammed right next to the stage. Too bad you had to miss it. What were you doing anyway?

SUBJECT:

Here's your trivia question for the day: Which of these three animals isn't raised by the father? a) ostrich b) killer whale c) seahorse

SUBJECT:

Did you see the game last night? Penny Hardaway had 38 points and was awesome! I've never seen anyone play like him. You have to agree he's going to be one of the best of all time.

Name _____

Use the strategies you've learned to reply to this e-mail. Pretend you've received this message out of the blue and would like to respond to this person. Include information from the original message in your reply. Set it off by using the > symbol as in the example on page 93.

TO: you
FR: NBAfan1@hoopnet.net

SUBJECT: Let's hear it from NBA fans!

Hi,

I thought you might like some e-mail :) I'm writing a book on NBA fans and would like to hear about why you like your favorite player or teams. If your story or reasons are unique, you might appear in my book.

Just write your reasons in 2 to 4 sentences. I look forward to hearing from you.

Judd

TO: NBAfan1@hoopnet.net
FR:

SUBJECT: REPLY TO:

Using the Writing Process

Writing E-mails

An e-mail is a different kind of writing because you don't need any paper to write it. That doesn't mean you can't use the writing process to write better e-mails, though. Use the tips below to help you apply a process to your e-mail writing.

•Prewriting•

Before writing, get your topic clear in your head. An e-mail is most effective when it sticks to one topic.

Make sure you have the exact address of the person you will be sending to. Internet addresses can be tricky, and accidentally sending your message to someone else can be really embarrassing.

•Writing a First Draft•

Complete the subject line to briefly describe your message.

Write a brief greeting, then write your message. Keep your paragraphs to one or two sentences to make your e-mail as readable as possible.

Follow the rules of e-mail etiquette as you write.

•Revising•

Look over your message to make sure you haven't strayed too far from your original topic.

Glance at your message and decide if you think it "looks" easy to read.

•Proofreading•

Misspelled words and poor grammar run rampant on the Internet. That doesn't mean you need to write sloppy as well. Proofread your e-mail carefully. It's probably a short note, so it won't take you long to look through it once more before sending it off.

Double-check your "TO:" line to make sure you're sending the message to the right place.

•Publishing•

Publishing an e-mail is probably the easiest part. Just click "Send."

Project Ideas

Writing E-mails

There are two types of project ideas on this page. Section 1 consists of e-mails which require replies. In Section 2 you'll simply find subject lines. See if you can write brief e-mails which match these subject lines. You can address these messages to anyone you like. Have fun making up Internet addresses.

1

TO: you1@yercomputer.net
FR: DJDeon@hisnetwork.net

SUBJECT: New music!

What's up?

There is some really great music out right now. I still find myself listening to older stuff, though. I can never remember any of the groups' names or I'd tell you some of the songs I really like.

Everybody seems to be getting turned on by country music these days. I've always liked to rock myself. What kinds of music are you into? What new stuff are you listening to?

Talk to you later
Deon

TO: you1@yercomputer.net
FR: mathnut@hisnetwork.net

SUBJECT: Not such a great day

Hey,

That science quiz was a killer today. I can't believe he asked us that "difference between amphibians and reptiles" stuff. Who can remember all those things anyway? Do you even like science?

Give me some good old fashioned multiplying fractions problems any day. I can't handle all this slimy frog and toad junk. I've always been a math person. What is your favorite subject anyway?

See you tomorrow.

2

SUBJECT: The best day of my life

SUBJECT: Did you see the game last night?

SUBJECT: I don't know if I'll get this English paper done on time.

SUBJECT: The best movie you've seen recently

SUBJECT: e-mail vs. snail mail

SUBJECT: Too much time spent sitting around

SUBJECT: Is that what she said? Are you sure?



Unit 6

Nonfiction Writing

The types of nonfiction writing in this unit could be considered “classroom-oriented writing.” The forms covered — reviews, research papers, and personal essays — reflect the types of writing many students are assigned in various academic subjects. The goal of this unit is to help students approach these time-honored forms of academic writing with a fresh eye pointed toward success and clarity.

You’ve undoubtedly read your share of disorganized, incomplete pieces of nonfiction from your students. These efforts usually don’t succeed for lack of originality or initial enthusiasm, but often fall down because of inadequate organization and structure. There is nothing that will frustrate a young writer more than to be armed with a task they have a lot of enthusiasm about, such as writing a review of their favorite group’s latest CD, only to have that enthusiasm dwindle into a disorganized mass of written opinions, rather than a clear, concise piece of criticism. The strategies in this unit were developed to keep a students’ enthusiasm alive and channel it into an organized piece of writing from the beginning.

The ability to organize factual information into a clear written piece is a skill which will only become more important as your students go through life. It’s true that beyond high school and college, it is unlikely that a student will be asked to write a formal research paper. It is likely, though, that your students will be asked repeatedly throughout their lives to explain themselves and their opinions through written reports and comments. The ability to write and organize factual information is a skill much like letter writing. The employee who can put her thoughts and recommendations together with facts and statistics is one who can help her company make valuable and sound business decisions.

Goals:

- to prepare students to complete academic writing assignments in the areas of reviews, research papers, and personal essays successfully
- to provide strategies for students to sustain their initial level of excitement about a writing project throughout the process

8 Ways to Write a Review

handout102

Sum It Up activity sheet106

Review Planner activity sheet107

Using the Writing Process — Writing Reviews handout110

Project Ideas — Writing Reviews handout111

9 Ways to Write a Research Paper

handout112

Get Specific activity sheet117

Title Wave activity sheet118

How Resourceful! activity sheet119

Using the Writing Process — Writing Research Papers handout120

Project Ideas — Writing Research Papers handout121

6 Ways to Write a Personal Essay

handout122

A Different Approach activity sheet125

Using the Writing Process — Writing Personal Essays handout126

Project Ideas — Writing Personal Essays handout127

Unit 6: Nonfiction Writing, *continued*

The ability to write and research is rewarded and sought in nearly every level of business. If writing a research paper is a valuable life skill, then writing reviews and essays are important personal development exercises. Writing opinions about the arts forces students to look and listen more closely to the media than they ordinarily would. This scrutiny heightens their perceptions about the world and develops critical thinking skills which will make them better problem solvers throughout their lives. Writing a personal essay allows students the opportunity to probe their own thoughts and feelings about their own lives. An essay allows a student to realize that the little things in life are often the most important ones.

8 Ways to Write a Review handout, page 102

Getting students to think critically about the things around them can sometimes be a challenge. Using the things they are exposed to often — books, TV shows, and movies — is a great way to inspire their inner critics. As they work through this unit, provide them with examples of reviews from professional critics to model. Most city newspapers carry regular movie reviews and the Sunday edition “Entertainment” or “Arts” section is usually full of reviews of all kinds. Also, the magazine *Entertainment Weekly* is basically devoted to reviewing the latest, books, TV shows, movies, videos, CDs, and even computer programs and on-line services.

Although the example in this unit on page 105 includes only two specific supporting opinions, stress to your students that a fully realized review would contain many such opinion paragraphs. Also, remind them that a review can be mixed — filled with opinions for and against what’s being reviewed.

Sum It Up activity sheet, page 106

If your students have difficulty diving directly into summary writing for books, TV shows, and movies, you might ease them into it by having them summarize events from their own life using the same kind of formula they would for a review. For example, you might have them write a summary for “What I did after school yesterday” or “How I spent the weekend.”

Review Planner activity sheet, pages 107-109

This planner is included for reviews because the format for a review contains more and different kinds of pieces than the other types of writing which have been discussed.

9 Ways to Write a Research Paper handout, page 112

The basic aim of this approach to writing research papers is to encourage students to keep their papers focused and manageable. You might supplement the writing of bibliography information by providing your students with some photocopied bibliographies from books. These examples will help them model the correct format.

Get Specific activity sheet, page 117

This page helps students practice whittling down general topics into more specific, focused ideas. Share the ideas as a class to illustrate the range of ideas students have produced. Compare how much easier it would be to produce a paper on the more focused topic than the general one.

Title Wave

activity sheet, page 118

This activity encourages students to take almost a journalistic approach to titling their papers. In the grand scheme of things, creating an interesting title may be a low priority. However, encouraging students to approach any part of their writing with a personal, unique perspective can only help them be a little more enthused about the process. Also, a title often sets the tone for the entire piece.

How Resourceful!

activity sheet, page 119

Students will create a mock bibliography as they work through this page. When students are finished, ask for ideas on what students think the topic of this person's research paper was.

6 Ways to Write a Personal Essay
handout, page 122

A definition for a personal essay will be mixed. For the purposes of this group of

strategies, a personal essay is being treated as a piece of nonfiction writing which is about a personal topic or is a personal interpretation of any topic. These strategies focus on looking at some ordinary topics from a unique perspective. Encourage your students to be creative as they design approaches to their essays. The handout contains some good examples of types of writing they may not have had much experience with but might be eager to try.

A Different Approach

activity sheet, page 125

This page allows your students to identify different types of essay-writing approaches. You might begin by reviewing the three kinds of approaches on this activity sheet. When your students have finished, have them brainstorm essay topic ideas and consider approaches they might use for those approaches. They might work in reverse as well. You could provide an approach and ask students to brainstorm essay topics which would work well with that type of approach.

8 Ways to Write a Review

Everyone's a critic! Now it's your turn to be one too. You see, read, and hear so much every day — books, magazines, TV shows, movies, and songs — you certainly have opinions about all these things. Writing a review is a way to express your opinion about something you've seen, heard, or read. Reviews often help others decide whether they will want to read, listen to, or see what you did. Putting together a review is also a way for you to think about entertainment in a new way.

78 Get the vital facts right.

If other people are to take your review seriously, you need to get the basic facts straight. Create a fact sheet like the ones below to help you make sure you have the information correct. You'll refer to this sheet when you begin writing.

Fact Sheet	
Title:	<i>The Outsiders</i>
Author:	S.E. Hinton
Year:	1967
Main Characters:	
Ponyboy	Darry
Dally	Sodapop
Johnny	

▲ Book review

Fact Sheet	
Title:	<i>Return of the Jedi</i>
Year:	1983
Main Characters (Stars):	
Luke Skywalker	(Mark Hamill)
Han Solo	(Harrison Ford)
Princess Leia	(Carrie Fisher)
Darth Vader	(James Earl Jones)

▲ TV show/movie review*

Fact Sheet	
Title:	<i>Cracked Rear View</i>
Band:	<i>Hootie and the Blowfish</i>
Year:	1995
Songs:	Hannah Jane, Hold My Hand, Let Her Cry, Only Wanna Be With You, Running from an Angel, I'm Goin' Home, Drowning, Time, Look Away, Not Even the Trees, Goodbye

▲ CD review**

79 Read, listen, or watch critically.

When you read a book, watch a show, or listen to music, you probably don't think too much about what you're doing. You just let yourself be entertained. That's great, but when you are going to review something, you need to pay closer attention to what's going on. Ask yourself these questions as you're being entertained:

- ☐ How does this make me feel (good, bad, sad, happy, neutral)?
- ☐ Does everything that happens in this story make sense?
- ☐ Is that character too mean or too good to be believable?
- ☐ What do I think of the lyrics to the song? Do they fit the music?
- ☐ Would I like to read, listen to, or see this again? Why?
- ☐ Would I tell someone else to read, listen to, or see this? Why?

As you can see, the questions will be a little different depending on what you're reviewing, but the idea is the same. Don't just sit there. Question and try to understand what it is you're experiencing. Don't try to write too much as you're listening, watching, or reading for the first time, though. You can write your opinions later.

*If you're reviewing a TV show, your fact sheet might include the channel and time the show airs.

**If you're reviewing a song, you might include the CD the song came from and the composer(s).

80 Quickly write some opinions.

Brainstorm, or *freewrite* some opinions about what you've just experienced. Freewriting means you just write whatever comes into your mind. It's a lot like the clustering you've done on other writing projects. Simply make a list of opinions or statements about how what you've just read, listened to, or watched made you feel. Here's an example for the book *The Outsiders*.

Opinions for *The Outsiders*:

- ✓ I liked Ponyboy a lot. He seemed like a good person with a lot of problems.
- ✓ Ponyboy and Johnny were good friends. It's nice to read a story about good friends.
- ✓ Dally seemed to be too wild to be believable. Why would those other guys keep hanging around with him?
- ✓ This was a great story. I couldn't wait to read what would happen next.
- ✓ This story really showed how friends will hang together no matter what.
- ✓ The greasers seemed to get into trouble just because people didn't like the way they looked.
- ✓ Bad things can happen when people are judged by what they look like.
- ✓ I think anyone who has ever felt left out of something would like this book.

Look over your opinions. First of all, choose two or three statements that you'd like to write more about in your review. Next, decide whether you will give the book, CD, or movie a positive or negative review. It looks as if this writer will give *The Outsiders* a positive review.

81 Summarize what you've read, listened to, or watched.

A review always contains a *summary*. A summary is a paragraph which tells the reader about the book, movie, or CD you've experienced. Here are some examples of summaries which might appear in a review:

Summary for *The Outsiders*:

The Outsiders is a story of friendship and tragedy. A group of friends known as "greasers" because of their long, oily hair, clashes with the "Soc's," a group of rich kids. A Soc gets killed and the two greasers who did it (Ponyboy and Johnny) head out of town to hide. As they're hiding, a fire breaks out in a school. Ponyboy and Johnny help rescue the kids, but Johnny gets badly burned and later dies. While all of this is going on, Ponyboy is trying to get along with his older brother, Darry, who is also the guardian of Ponyboy and his brother Soda. The story is pretty sad, but the friendships and family relationships keep it from being too sad.

Summary for *Return of the Jedi*:

The Return of the Jedi is a movie of adventure and excitement. A young Jedi warrior, Luke Skywalker, tries to save the Rebel Alliance again with his partners Princess Leia Organa and Han Solo. This movie is a sequel to *Star Wars* and *The Empire Strikes Back*. This time, Luke comes face to face with his

8 Ways to Write a Review, *continued*

father, the evil Darth Vader, and Vader's boss, the dark Emperor. Darth Vader and the Emperor try to talk Luke into joining them on the "dark side," but Luke refuses. A fight breaks out and before Luke kills his father in battle, he finds out that he and Leia are brother and sister. The emperor's Death Star base is then destroyed and the Rebel Alliance has won again.

Summary for "Cracked Rear View" by Hootie and the Blowfish:

Cracked Rear View is a CD put out by Hootie and the Blowfish in 1995. It's a 12-song CD of easy rock 'n' roll music that was very popular. Several of the songs were played on the radio, including "I Only Wanna Be With You" and "Let Her Cry." Hootie and the Blowfish is a band that has been together for a long time. They played many small places in the Southeastern U.S. before finally recording the hit album *Cracked Rear View*.

You'll notice the writer included some information about the band in the summary for the CD review. You can find this kind of the information in magazines in the library and on the Internet.

82 Write a strong opening.

Good reviews always start with a strong, interesting opening. One of the best ways to open a review is to refer to something specific in the book, movie, TV show, or CD. Don't come right out and tell your opinion in the first sentence. Instead, try to grab the reader's interest by including a line of dialogue or lyric or reference to a scene in the movie. Here are some sample openings:

The Outsiders

What do you think of when you hear the word *greaser*? When you read *The Outsiders* by S.E. Hinton, you'll not only find out exactly what a greaser is, you might also wish you were one.

Return of the Jedi

The dark side of the force might be a fun place to visit, but Luke Skywalker won't be spending any more time there. In *Return of the Jedi*, Skywalker and friends take on the evil Darth Vader once and for all.

Cracked Rear View

Hootie and Blowfish sing "I Only Wanna Be With You" on their CD *Cracked Rear View*. From the way the CD has sold, it looks like they'll be with us a long time.

Notice how each author chose something specific to open the review:

The Outsiders — the word *greaser*

Return of the Jedi — characters and "the dark side"

Cracked Rear View — song title "I Only Wanna Be With You"

83 Begin to put it all together.

Now you have something to write about. Along with the opening and summary, you'll write a paragraph for each opinion you chose in #80. Look at the completed review on the next page to get an idea of how you'll put these pieces together.

As you write about your opinions, remember your rules for paragraphing. Your main opinion should be your topic sentence (topic sentences are underlined in the review below). The other sentences in your paragraph should have something to do with your topic sentence.

84 Make a recommendation.

Another piece of your review is a recommendation. In this short paragraph, you'll say whether you think the reader should read, listen to, or watch what you're reviewing. If you wouldn't recommend what you're reviewing, give good reasons. Don't just say you hated it.

85 Mention your opening in your closing.

The closing of your review will be stronger if you refer to the same specific example you did in the opening. You'll notice in the sample review, the writer mentions the word *greaser* again in the closing.

The Outsiders	title
What do you think of when you hear the word <i>greaser</i> ? When you read <i>The Outsiders</i> by S.E. Hinton you'll not only find out exactly what a greaser is, but you might also wish you were one.	opening
<i>The Outsiders</i> is a story of friendship and tragedy. A group of friends known as "greasers" because of their long, oily hair clashes with the "Soc's," a group of rich kids. A Soc gets killed and the two greasers who did it (Ponyboy and Johnny) head out of town to hide. As they're hiding, a fire breaks out in a school. Ponyboy and Johnny help rescue the kids, but Johnny gets badly burned and later dies. While all of this is going on, Ponyboy is trying to get along with his older brother, Darry, who is also the guardian of Ponyboy and his brother Soda. The story is pretty sad, but the friendships and family relationships keep it from being too sad.	summary
<u>This story really shows how friends will hang together no matter what.</u> Even though the story was tragic, these guys had fun together, and no one else wanted to be friends with them. Ponyboy and Johnny got in a tough spot and everyone pitched in to help them out.	opinion #1
<u>The Outsiders also showed me that you shouldn't judge people by what they look like.</u> The Soc's had cars, nice clothes, and money, but they were mean and cruel people. The greasers didn't have anything but one another, but they had a lot going for them. Darry was a hard worker and Ponyboy was a good athlete and smart. Johnny and Dally risked their lives to save some kids from a fire. In the end, the greasers seemed like a much better bunch of guys.	opinion #2
I'd recommend that anyone read this book. It's not only a great story, but it also makes you think about the way we treat each other. I learned that good friends are important and hard to find.	recommendation
No matter what you call yourself, after you read <i>The Outsiders</i> , you'll realize we're all greasers and outsiders sometimes.	closing

Sum It Up

Name _____

The summary is one of the most important parts of your review. Your reader probably hasn't seen, read, or heard what it is you're reviewing. Your summary will give the reader a quick, but thorough, idea of what you're reviewing. Here are the things you need to include in a summary (Look at the summaries on pages 103-104 for examples.)

- a clear topic sentence that describes what you're reviewing
- mention of the main characters in the story or show
- a few sentence which describe what happened

If you're reviewing a CD or concert, you'd mention the band members, songs, and maybe some background information about the group. Practice your skills by writing a summary for each situation below. Use another sheet of paper if you need more room.

the last TV show you watched

the last movie you saw

the last book you read

Review Planner

Name _____

These pages will help you plan your review, step by step. You can use them over and over, or create your own fact sheets and planners to help organize your review.

Fact Sheet

Title _____

Author/Band _____

Year _____

Characters (Stars)/
Songs _____

Quick Opinions

Use this space to write some quick opinions about what you've just experienced.

✓ _____

✓ _____

✓ _____

✓ _____

Review Planner, *continued*

Quick Opinions, *continued*



✓

Circle at least two opinions that you'll use in your review.

Summary

Use this space to write your summary.

[illegible]

Opening

Choose something specific from your TV show, movie, book, or CD to include in your opening and write it here:

✓

Review Planner_{, continued}

Opening_{, continued}

Create your opening using the specific example from the previous page.

Recommendation

Will you recommend what you listened to, read, or saw to someone else? ☐ yes ☐ no

Write your reasons.

Closing

Create a closing that mentions the specific example used in your opening.

Refer to the completed review on page 105 to put all the pieces of your review together.

Using the Writing Process

Writing Reviews

A review has many parts and can be a little tricky to put together. Using the steps of the writing process can help you keep everything organized. Keep this sheet handy as you write your reviews.

•Prewriting•

Get the facts straight. Write the important information about title, characters, names of songs, year published or released, etc.

Read, listen, or watch critically. Don't just sit there. Think about how what you're reviewing makes you feel as you're experiencing it.

Write some opinions off the top of your head. Select a few of these opinions to use in your review. Each of these opinions will become a paragraph in your review.

Write a summary of what you're reviewing.

•Writing a First Draft•

Write a strong opening for your review. Include something specific, like a line from the book, something a character says in the movie, or a line from the song to capture your reader's attention.

Put your review together in this order:

1. opening
2. summary
3. opinion paragraphs
4. recommendation
5. closing

•Revising•

Ask yourself these questions as you revise:

- Do my opinion paragraphs make sense?
- Did I give good reasons for my opinion?
- Does my closing remind my reader of the opening?
- Did I give a clear recommendation?

•Proofreading•

As usual, check your paper carefully for spelling and grammar. Remember that movie titles, book titles, and CD titles are in italics or underlined. TV shows and names of songs are usually in quotation marks.

•Publishing•

Think about submitting your review to your school newspaper. Another idea is to record your review on audio or video tape.

Project Ideas

Writing Reviews

This page contains different kinds of questions you might ask yourself depending on what you're reviewing. Answering these questions in your review will make it more complete and interesting. Keep these lists handy as you write reviews. Add your own questions to the lists, too.

1

Reviewing a CD

- ✓ What kind of music does this group play? Do you usually like this kind of music?
- ✓ What's your favorite song on the CD and why? What's your least favorite?
- ✓ Has this group or person been around for a long time?
- ✓ Does this music sound like anyone else's you've heard? How does it compare?

2

Reviewing a TV Show

- ✓ Do you usually watch this show or is this the first time?
- ✓ Is there a particular star you like on this show? Is there someone you don't like?
- ✓ How is this show better than or not as good as similar shows?
- ✓ Was it worth the time you took to watch this show, or would you rather have done something else?

3

Reviewing a Movie

- ✓ What kind of movie was this (action, thriller, comedy, etc.)? Do you usually like this kind of movie?
- ✓ What did you expect this movie would be like? Were you surprised?
- ✓ Is there a particular star you like in this movie? Is there someone you don't like?
- ✓ Was this movie worth the price of admission, rental fee, or time you spent watching?

4

Reviewing a Book

- ✓ Have you read anything else by this author? How does this book compare to other books by this author?
- ✓ Did you see yourself in any of the characters in the story?
- ✓ Did everything that happened in the story make sense?
- ✓ If you had written this book, what's something you would have done differently?

9 Ways to Write a Research Paper

When you think of fun things to do, writing a research paper probably doesn't make the list. Writing a research paper can actually be pretty interesting if you do it the right way. The topic you choose is usually the difference between a good time and a big snore. Follow these tips and your research papers will not only be more interesting and easier to write, you might just enjoy yourself.

86 Choose an interesting topic.

Most research papers are boring to write and read because the writer chooses an ordinary, boring topic. In Unit 3 on pages 31-32, the writer chose *sharks* as a topic. Sharks are interesting, but the writer might have made the paper better by narrowing his subject to one of these:

- ☐ The Oldest Fish
- ☐ Man-eating Sharks
- ☐ Nature's Perfect Killing Machines

Not only would each of these titles make a more interesting paper than simply *Sharks*, the paper would be much easier to write. It would be easier to stay focused on the topic, and research material would be easier to find.

You'll often have to do some reading about your main topic before you can find an interesting narrow topic to write about. As soon as you find something that you want to know more about, you've probably found your topic. It's always best to write about something that interests you.

87 Develop a thesis statement.

The thesis statement is sort of your road map as you research and write. A thesis statement is a sentence or two that states what your paper will tell about your topic. Here are some thesis statements for the shark topics:

Topic	Thesis Statement
The Oldest Fish	Sharks have been around for many years and haven't changed much over all that time. This paper will show just how long sharks have been around and why.
Man-Eating Sharks	Some sharks do attack people. This paper will explore when sharks attack people, why they do, and what people are doing to protect themselves.
Nature's Perfect Killing Machines	A shark's body is designed for hunting and killing. This paper will show why the shark is such a great hunter and why sharks are important to the oceans.

Write your thesis statement on a note card or in a notebook. You'll need to use it as you do your research later. Your thesis statement will also be used to help write the introduction for your paper.

88 Identify your subtopics.

Your subtopics are the ideas that relate to your main topic. Each of your subtopics will become a paragraph or group of paragraphs in your research paper. Brainstorm your subtopics by thinking about things you want to know about your main topic. You may need to do some more reading to come up with subtopics. Make sure your subtopics follow your thesis statement. Here are some ideas for one of the shark topics:

Topic: Man-Eating Sharks

subtopics:

- ✓ statistics about shark attacks
- ✓ kinds of sharks known to attack humans
- ✓ reasons sharks attack swimmers
- ✓ things people do to prevent shark attacks



Be ready to add or get rid of some subtopics as you research. You'll find new things about your topic that you may want to add to your paper. Others you originally thought would be important might not seem so great once you learn more about them.

89 Choose appropriate research materials.

A big mistake a writer can make is to spend too much time researching her topic. Use your subtopics and thesis statement to guide your research. Instead of loading your arms with books at the library, use these tips to begin your research:

- Select a recently published (within last 5-10 years) book on your general topic. This book will not only help you get an overall feeling for your topic, it will probably help you come up with your narrow topic, thesis statement, and subtopics.
- Do an Internet search on your topic in several different ways. For instance, you might use a search engine to find *sharks*, *man-eating sharks*, *predators*, *ocean*, or *aquariums and zoos*. You might even find a shark expert on-line who can help you.
- Only after you've done the above steps, begin searching in the library for your specific topic. Generally, magazine and newspaper articles will give the most recent information on your topic. Use the table of contents and indexes of books to find the information you need quickly.
- Finally, only keep five different pieces of research in your possession at any one time. Too many writers check out stacks of books and never open them. Don't get more materials until you've finished with the ones you have.

90 Take good notes.

You can read tons of research material, but it does you little good if you don't take good notes. Effective notes are brief, complete, and accurate. Lots of people like to use note cards, but a notebook does just as well. The most important thing is to organize your notes by subtopics. Either keep your note cards in subtopic piles or keep notes on the same subtopic together on a page in your notebook. Also, write where you got the information along with the notes. Here is a note card on man-eating sharks and the kinds of information you should include in your notes:

The diagram shows a rectangular note card with the following text inside:

- Subtopic: Kinds of Sharks Known to Attack Humans
- From: pg. 55, Carl T. Ledge. *The Lives of Sharks.*
- New York: Undersea Publishing, 1995.
- White sharks, which are sometimes called great white sharks, are extremely dangerous. They can grow to be over 20 feet long and have attacked humans and even small boats.

Annotations with arrows point to specific parts of the card:

- An arrow points to the subtopic line with the text: "write your subtopic at the top".
- An arrow points to the page number "pg. 55" with the text: "include the page number from the book".
- An arrow points to the book title and author "Carl T. Ledge. The Lives of Sharks." with the text: "Write all the information about the book, magazine, or video you're using. You'll learn all the rules for this in #94.".
- An arrow points to the descriptive paragraph about white sharks with the text: "If you are writing the information as it appears in the book, put quotation marks around it. If you are paraphrasing the information, you don't need quotation marks.".

91 Organize your research material (create an outline).

An outline is an important step in writing a research paper. It's a final check that you have all the information you need before you begin writing. It also helps you organize your information so your writing will go much faster.

Work from your notes and organize your outline around your subtopics. Here's a portion of the outline for "Man-eating Sharks:"

The diagram shows an outline for "Man-eating Sharks" enclosed in a rectangular box. The title "Man-eating Sharks" is centered at the top. Below it, the outline is structured as follows:

- I. Kinds of Sharks Known to Attack Humans
 - A. white shark
 - 1. sometimes called great white shark
 - 2. grows to over 20 feet long
 - 3. most dangerous shark
 - a. has attacked humans and small boats
 - b. great white has killed more humans than any other shark
 - B. bull shark
 - 1. often found in fresh water
 - a. Rivers (Mississippi, Amazon, Ganges)
 - b. Lakes (Lake Jamor in Indonesia and Lake Nicaragua in Nicaragua)
 - 2. Not as dangerous as white shark

92 Follow the format of a research paper.

The format of a research paper is pretty easy to follow. The sample research paper below shows you all the parts. Here are some things to keep in mind as you write:

- Your teacher may want your paper typewritten or word processed.
- A research paper is usually double-spaced so it can be read easily.
- Come up with an interesting title, kind of like a newspaper headline.
- Don't write like an encyclopedia. Be yourself and have fun as you write.
- As you write your closing paragraph, tie it into your opening paragraph by mentioning some of the same things.
- Write your first draft quickly, then set it aside for a while. Revise your paper, then proofread it carefully.

Shark Food —————→ The **title** is often in boldface type.

Alyssa Montegna —————→ Your **name** goes here.

Are you just shark food waiting to happen? Most species of sharks are harmless but some do attack people. This paper will explore **which sharks attack people, why and when they do, and what people are doing to protect themselves against shark attacks.** —————→ A good **opening** gets your reader's attention and tells the reader what to expect in the paper. This writer uses the idea of *shark food* to grab the reader's attention then mentions the subtopics (highlighted).

About 50 species of sharks are known to attack people. The most dangerous of these is the white shark. Some people call it the great white shark because of its size. Great whites can grow to over 20 feet long. These sharks don't stop at attacking people, though, some have been known to attack small boats. Great white sharks have killed more swimmers than any other kind of shark. —————→ The **body** includes paragraphs about your subtopics. The paragraphs in this example follow the subtopic *kinds of sharks known to attack humans*. Follow your outline closely to write your paragraphs.

Another shark known to attack people is the bull shark. Although not as dangerous, the bull shark lives in places where humans

As you can see, a lot of us are in danger of being shark food when we try to share space with these natural killers. Even though only a few species of sharks attack people, the ones that do cause a lot of trouble. We will no doubt have to keep finding ways to live together in peace. —————→ The **closing** is a way to summarize what you've written and to mention something from the opening paragraph. This author uses *shark food* in both the opening and closing.

4 —————→ Put a **page number** at the bottom of each page.

93 Quote resources correctly.

Sometimes you'll want to quote word for word from a book, magazine, or person. That information should be enclosed in quotation marks. After the quote, the author's name and the page number of the resource should be included in parentheses. Here's an example of something quoted from page 156 of a book called *Great White Devils of the Deep* by Dr. Sheesaw A. Tooth.

About 50 species of sharks are known to attack people. The most dangerous of these is the white shark. Some people call it the great white shark because of its size. Great whites can grow to over 20 feet long. These sharks don't stop at attacking people, though. Some have been known to attack boats. "Because of their vicious nature and incredible strength, great white sharks are a menace to beaches all over the world." (Tooth 156).

If you have interviewed someone, you might introduce her quote by simply saying: Dr. Tooth says, "Because of their vicious nature"



Don't quote too much material directly from books and magazines. A good rule to remember is that you should only quote something if the wording is interesting or the person is a well-known expert.

94 List your resources.

The last step in writing a research paper is to list your resources in a bibliography. A bibliography is an alphabetical listing, by author, of all the resources you've used in your paper. There is a specific way to list resources. Use these examples as models and pay close attention to the punctuation used:

Book:

Tooth, Sheesaw A. *Great White Devils of the Deep*. Montreal: Nature's Best Books, 1996.

↑ author's name, last name first ↑ title of book in italics or underlined ↑ city where book was published ↑ publishing company ↑ year published

Periodical (Magazine):

Pectoral, David. "Secret Lives of Sharks." *Natural Journal*, March 1994.

↑ author's name, last name first ↑ title of article in quotation marks ↑ name of periodical in italics or underlined ↑ date published

Get Specific

Name _____

Your research paper will be more successful if your topic is specific and interesting. For example, rather than just writing about *aviation*, you could write about one of these topics:

- early failed inventions of the airplane
- the worldwide race to invent the airplane
- flying machines before the airplane
- the beginnings of space flight
- how air travel has changed the world

Read each topic below. Then, write three more specific topics that could become research papers. If you have trouble brainstorming topics, briefly research each on the Internet, in an encyclopedia, or a general interest book.

Medicine ✓ _____
✓ _____
✓ _____

The ✓ _____
Environment ✓ _____
✓ _____

Pets ✓ _____
✓ _____
✓ _____

Computers ✓ _____
✓ _____
✓ _____

Football ✓ _____
✓ _____
✓ _____

Careers ✓ _____
✓ _____
✓ _____

Title Wave

Name _____

A great title can really get your research paper moving. Read each research paper summary below and circle the title you think fits best. Pick a title that is interesting and does more than just describe the information.

Summary	Title
Many of our cities are decaying due to neglect and violence. This paper looks at three different groups of people who are working to make their neighborhoods clean, safe places to live.	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Cities in Trouble• Operation Neighborhood Rescue• Cities Need Safe Places
Billions of dollars are spent every year making movies. Only a few of these movies ever become hits. This paper explores what things make a movie successful.	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Hollywood Hits and Misses• Lots of Money Wasted• Recipe for a Hollywood Hit
The electric guitar has come a long way since it was invented. One of the first electric guitars was actually made from a wooden railroad tie. This paper traces the history of the electric guitar.	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• From Railroad Tie to Rock and Roll• History of the Electric Guitar• Making Music
More Americans died in the U.S. Civil War than in any other war Americans fought. The many casualties gave doctors the opportunity to learn a lot about treating injuries. This paper looks at how the U.S. Civil War helped doctors make advances in medicine and surgery.	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Doctors in the Civil War• Tragedies of War• Victories off the Battlefield

Now write a title of your own for each summary below.

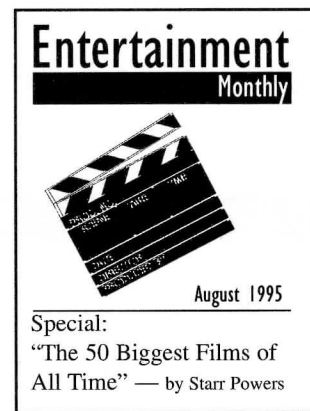
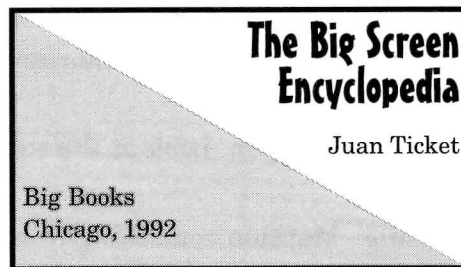
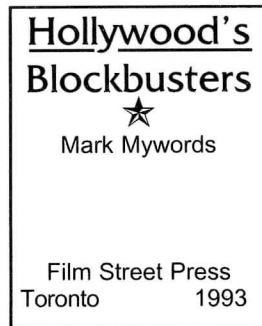
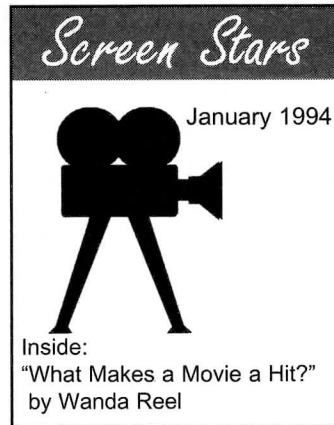
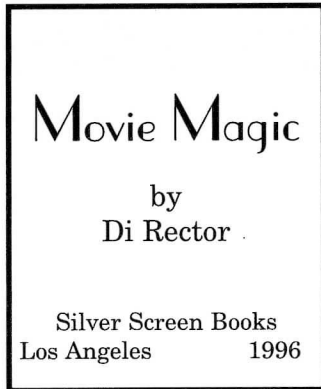
Japan is a country that has a lot of traditions, and it is also open to new ones. This paper explores how Japan has embraced the sport of baseball and how baseball in Japan is different than in any other country in the world.

Many people are convinced that they've actually seen ghosts. This paper looks at scientists who claim to have proof that ghosts exist.

How Resourceful!

Name _____

Practice putting together a bibliography by writing the books and magazines below in the correct format. Look at each cover closely to get the information you need for your bibliography. An example is done for you. (Remember, your bibliography needs to be in alphabetical order by author's last name.) Notice how the second line of an entry is indented.



Bundle, Costa. Big Screen Flops. New York: Big Money Books, 1995.

Using the Writing Process

Writing Research Papers

Using the steps of the writing process can really help your research paper writing. The things you do in the prewriting stage might determine the success of your paper. Keep this sheet handy as you write.

•Prewriting•

First of all, choose an interesting topic that is specific and not general. Then, develop a thesis statement to guide your research and writing.

Write your subtopics. If your paper needs to be fairly short, you'll only have a few subtopics. For a long paper, you might have many subtopics.

Get research materials (only five books or magazines at a time) and take good notes.

Create an outline from your research notes.

Write an interesting title that does more than just describe the topic.

•Writing a First Draft•

Write an opening that includes your thesis statement and something that grabs your reader's attention.

Follow the format for writing a research paper. Look at the example on page 115 to remind you.

Summarize your paper in the closing. Mention something from your opening paragraph in the closing.

•Revising•

Make sure your subtopics are topic sentences for your paragraphs and that all the information in your paragraphs fits the correct topic sentences.

Be sure you've quoted sources correctly.

•Proofreading•

A research paper needs to be proofread thoroughly. Trade papers with a partner to make sure your papers are free of errors.

•Publishing•

When you rewrite your paper for the final time, double space it and add page numbers.

If you are handwriting your paper, be sure to use ink and regular three-hole punched notebook paper.

If possible, present the information in your research paper in a different way — as a video, poster, group presentation, or any other way you can think of.

Project Ideas

Writing Research Papers

Research papers are often assigned to you in different subjects. This page gives you some ideas for choosing unique and interesting topics in different subject areas.

1

Social Studies/Geography

- ✓ Instead of just writing about a country, think about why the country is important to the world or something you'll find there that you won't find anywhere else.
- ✓ If you need to write about a certain crop or industrial product from a country, think about how that product or plant's use affects the whole world.
- ✓ Write a paper comparing two countries, geographical features, or cultures.
- ✓ If you're writing about an environmental topic, think about how this topic might affect you or your classmates personally.

2

Science

- ✓ If you're writing about a famous scientist, focus on just one part of her or his life.
- ✓ Write about the science in something ordinary like an ice cube or boiling water.
- ✓ If you're writing about an animal, focus on something specific like behavior, body design, or why it lives where it does.
- ✓ If you're assigned to explain something in science like a thunderstorm or sound waves, do it as part of something everyone will understand. You might use a guitar or piano as a way to explain sound.

3

Health and Nutrition

- ✓ If you're writing about healthy foods, follow the life of a food, like a fruit or vegetable to show why it's healthy.
- ✓ If you're assigned to write about exercise, use an athlete as the example throughout your paper. You might show how fitness builds a gymnast's body, for example, or how a football player tries to avoid injury.
- ✓ Write about a medical topic by putting yourself in the scene. Your paper might focus on you visiting a doctor, dentist, or the emergency room.

4

History

- ✓ Write biographies about famous figures by focusing on their personal and family lives.
- ✓ If you are assigned to write about a period in history, write the paper as if you were a newspaper reporter on the scene.
- ✓ Write about historical periods by comparing them to other periods or to modern times.

6 Ways to Write a Personal Essay

A personal essay might be one of the most difficult pieces of writing to produce. It's difficult because everything in a personal essay comes from your own mind and experiences. You don't do research for a personal essay or necessarily form an opinion, you simply give your thoughts about a topic. For example, if you've ever been asked to write about "What I did on my summer vacation," you've written a personal essay. These strategies will help you produce a personal essay you'll be proud of.

95 Choose a unique point of view.

A personal essay is often a short assignment. You might be assigned one of these topics:

- ✓ writing about a book or story character
- ✓ what you did on a school vacation
- ✓ your neighborhood
- ✓ how you think a bug spends its day

As you can see, none of these topics needs any research. All you have to do is think. The trick to writing a personal essay is to find a unique *angle*. That means, a way to write that isn't ordinary. Here are some interesting ways you might approach each topic.

Topic	Approach
book or story character	an interview with the character
what you did on a school vacation	a news report or journal entries
your neighborhood	structure your essay around a single image, like a tree or building in your neighborhood
how a bug spends its day	write from the bug's point of view

96 Be introspective.

When you're *introspective*, you look inside yourself to see what you really think of something. For example, when you look at graffiti on the dumpster beside a building what do you see? Of course you see graffiti, but who put it there? Why did they put it there? Think about these kinds of things as you write and organize your personal essay. What makes a personal essay different from most other types of writing is that it is *personal* and *real*.

97 Determine your supporting thoughts.

Your supporting thoughts are your subtopics. Each supporting thought relates to your main topic. You should come up with at least three supporting thoughts for your essay. Begin by brainstorming a list of possible thoughts, then choose the best ones for your essay. Look at the brainstorming and final supporting thoughts for the topic *your neighborhood* on the next page. The author simply thought of many general things in his neighborhood, then chose the ones he thought would work best in his essay.

Topic: My Neighborhood

Approach: Recurring image of bars on windows

Supporting Thoughts:

Safe most of the time

People

~~Riding our bikes~~

Businesses

~~Cars parked on street~~

~~Park at the edge of neighborhood~~

~~Summer evenings~~

You might set up a sheet of paper like the one above as you brainstorm your supporting thoughts.

98 Add details to your supporting thoughts.

Each of your supporting thoughts will become a paragraph in your essay. Add some more specific details to each supporting thought. Write your details quickly. You don't even need to put them in complete sentences at this point. Organize your details in a formal outline form, or in a less formal list like the example below.

Safe most of the time

- not much crime in our neighborhood
- we play outside, kids in neighborhoods nearby don't
- drug dealers hang out a few blocks away at the river
- hear gunfire at night sometimes

99 Write your opening.

As with other kinds of nonfiction writing, the opening needs to get your reader's attention. Your opening should let your reader know right away what your approach to the essay is. Look back to the approaches for the four different essay topics on page 122. Openings for two of the essays are included on the next page to illustrate how you can introduce the main topic to your reader.

The first things you might see in my neighborhood are bars. There are bars on the windows of each house and building, and bars on the doors of every business. Some of the bars are black. Some are painted. Some are chipped, bent, and broken. It's too bad there are so many bars in this neighborhood. It makes it hard to see the nice buildings and the people who live in them.

I'll bet you wish you were me right now. I'm hanging high over the city on a single thread swinging back and forth in the breeze. No, I'm not a window washer. I'm a spider. Now don't curl up your nose. I have a great life, and I'm going to tell you all about how I spend my day.

Watch Out!

Don't tell too much in your opening paragraph. The opening is simply to get your reader's attention and urge her to read on. In a research paper or opinion paper you often tell your reader all your subtopics or supporting thoughts in the opening paragraph. A personal essay is often better if you surprise your reader with supporting thoughts as you go along.

100 Write the rest of your first draft.

Write your first draft as you would with other forms of writing. Add your details to your supporting thought paragraphs and write a closing. The closing to a personal essay should give your reader an idea of how you feel about your topic. Notice how the writer closes the piece on the right by mentioning the bars again as well as how they make him feel about his neighborhood.

Note: The author of this piece decided to write a title that would be more interesting than just "My Neighborhood." The bars on the windows made him think of a prison, so he included that in his title. Look for an interesting way to write a title for your essay.

No Longer a Prison

The first things you'll see in my neighborhood are bars. There are bars on the windows of each house and building, and bars on the doors of every business. Some of the bars are black. Some are painted. Some are chipped, bent, and broken. It's too bad there are so many bars in this neighborhood. It makes it hard to see the nice buildings and the people who live in them.

The bars in our neighborhood are from a time when it wasn't as safe here as it is now. There isn't much crime in our neighborhood now, but sometimes we do hear gunfire at night. The shots come from the drug dealers who hang out by the river. I get scared sometimes because the sounds seem so close. I worry about the people who live near the dealers. Just because our neighborhood is safer now doesn't mean everyone is safe.

The barred windows and doors where I live make me happy and sad. I'm happy because our neighborhood has become safe enough not to really need them, and I hope they begin to come down soon. On the other hand, many of the problems our neighborhood had were simply moved to another place. The drugs and the gangs don't seem to go away. They just move for a while.

A Different Approach

Name _____

One way to make an essay successful is to write with a unique approach. Read each essay opening below, then decide which approach the writer is using. Choose the correct type of approach from the box and write its letter on the line next to each essay.

a. central image

b. imaginary interview or news story

c. subject's point of view

1. _____ **Topic:** how a piece of music makes you feel

When I close my eyes and listen, I see clouds. The clouds I see are huge and round and whiter than any white I've ever seen. They speed across the sky smoothly like water flowing in a river.

2. _____ **Topic:** history of a chair

I've been around here for many years. I can barely remember the day I was carried into this room and placed next to the big round table. Those were the days when I was shiny and new and unbroken. Now one of my legs is shorter than the other three, my seat is split, and I tend to wobble. But I do have some great memories.

3. _____ **Topic:** how a snake spends its day

I'm here today with Snerdly Snake just outside his lovely hole in the ground. Snerdly has decided to take a few minutes out of his busy schedule to talk with me about what being a snake is all about. Is that right, Snerdly?

"That'ssssss right, ssssssir," Snerdly says.

4. _____ **Topic:** a typical day at school

There goes the bell again. It's one of the first things I hear in the morning and the last thing I hear before leaving. It's always ringing, at least twice an hour and sometimes more. It seems my whole day is marked by hallway bells ringing.

5. _____ **Topic:** our apartment

It's kind of hard to be lived in. You ought to try it sometime. I do love having the place to myself while everyone's gone during the day. When they all start coming home in the afternoon, though, this place is wild. The water is running, the TV is blaring, and everyone is talking all at once. I do have to admit that sometimes it is kind of fun.

6. _____ **Topic:** the park

Today at the park there was a lot of activity. People walked dogs, played catch, and rode bikes. The big story, though, was the weather. It was a beautiful fall day.

Using the Writing Process

Writing Personal Essays

The steps of the writing process will help you put together a unique and effective personal essay. Keep this sheet handy as you write.

•Prewriting•

Once you are assigned a topic or choose one, decide which approach you'll use:

- central image
- imaginary interview or news story
- subject's point of view

Brainstorm supporting thoughts and select two or three to develop in your essay.

Add details to your supporting thoughts.

•Writing a First Draft•

Add an interesting title to your essay.

Write an attention-grabbing opening paragraph. Set the tone for the approach you're using and make sure you don't tell too much.

Follow the format for writing a personal essay as shown in the example on page 124.

•Revising•

As you revise, make sure your paragraphs stay on topic. Also, paragraphs in personal essays have a tendency to get long and ramble. Watch the length of your paragraphs so they are easy to read.

Make sure you use the same approach throughout. If you start your essay as an imaginary interview, don't let your essay turn into a different kind of approach halfway through.

Ask yourself if your essay tells the reader how you feel about the topic. If the essay doesn't include some of your own feelings, add some thoughts to a new paragraph or to the closing.

•Proofreading•

Proofread as you normally would, checking your grammar and spelling.

•Publishing•

You might let your essay stand as a written piece. Here are some other ideas for sharing:

- write a poem from your essay
- present your essay orally
- do a drawing or piece of artwork inspired by your essay

Project Ideas

Writing Personal Essays

The types of topics you might choose for personal essays are a lot like the kinds of things you might write poems about. Both kinds of writing work best with specific, everyday topics. Here are some ideas for writing your own personal essays. These are only a few ideas. You'll certainly come up with more.

1

Things All Around You

You can write a great personal essay about the most ordinary things if you use the right approach and put some of your own feelings into it. Here are some things you could write about:

- the things a sleeping dog dreams of
- what your street looked like 50 years ago
- the secret life of the person you've never met who lives across the street
- how a flower feels when it's picked, and what happens to it next
- how you think your teacher was when he or she was young
- all the things your favorite pair of shoes has seen
- how an office computer keyboard feels at the end of a work day

2

How You Feel

Another source of essay ideas is right in your own head. Writing about your feelings and how things and people make you feel is both a great way to understand your feelings and share them with others. Here are some suggestions:

- some things you stand for and believe in
- how the weather and seasons affect your moods
- why some people always seem unhappy and mean
- what it would be like to be able to fly or live underwater
- how you feel whenever you hear a certain song or smell a certain smell
- why you admire someone in your life so much
- why you like your favorite sport so much, and how playing it makes you feel
- what kind of parent you think you might become
- how you will change the world someday
- the qualities you'd look for in a perfect friend
- how you would change the way schools are run
- what decisions you would make as leader of your country



Unit 7

Fiction Writing

When people talk of “writers,” they usually mean writers of fiction. From a functional writing standpoint, writing fiction is not incredibly useful, but we often place a lot of emphasis on the ability to create stories. This emphasis is well-placed because creating fiction forces us to think and problem solve in abstract situations. It challenges our minds to go beyond simply transcribing the events around us and allows us to create something which only we could devise.

This unit can be approached in a couple of different ways. You might ask students to attempt writing a story before looking at the unit at all. The handouts and activity sheets could then be used to revise what students have already written. Another way is to have students work through the entire unit before attempting a story on their own. Finally, you might have students construct a story as they simultaneously work through the unit.

One of the greatest aids you can give your students throughout this unit is to provide them with good examples of fiction to model. Select some short novels or stories from age-appropriate magazines for them to read and explore. Encouraging modeling is one of the best ways to help less confident students write fiction more successfully.

As a final note, it’s important to remember that writing fiction is not necessarily a linear process. This unit gives your students 25 strategies for improving their story writing. *The Homework Shuffle* handout on pages 149-150 is a completed story you may want to share with your students at the beginning of the unit as a model to illustrate the strategies. You might wait to share it at the end of the unit, though, to give your students a model as they begin working on their own stories.

Goals:

- to provide students with strategies for developing story plots, characters, settings, conflicts, and resolutions
- to allow students to develop creative, problem-solving, and writing skills through writing fiction

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Note: *Using the Writing Process* is only included once — on pages 151-152. These pages include all the facets of creating a story using the writing process. Also, the *Project Ideas* sheets on pages 153-154 provide story-starting scenarios in a variety of genres. Students can develop their characters, settings, and conflicts from these scenarios. Encourage students to create their scenarios once they’ve been introduced to different literary forms through these pages.

Unit 7: Fiction Writing, *continued*

10 Ways to Plan and Develop Your Plot handout, page 132

The strategies on these pages provide an overview of developing a story idea from a slight notion through conflict development, and finally, creating a resolution. The biggest thing to emphasize as you work through these strategies is keeping the story manageable. Students may have initial grand notions which could turn into novels. They will be more successful if their aspirations are to write a small, tightly written, plausible story.

How Will It Develop? activity sheet, page 137

This activity sheet encourages your students to develop a small idea into a story starting scenario by answering basic questions. Encourage students to provide out-of-the-ordinary answers to the questions. For example, in the first scenario, the boy might pick up the old book because it begins glowing or blows open to a page with his name on it. Encourage them to let their imaginations run wild rather than just giving one-word answers.

Story Map activity sheet, page 138

Provide your students with several copies of this sheet to plan and adjust their story maps. You might provide an example of story mapping on the chalkboard by mapping a story that is familiar to students.

9 Ways to Create Memorable Characters handout, page 139

The strategies in this section are fairly progressive. For beginning writers, suggest they focus on using strategies 111-114. These are concrete strategies that will help them begin

to create an interesting character. Writers with some experience will benefit from strategies 115-119 as well. These strategies challenge the writer to look beyond surface attributes to mold a character to a story or vice versa.

Designer Characters activity sheet, page 142

Students will practice developing characters by adding attributes to and asking questions about two arbitrary characters. When your students have finished, encourage them to share their descriptions with classmates. Talk about the range of characteristics your students have provided. Encourage students to think of scenarios for stories that might include these characters. Choose a scenario and work through a story map with that character and scenario.

Character Planner activity sheet, pages 143-144

These pages are tools to help your students plan the characters in their stories. Encourage your students to complete all the areas on these sheets. Explain that even though they may not mention all these facts in the story, deciding all factors gives the writer a complete picture of a character and how he or she will act in a situation.

6 Ways to Create a Setting handout, page 145

Many writers take their settings for granted. Other writers spend a lot of time and energy creating and describing the worlds and times in which their characters live. These strategies will help your students develop a setting rather than simply take it for granted. Emphasize the importance of incorporating sensory details into a story's setting.

Making Sense of It
activity sheet, page 147

To introduce this activity to your students in a concrete way, make a sense chart for the setting they find themselves in right now. Then, let them work through the activity.

When they've finished with the activity, have students share the details they've added to each setting. As a class, brainstorm some characters to put into these settings and map a brief story on the chalkboard to show your students how to pull all the elements of a story together.

Setting Planner
activity sheet, page 148

This sheet is a tool for your students to use as they prepare their own stories. They can use

this completed sheet along with completed *Character Planner* and *Story Map* sheets as reference materials when they write their first drafts.

The Homework Shuffle
handout, page 149

This page provides your students with the completed story of Cheryl and her lost homework to use as a reference and model for putting their own stories together. This story is very brief, but point out to your students the sensory details included, the events leading to a climax, and the final resolution of the story.

10 Ways to Plan and Develop Your Plot

Have you ever gotten yourself “stuck” while writing a story because you didn’t know what would happen next? Some writers can simply begin writing a story and it all falls into place. Most others, though, need to plan what will happen in their story ahead of time. What happens in your story is called the *plot*.

This unit will help you plan a story’s plot much like you would any other piece of writing. Remember that planning something doesn’t necessarily mean it will turn out that way. Even though you think the events of the story are well-designed, they may not work well once you begin writing. A good writer stays flexible and changes things when necessary.

101 Start with a germ of an idea.

Most stories start with the simplest ideas. All you need for a story idea is an action or a part of something that might happen. Here are some simple ideas that might turn into great stories:

- ✓ a girl loses her homework
- ✓ a man’s computer begins talking to him
- ✓ two planets go to war
- ✓ a dog runs away from home
- ✓ a close basketball game with a rival school

You’ll notice that some of the stories are about things that might happen and others are about situations that are completely made up. You choose which kind of story you’ll write.

102 Use a story map.

A story map helps you plan the action in your story. It works a lot like an outline in a research paper. You can write all the pieces of your story on your map, including notes about your characters and settings and work from it as you write your story.

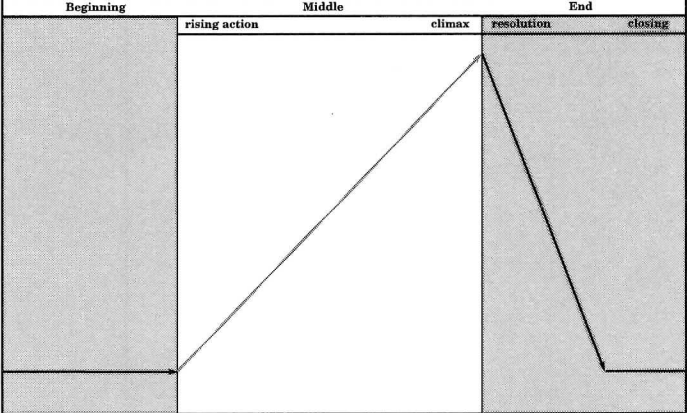
Following a story map is kind of like climbing a mountain. The line on the blank story map on the right shows the action of a story. At the beginning of the story, the action is usually flat as your characters and setting are introduced. Then, the action begins to rise as the conflict, or problem, in the story begins to take shape. The action then peaks at a climax. That’s the top of the mountain. As the conflict is solved, the action falls off again to the end of the story.

Story Map

Name _____

Character(s) _____ Setting (s) _____

Beginning	Middle	End
	rising action	climax resolution closing



103 Ask and answer questions about your idea to develop it further.

Before you can begin using a story map, you need to develop your story idea a little further. You can develop your initial idea by asking yourself questions which begin with *who*, *what*, *when*, *where*, *why*, and *how*. Here's an example of how a writer began to develop one of the simple ideas from the previous page.

Idea: a girl loses her homework

Questions:

Who loses her homework? Cheryl Hopson

Where does she lose her homework? on the street

When does she lose it? on her way to school one morning

How does she lose her homework? It drops out of her backpack
and the wind blows it away.

Why does she lose her homework? There was a hole in her backpack.

What does she do next? chases it down the street

104 Write your developed scenario in a short paragraph.

After you've asked and answered some questions about your story idea, write what you know in a short paragraph. Writing what you know will help you as you continue planning your plot.

As Cheryl Hopson gets on the bus to go to school one morning, her homework falls out of a hole in her backpack. The wind catches her paper and blows it down the street. Cheryl takes off to follow her homework as it blows away.

105 Decide what the rising action and conflict are in your story.

The backbone of every story is its conflict. The conflict is the problem the characters face and must solve. The more interesting and unexpected your conflict is, the better your story will be. The rising action is the events that lead up to the conflict.

In the example, Cheryl has lost her homework. The author could write a story about Cheryl chasing down her homework and finally getting it, but that could be pretty boring. Instead, some other directions the story might explore are shown on the next page.

- ❶ Cheryl chases her homework down street after street until she finds herself in a part of town that she's never been in before. She forgets about her homework and looks around. The street seems totally deserted, the cars look like they haven't been driven in years, and the windows are all dusty and cobwebby. She begins to get scared.
- ❷ As Cheryl chases her homework, she trips and falls into a man passing by on the street. Although she knocks the man down, she doesn't see his face as he hurries off. She turns around to look one more time and sees her homework paper stuck to the back of his gray trenchcoat.

106 Don't make your conflict too complicated.

As you're creating your conflict, you'll already be thinking about how your character could solve it. Come up with a conflict that can be solved fairly quickly, logically, and easily. For example, Cheryl could stumble into a different time period where she meets a lot of people and goes through a lot of struggles to find her way back. That kind of story is difficult to write and could almost be a book. Try to make your conflict fairly simple, believable, and logical to solve. Don't frustrate yourself by making things too complicated.

107 Identify and develop a climactic point in your story.

A story's *climax* is its most dramatic point. It is usually the point in the story where one of these things happens:

- Your main character is in the deepest trouble.
- Your main character suddenly sees the solution to a problem.
- Something dramatic happens that makes your readers think "What will happen next?" (This is often called a "cliffhanger.")

The climactic points in the two scenarios about Cheryl might be:

- ❶ Cheryl looks around and realizes she's in a strange, deserted place and she has no idea how to get back to her bus. (*main character is in the deepest trouble*)
- ❷ Cheryl stands on the sidewalk and watches as the man hurries away with her homework paper stuck to the back of his gray trenchcoat. (*cliffhanger*)

108 Come up with a creative, but believable resolution.

Almost any writer, whether new or experienced, will tell you that writing a resolution is the trickiest part of writing fiction. The resolution is the way your character's problem is solved. It usually happens soon after the climax of a story. The reason a resolution is sometimes hard to write is because it needs to be believable and simple to explain.

For example, in the first scenario involving Cheryl, it would be unbelievable to have Cheryl magically disappear from the deserted street and reappear at the bus stop. That type of action would solve the problem, but it doesn't make any sense. Readers want to be

entertained, but they don't want to be tricked or cheated by endings that are too unbelievable. Here are some possible endings for the Cheryl scenarios.

- ❶ As Cheryl is about to give up hope, she hears someone yell, "Cut! Would someone get that girl off the set?" She realizes that a movie crew is shooting a movie on the street and that she has stumbled onto a scene they are filming.
- ❷ Cheryl gets back to the bus and goes to school without her homework. When she arrives in history class, she goes up to Mr. Wilkins' desk to tell him she doesn't have her homework and notices his gray trenchcoat hanging on the door. She looks on the back of the trenchcoat and her homework is still stuck there.

109 Sequence your story events, climax, and resolution on the story map.

Now that you have a pretty good idea of how your story will unfold, you can map it on the story mapping sheet. (This map of the first plot also includes a closing for your reference.)

Story Map

Name _____

Character(s) Cheryl Hopson, 13-year-old
student
Don Cruz, movie actor

Setting(s) 1. bus stop early in the morning
2. deserted, dirty, unfamiliar street a
few minutes later

Beginning	Middle	End
	rising action	climax resolution closing
<p>Cheryl gets on the bus to go to school one morning.</p> <p>She has a hole in her backpack.</p> <p>Her homework falls out of the hole.</p>	<p>1. The wind catches her paper and blows it down the street.</p> <p>2. Cheryl chases her homework as it blows down the street.</p> <p>3. She finds herself in a part of town that she's never been in before.</p> <p>4. She forgets about her homework and looks around.</p> <p>climax: The street is deserted, old-time cars look old and dirty, windows are dusty on buildings. Cheryl gets scared. She doesn't know where she is or how to get home from here.</p>	<p>resolution: Someone yells "Cut!" and Cheryl finds out she has wandered onto a movie set. She's in no danger.</p> <p>closing: She meets her favorite actor, Don Cruz who offers to come to her school and tell her teacher what happened to her homework.</p>

110 Close your story.

Now that you've solved the problem in your story, you need to bring it to a close. Some authors close their stories with the characters laughing about what happened or the main character realizing that she learned something important. There's a reason stories for kids often end with "And they lived happily ever after." That kind of ending tells the reader that everything is all right now that the problem is solved. Try to bring your story to a close that will make your reader feel that even though there was a tense moment in the story, everything is okay now. Here's how the two Cheryl stories might end:

- ❶ After Cheryl is taken off the set, she meets one of the actors and finds out the movie they're filming is about The Great Depression — the same period of history they are studying in class. The actor offers to come to her class and talk about the movie and explain what happened to Cheryl's homework.
- ❷ Cheryl realizes it was Mr. Wilkins she bumped into that morning. She grabs the paper off the back of the trenchcoat, wipes off the sticky goo that was holding it to the coat, hands it to her teacher saying, "I hope you don't take points off for neatness, Mr. Wilkins."

How Will It Develop?

Name _____

Practice turning these simple story ideas into well-developed scenarios. Answer the questions about each idea. Then write a paragraph that describes what you know about your scenario. Be specific as you answer the questions. For example, one of the questions for the first idea is "What does the boy find?" You already know it's an old book, but tell more about what the book looks like.

Idea: a boy finds a strange, dusty, old book in the library

Who finds the book? _____

What does the boy find? _____

Where does he find it? _____

How does he find it? _____

Why does he pick it up? _____

Where will he go next? _____

Idea: the electricity goes out in the school

Where is our main character? _____

Who is our main character? _____

How does this affect the main character? _____

What does the main character do? _____

Why does the main character do that? _____

Where will the main character go next? _____

Story Map

Character(s) _____

Name _____

Setting (s) _____

Beginning		Middle		End	
rising action		climax		resolution closing	

9 Ways to Create Memorable Characters

A main character in a story is more than the person that stuff happens to. Your main character is the center of your story. Even if you've already designed a great plot, putting a character into it might change the whole direction of the story. People might think they read stories for what's going to happen, but what most people will remember is the characters. Follow these tips to create memorable characters.

111 See your character in your mind.

Once you have a general idea of who your main character is, close your eyes for a minute. Try to see your character in your mind.

- What color is your character's hair?
- How tall is your character?
- Is your character thin or filled out?
- What is your character wearing?
- How does your character wear his or her hair?
- Does your character look kind of like a celebrity your readers might know?
- How does your character look when he or she smiles?
- What color is your character's skin?
- Does your character slouch or stand up straight?



You probably won't use all these characteristics in your story, but thinking about them helps you get to know your character better.

112 Think about how your character would act.

Besides what your character looks like, you need to know other things about her. Here are some things you might wonder about your character's actions.

- Would this person's desk or locker at school be clean or messy?
- What kind of people does your character hang out with?
- What are your character's interests and hobbies?
- Does this person always tell the truth or lie a little?
- What would people really like about this character?
- What wouldn't people like about this character?
- What's something this character does the best?
- What's something this character would like to do better?

113 Listen to your character.

You can learn a lot by listening to how a character talks. Once again, close your eyes and imagine having a conversation with your character. How does she or he answer? Imagine you asked a group of characters "What are you up to?" and they answered as follows. What would you think about each character by just knowing how he talks?

- "I don't know why you're asking me that question. Can't you see for yourself?"
- "Not much. Just got up. What time is it? Noon? Really? Wow, I'm up early!"

9 Ways to Create Memorable Characters, *continued*

- “Not much. What are you up to? Wanna do something?”
- “If you must know, I’m putting the finishing touches on this painting. I call it ‘Sunset at Midnight.’ But I’m sure you wouldn’t understand it, so never mind.”

As you can see, you can learn a lot about a character by the words he or she uses. Decide how your character will speak, and keep that style of speaking the same throughout the story.

114 Allow your character to be a little odd.

People seem to really remember and like characters who are a little odd. Giving your character a unique name is one way to both make her or him memorable as well as tell something about the character’s personality. What do you think of characters with these names?

- ✓ Raymond B. Ratburn
- ✓ Louise DeLightly
- ✓ Winthrop P. Greatbucks III
- ✓ Joe Nobody

Another way to make a character memorable is to give him or her an offbeat hobby or interest. Your character might collect empty milk cartons, know all there is to know about spiders, or know the words to every song on the radio. A story is interesting because it’s not totally real life. That goes for characters, too. Readers will remember your characters if they’re more different and interesting than the people we see every day.

115 Take a risk with your character.

A lot of writers never stop to think about how they feel about their characters. That’s probably because we usually create characters that we would like. Another way to approach writing is to work with a character that is the total opposite of you. Let your character do things you would never do.

Another way to approach creating a character is to make up one that you don’t like. That doesn’t mean you have to create a character who is evil or bad. Try coming up with a character who is someone you wouldn’t ordinarily talk to or even like. Maybe your character likes a different basketball team than you or enjoys music you hate or maybe your character is simply an annoying loudmouth. When you start putting good qualities on your character, like that she might be a really good friend and listen to people’s problems, you might realize there are things about people in life that you’re overlooking, too.

116 Don’t create single dimensional characters.

A single dimensional character is one who is either *all* good or *all* bad. There is a cartoon character called Dick Dastardly who is really mean. Unfortunately that’s all he is — mean. It’s boring to watch him do the same mean things all the time.

Avoid single dimensional characters by making your good characters have some bad traits. Maybe your main character has a bad habit, like lying sometimes or copying off someone

else's paper in math. Give your villains or bad characters something the readers can like about them. Maybe one of your characters is so bad because his puppy ran away when he was a kid, or maybe your villain is mean but really likes to dance to hip hop music. Readers will believe your characters more if they are a mix of good and bad.

117 Let your character determine the story.

As you write your story, your character might change the events you've mapped out. When you mapped your story, your character was just a name. Now your character has an appearance, actions, and a voice. It may not make sense for your character to do some of the things you've mapped out. Whenever possible, change the events on your story map to match your character. Don't try to change things about your character to try to fit the story.

118 Let your character learn something in the story.

One way to make your character very believable is to have her or him learn something through the course of the story. If the story is about a friend doing something rotten, your character might learn that even though people do bad things, they're still your friends. Maybe your character did something bad in the story, like steal something. Your character might learn that even though you do something bad, your real friends will stand by you and you can overcome it.



Letting your main character learn from his or her mistakes is great. Don't turn your story into "preaching," though. Your readers don't want to be told how they should feel. Just let your characters tell the story. People will get the idea.

119 Make sure your action fits your character.

Finally, don't try to make your character do or say things that your character wouldn't do. If your character is just a regular person, don't make her suddenly have superhuman strength or incredible courage for no reason. A character needs to act consistently or your reader won't believe what you're writing. For example, Superman can't play the piano better than anyone in the world or do math faster than anyone. Superman's main asset is strength. He wouldn't do those other things in a story just for the heck of it. Be true to your characters and don't expect too much from them.

Designer Characters

Name _____

Practice putting your own characters together. Read each brief character description. Then, answer the questions.

Character: Business executive in the computer industry

What is this character's name? _____

What does this character look like? _____

What are this character's hobbies? _____

What are this character's bad habits? _____

How would this character answer the question "What are you doing under that table?" _____

Character: 13-year-old kid who loves major league baseball

What is this character's name? _____

What does this character look like? _____

What are this character's bad habits? _____

What's something readers would really like about this character? _____

What's something readers wouldn't like about this character? _____

How would this character answer the question "What are you doing this Saturday?" _____

Character Planner

Name _____

Use these pages to design the main character for your story. Complete this sheet only for each other major character in your story.

Name
Age
Physical Features (height, weight, hairstyle, skin color, etc.)
Occupation (if applicable)
Hobbies/Interests
Bad Habits
What would people like most about this character?
What would people like least about this character?

Character Planner, *continued*

Name _____

Family Members

Pets

What's something that makes this character unique (or weird)?

Favorite Sports/Athletes

Favorite Kind of Music/Groups/Singers

Favorite Movie/TV Show/Actor

How would your character answer the question "What's up?"

6 Ways to Create a Setting

Some people claim that the setting of the story acts as another character because of the important part it plays. The *setting* is where and when a story takes place. Some writers spend a lot of time describing in detail the setting of a story. Others let the setting just be there and we learn more about it as the story events unfold. No matter how a setting is used, it can make a story richer, more believable, and a lot of fun. Use these strategies to create settings that will get your stories off the ground fast.

120 Close your eyes and sit inside the the setting.

Writing stories is basically playing pretend. The best way to pretend is to forget about how cool you should be for a minute, close your eyes, and imagine. Think of where you'd like your story to take place. Imagine each tree and building and try to touch each wall. Notice the sidewalk, floor, or wallpaper. You are creating a world. The best way to do that is to find a quiet place, close your eyes, think about your story, and see what happens.

121 Use sensory details to make your setting real.

As you write your story and describe your setting, use sensory details to make it come alive. Sensory details are the things you see, hear, touch, taste, and smell. Pretend your setting is an urban bridge at noon. You might experience these sensations:

sight — ferry boats, gulls diving, waves, brownish water
hearing — gull shrieks, ferry horns, waves lapping, cars speeding on bridge
touch — cold steel of the bridge, vibrations of cars passing, wind on face
taste — slight taste of salt from the harbor and ocean
smell — car and boat exhaust fumes, faint smell of sewage and dead fish

122 Imagine your character in the setting.

One way to “test” your setting is to imagine your character inside it. There is a good reason to do this. Often a story will end up sounding like this:

1. The writer explains the setting.
2. The writer explains the character.
3. Action happens.

In order to make your story sound natural instead of forced, your character and setting need to make sense together. You also need to take time to think about ways your character can interact with a setting. You might have your character lean up against a tree, buy a hot dog from a street vendor, or trip on a crack on the sidewalk. If you think about your character in the setting, those types of actions will happen naturally.

123 Make your setting fit the story.

Where and when your story takes place has a lot to do with the *mood* of the story. The mood is how the reader feels when she reads your story. An abandoned house at midnight sets a different mood than does a community swimming pool at noon on a sunny July afternoon. As you construct your setting, think about matching it to the type of story you're writing. Imagine you're writing a funny story about a kid losing his lucky gym shorts that he thinks make him jump higher. You probably wouldn't set the story in an old, run-down school on a dark and dreary day. That setting wouldn't fit the mood of the story.

124 Be ready to work with more than one setting.

A change in setting can often be a story event or climax in itself. Many stories begin in one setting then change to another at the climax or resolution point. For instance, a story could be written about a boxer training for the Olympics. He spends a lot of time training in a loud, smelly, crowded gym until he finally makes it to the Olympics. Then he steps into the ring with one other fighter in a bright, clean arena. Those kinds of setting changes can have a big impact on your story.

125 Don't lose the setting. Build your story around it.

Too many writers introduce the setting at the beginning of the story then forget about it. Think about making the setting part of your story. Maybe your story takes place during a thunderstorm or inside a mine shaft where the setting can't be ignored. Creating a story with an interesting setting keeps the action focused. Once your action is focused, a story almost writes itself (almost!).

Making Sense of It

Name _____

Your setting will be much more realistic if you add sensory details when describing it. Read each setting description below. Then, add details you might experience there for each sense listed. An example is done for you.

Setting: watching a little league baseball game at 3:00 in the afternoon

Taste hot dogs, soda, popcorn

Sight _____

Sound _____

Smell _____

Touch _____

Setting: outside an arctic weather station in northern Alaska

Taste _____

Sight _____

Sound _____

Smell _____

Touch _____

Setting: a crowded city park on a Saturday afternoon

Taste _____

Sight _____

Sound _____

Smell _____

Touch _____

Setting: a rock concert right before the end

Taste _____

Sight _____

Sound _____

Smell _____

Touch _____

Setting Planner

Name _____

Use this sheet to create your setting. Refer to this sheet as you write your story.

Where does your story take place?

When does your story take place?

What sensory details would you experience in this setting?

Taste

Touch

Sight

Sound

Smell

Describe the second setting in your story, if there is one.

The Homework Shuffle

Here is a completed story for you to refer to as you write your own stories. Notice how setting and character are used in this story. Can you identify the conflict? What is the climactic point? Is the resolution believable?

Cheryl Hopson smelled the air and smiled. It was a mixture of fresh bread from DeCastro's bakery across the street and diesel fumes from the bus that had just pulled up to the bus stop. It was kind of a disgusting smell, but she liked it. As the doors swooshed open she stepped up onto the first step of the bus. Cheryl pulled herself onto the step but felt something shift in her backpack. And then something dropped out. Cheryl looked behind her as her history assignment made its way out the big hole in the bottom of her backpack.

Cheryl turned around to grab the paper, but the wind grabbed it first. She gasped a little as she watched her homework blow down the crowded street. She had worked for two hours last night answering those questions about The Great Depression. There was no way she was going to let the wind take her assignment. The bus driver shouted "C'mon, let's go!" at her but she took off running after the windblown paper.

The wind began to blow harder and the paper kept going with it. It plastered itself against a garbage can at the end of the block and Cheryl dove to grab it. As she did, though, another gust of wind flipped the paper up and on its way again. Cheryl chased the paper to the end of the next block, then down two more blocks, and up another. Actually, she wasn't sure how far she'd gone. Then she lost sight of it. The paper was nowhere in sight. Cheryl stopped running, bent over, and put her hands on her knees. Her face was red from running and she was out of breath. She was also getting very angry that her homework was lost. "All that time wasted," she said to herself. She decided the best thing to do would be to head back to the bus stop, catch the next bus, and face Mr. Wilkins, her history teacher.

As Cheryl straightened up, she looked around. In a second, she felt panic. Not only did she have no idea where she was, but this street suddenly looked very creepy also. The old-time cars on the street looked like they hadn't been driven in years. The windows on the buildings were dusty and cobwebby, and worst of all, there was no sign of people anywhere. Everything was silent. It was almost as if she were the last person on earth. Cheryl tried to tell herself to be calm. This couldn't be what it seemed. She'd just stumbled into a part of town she'd never seen before. "Then why are all these dusty, old-fashioned cars parked here?" she asked herself. Panic hit her again, and she was just about ready to run and try to find a way out of this weird place. Instead of running, though, she calmed down a little and looked at the street a little closer now. She saw something halfway down the block. It was sitting on a high platform, and it almost looked like some kind of camera.

"Cut! Cut!" a voice yelled over what sounded like a megaphone. "Would someone get that girl off the set? Now!"

A half dozen people stepped out from an alley just up the street. They had clipboards and stopwatches, and one of them began to run toward her.

The Homework Shuffle, *continued*

"Hey, c'mon, you're ruining this shot," the man said, "We've been setting this up for a week."

He took Cheryl's hand and led her toward the alley. As they rounded the corner and entered the alley, Cheryl couldn't believe what she saw. The narrow alley was crammed with lights, cameras, cranes, and people everywhere. She'd apparently stumbled onto a movie that was being filmed on this street. Movie crews were always working in the city, but she had no idea they were filming so close to her neighborhood. She leaned against a building and watched as people ran around adjusting lights, touching up makeup and yelling. There was lots of yelling.

She felt someone tap her shoulder and she turned around. Cheryl's eyes were as big as headlights. Her favorite actor, Don Cruz, was looking right at her.

"Hey, I guess you're lost," he said

"Y-y-y-yes," Cheryl stammered. "I can't believe it's you." She stopped for a minute and just looked at him. Then, not wanting to look like a dopey fan, she said, "You won't believe this, but the wind got ahold of my homework and I chased it a long way. This is where I ended up."

"That's pretty unbelievable," Don said. "Do you think your teacher will buy it?"

"I doubt it. Mr. Wilkins isn't big on excuses," Cheryl mumbled.

"What was the homework?" Don asked.

"It was history. We're doing The Great Depression," Cheryl said.

"No kidding," Don laughed. "This movie is about The Great Depression. I have an idea that might work for you."

"What?" Cheryl asked.

"How about if I stop by your school this afternoon when we're done shooting? I could tell your teacher what happened. Then he'll have to believe you. I could even talk a little about the movie since it's about what you're studying."

"No way!" Cheryl almost yelled. "Would you do that, really?"

"Sure. For once, I have an afternoon free. Why don't you wait here while I get a limo to give you a ride to school. I'll be there about 2:00."

Don walked away and Cheryl stood there paralyzed. She couldn't believe what had just happened. And she couldn't wait to see Don Cruz walk into her school and start talking to her like they were old friends. This would be an excuse Mr. Wilkins would have to believe.

Using the Writing Process

Writing Stories

A story contains lots of parts. Using the steps of the writing process can help you keep the characters, setting, and plot organized. Keep these sheets handy as you write.

•Prewriting•

Start your writing with just a germ of an idea (an action or a character and a place).

Develop your idea further by asking questions about it. Write your developed scenario in a short paragraph.

Create a conflict and begin mapping events that lead up to it on a story map. Don't make your conflict too complicated.

Identify the climactic point in your story and create a resolution.

Begin developing your main character and setting by completing planner sheets for each. Think about how the setting and character will fit into the plot you've begun mapping.

•Writing a First Draft•

Put your story together quickly and roughly. Work from your planner sheets and your story map to put the elements you've created in the story.

As you write, you may wish to change your characters, setting, or plot. The first draft is the best time to make those kinds of big changes.

Even if you don't feel you have the best resolution at this point, write what you have. You can refine your resolution when you revise.

Don't stop writing, even if you hate the way your story is turning out. The most important thing to do in the first draft is to complete the story.

•Revising•

Revising is where the most work is done in writing stories.

Begin by looking at the story as a whole. Does it ramble too much? Is there too much unnecessary description? Is there not enough description to make it interesting?

Using the Writing Process

Writing Stories, *continued*

As you revise, pay special attention to the resolution of your conflict. Does it make sense? Will people believe that it could actually have happened? Do you need to come up with a whole new ending to make the story stronger? What other parts of the story do you need to change as a result?

As you revise, don't be afraid to make some big changes. Writers have been known to get rid of entire sentences, paragraphs, and even pages as they revise.

•Proofreading•

Use the proofreading strategies that work best for you to check the grammar and spelling in your story. Exchange papers with a partner and proofread one another's work.

•Publishing•

There are lots of options for publishing your story. First, prepare a clean, error-free copy of your story. Then consider presenting it in one of these ways:

- Illustrate it and bind it as a small book.
- Rewrite your story as a play and enlist some classmates to help you produce it.
- Tape record your story and add sound effects and music to bring it to life.
- Write a song that tells your story and have someone help you put it to music. (A song that tells a story is called a *ballad*.)
- Read it aloud to your class.
- Enter it in a writing contest.

Project Ideas

Writing Stories

There are many different kinds of stories you can write. These pages will give you some ideas of scenarios you might turn into stories. Maybe these situations will help you create your own story ideas. You may need to do a little research to make some of these stories realistic.

1 Adventure Story

A famous scientist doing research on gorillas in Africa comes across an amazing discovery. She creeps up on a group of apes to find a small child apparently living with them. The child looks about two years old, and is seated among the gorillas, leaning up against one of the females. You decide what happens next.

- Give the scientist an interesting name, but not a silly one. This is an adventure story, not a comedy.
- Pay special attention to the setting. Do some research on where gorillas can be found and what kind of areas they live in.
- Think about what action the scientist might take. Will she try to take the child from the gorillas? If she does, how will the gorillas respond?

Two friends are walking through the park in their neighborhood. In the center of the park is a large statue of a soldier. As one of the friends stops to rest on the base of the statue, he feels part of the base slide under him. He jumps up and moves the large piece of stone. Inside they can see a narrow stairway leading down. You decide what happens next.

- Who are these friends? Is it two girls, two boys, or a boy and a girl? What were they doing in the park in the first place?
- What is the weather like? What else is going on in the park? How can you use the setting and sensory details to heighten the excitement?
- Wouldn't it be pretty dangerous to think about going down in that dark passageway? What else might the friends do? What is down there?

2 Fantasy/Science Fiction Story

One evening, every TV and radio in the world was interrupted for 10 seconds with exactly the same message: "We've come to solve all your problems. We've come in peace. And we've come to stay." At first everyone thinks someone has played a huge trick on the world. The next day, however, the visitors appear on every morning news program to begin telling their message to the world. You decide what happens next.

- Who is the main character of this story? Is the main character you as you listen to the message or one of the visitors who is delivering the message?
- How can you write about this incident and keep it fairly short and easy to handle? Could you just focus on the visitors' first day on earth or only the message they're sending?
- Have these visitors really come in peace to help the world?

Project Ideas

Writing Stories, *continued*

Fantasy/Science Fiction Story, *continued*

It's 6:30 and Kylie's alarm starts to go off. She doesn't want to wake up today and begins wishing the alarm would just stop. As soon as she thinks it, it happens. The alarm stops buzzing. She laughs, thinking the thing must be broken again. As she swings her feet out of bed she realizes how hungry she is and can't wait to eat breakfast. She glances at the table beside her bed and sees a plate filled with steaming eggs, sausage, and a bagel. She gasps. It seems anything she thinks of happens.

- What do we know about this character? How old is she? Why doesn't she want to get up?
- How does Kylie test her new powers? How could her new powers create trouble for her?
- Where did these mysterious powers come from? How long will she have them? How do you think she'll get rid of them or lose them?

3 Mystery Story

Mr. Griffey is very mad as he talks to the whole class. He explains that his Math Teacher's Guide is missing. He assumes someone in the class has it because it was taken during lunch. He has scheduled a big test for next week and thinks someone took it to copy all the answers for the test. Mr. Griffey tells the class that no one will leave the room for any reason until the book is returned. How will this mystery be solved?

- What kind of person is Mr. Griffey? Do the students like him or does someone have a problem with him?
- Is there a character who might be a likely suspect to take the book?
- Has Mr. Griffey made the right assumption? Is the book actually missing?
- What happens in the classroom as the mystery is being solved?
- Who comes forward to solve this mystery?

4 Funny/Weird Story

Tito has a little problem. There's something living under the dirty laundry in the closet. He's seen it move under the pile a few times and thinks it's friendly. He finally gets the courage to lift up the laundry to see what's there.

- What kind of person is Tito? Is he brave or sometimes scared?
- What exactly *is* living in the closet? Describe it using lots of sensory details (including smell!).
- How do Tito and his new acquaintance get along? What conflict comes up in this story?

Appendix

Listing of all 125 Strategies

Unit 2: The Writer's Toolbox

7 Ways to Write Better Sentences

- 1 Check you subject/verb agreement.
- 2 Check your spelling carefully.
- 3 Choose the right words.
- 4 Use quotation marks correctly.
- 5 Use end punctuation correctly.
- 6 Use active voice.
- 7 Get rid of useless words.

7 Ways to Write Better Paragraphs

- 8 Begin a paragraph with a topic sentence.
- 9 Begin a new paragraph with each change of topic.
- 10 Use transition words.
- 11 Vary sentence structure.
- 12 Keep paragraphs a readable length.
- 13 Don't overwrite.
- 14 Don't be too casual or too formal.

Unit 3: The Writing Process

3 Ways to Use Prewriting

- 15 Choose a topic.
- 16 Cluster your topic.
- 17 Organize your cluster.

4 Ways to Write a First Draft

- 18 Take some think time.
- 19 Write like crazy!
- 20 Don't stop writing until you're done.
- 21 Concentrate on the major parts, not all the details.

6 Ways to Revise

- 22 Check your ego. Be ready to change *anything*.
- 23 Look for weak spots.
- 24 Read out loud.

Appendix, *continued*

6 Ways to Revise, *continued*

- 25 Share with a partner.
- 26 Double-check your research and details.
- 27 Give only your best to your work.

3 Ways to Proofread

- 28 Design your own process.
- 29 Exchange papers with a partner.
- 30 Use resources to check your work.

3 Ways to Publish Your Work

- 31 Decide on a format.
- 32 Gather your resources.
- 33 Polish and share your work.

Unit 4: Expressing Yourself

8 Ways to Write About Your Opinions

- 34 Form an opinion.
- 35 Aim your opinion in the appropriate direction.
- 36 Be emotional, but not rude or simplistic.
- 37 Don't argue both sides of the issue.
- 38 Support your opinion.
- 39 Format your opinion piece.
- 40 Use facts, statistics, and quotes to back up your opinion.
- 41 Call for action when necessary.

7 Ways to Keep a Journal

- 42 Get a journal.
- 43 Decide when you'll write and stick with it.
- 44 Write as if no one else will ever read it.
- 45 Look for inspiration all around.
- 46 Listen to yourself and reflect.
- 47 Experiment, experiment, experiment.
- 48 Use your journaling to fuel your other writing projects.

8 Ways to Write Poetry

- 49 Open your mind.
- 50 Choose a single topic.
- 51 Brainstorm ideas about your topic.
- 52 Begin with a first line.
- 53 Build your poem line by line.
- 54 Let your poetry follow a form.
- 55 Use sensory detail.
- 56 Use similes and metaphors.

Unit 5: Everyday Writing

5 Ways to Write Personal Letters

- 57 Know how to format a personal letter.
- 58 Use an appropriate greeting.
- 59 Start by telling something that happened recently.
- 60 Ask some questions and answer questions from a previous letter.
- 61 Use a fun closing.

4 Ways to Write Thank-You Notes

- 62 Know how to format a thank-you note.
- 63 Start by thanking the person for the gift or favor (be specific).
- 64 Even if you don't like the gift or favor, thank the person for the effort.
- 65 Close your letter with a personal touch.

6 Ways to Write Business Letters

- 66 Know how to format a business letter.
- 67 Introduce yourself.
- 68 State your purpose clearly.
- 69 Tell what you would like to have happen next.
- 70 Restate your purpose before closing.
- 71 Sound businesslike but be polite.

6 Ways to Write E-mails

- 72 Know how to format an e-mail message.
- 73 Know the rules of e-mail etiquette.
- 74 Complete subject line.
- 75 Don't try to cover too many topics.
- 76 When replying to a message, include some of the original text.
- 77 Understand the language of the Internet.

Unit 6: Nonfiction Writing

8 Ways to Write a Review

- 78 Get the vital facts right.
- 79 Read, listen, or watch critically.
- 80 Quickly write some opinions.
- 81 Summarize what you've read, listed to, or watched.
- 82 Write a strong opening.
- 83 Begin to put it all together.
- 84 Make a recommendation.
- 85 Mention your opening in your closing.

9 Ways to Write a Research Paper

- 86 Choose an interesting topic.
- 87 Develop a thesis statement.
- 88 Identify your subtopics.
- 89 Choose appropriate research materials.
- 90 Take good notes.
- 91 Organize your research material (create an outline).
- 92 Follow the format of a research paper.
- 93 Quote resources correctly.
- 94 List your resources.

6 Ways to Write a Personal Essay

- 95 Choose a unique point of view.
- 96 Be introspective.
- 97 Determine your supporting thoughts.
- 98 Add details to your supporting thoughts.
- 99 Write your opening.
- 100 Write the rest of your first draft.

Unit 7: Fiction Writing

10 Ways to Plan and Develop Your Plot

- 101 Start with a germ of an idea.
- 102 Use a story map.
- 103 Ask and answer questions about your idea to develop it further.
- 104 Write your developed scenario in a short paragraph.
- 105 Decide what the rising action and conflict are in your story.
- 106 Don't make your conflict too complicated.
- 107 Identify and develop a climactic point in your story.

- 108 Come up with a creative, but believable resolution.
- 109 Sequence your story events, climax, and resolution on the story map.
- 110 Close your story.

9 Ways to Create Memorable Characters

- 111 See your character in your mind.
- 112 Think about how your character would act.
- 113 Listen to your character.
- 114 Allow your character to be a little odd.
- 115 Take a risk with your character.
- 116 Don't create single dimensional characters.
- 117 Let your character determine the story.
- 118 Let your character learn something in the story.
- 119 Make sure your action fits your character.

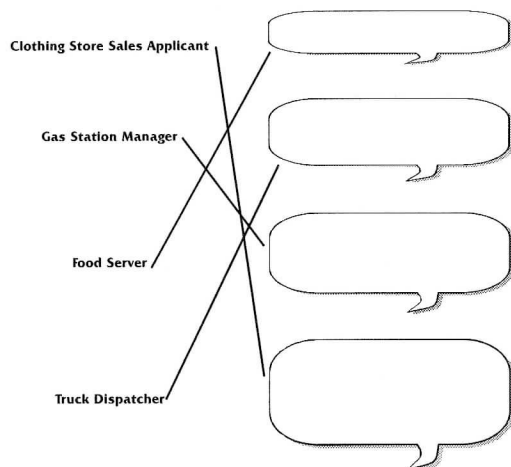
6 Ways to Create a Setting

- 120 Close your eyes and sit inside the setting.
- 121 Use sensory details to make your setting real.
- 122 Imagine your character in the setting.
- 123 Make your setting fit the story.
- 124 Be ready to work with more than one setting.
- 125 Don't lose the setting. Build your story around it.

Answer Key

Answers will vary on pages not listed.

page 14 — *Writing for Life*



Answers will vary at the bottom of the page.

page 20 — *Under Construction*

1. marches
 2. works
 3. have
 4. help
 5. dance
 6. sits
1. "I hope you enjoy your meal," the waiter smiled.
 2. "Waiter!" the woman shouted, "there's a fly in my soup."
 3. The waiter snarled, "Please keep your voice down or everyone will want one!"
 4. "Well, what is the fly doing in there?" the woman asked.
 5. "I'm not sure," the waiter answered, "but I think it's the backstroke."
 6. "In that case," the woman frowned, "bring me another fly so I can at least watch them race."
1. That guy claims he can cram two cheeseburgers into his mouth at one time.

2. Why, I ask you, would anyone even want to try such a thing?
3. Who even has a mouth big enough to cram two cheeseburgers inside?
4. I know if I saw such a thing I'd have to stand up and yell, "Wow!"
5. Now that I think about it, I'm pretty sure anyone could pull off that trick.
6. I mean, nobody said the cheeseburgers had to be any bigger than a quarter, right?

1. Marcia races dirt bikes as well as playing basketball.
2. We stomped in puddles along the curb after the rain stopped.
3. Dion knew his father was not happy from the sound of his voice.

page 25 — *Topical Heat Wave*

There are lots of options for people who don't want their children watching violence on TV.

Some bands today don't play instruments in their songs.

Lightning is more dangerous than you might think.

People who buy exotic pets often get tired of them and let them go.

page 26 — *Under Construction*

Wrigley Field in Chicago is one of the most unique baseball parks in the U.S. The stadium is surrounded by brick apartment buildings and homes and the outfield walls are covered with ivy. The huge, hand-operated scoreboard in center field also makes it unique as does the green, natural grass field.

Answer Key, continued

African bullfrogs can really eat a lot. This type of bullfrog has a huge mouth and a round, fat belly. The African bullfrog isn't happy just eating flies, though. It eats large frogs, rodents, and even birds and swallows each of them in one gulp. This bullfrog is an animal with a big appetite!

page 36 — *I Can Read Clearly Now*

Beginning: Sharks are pretty amazing creatures and are quite different from other fish.

Middle: Sharks and other fish have different types of bodies. Most sharks breathe different from other fish.

Ending: Even though sharks and fish share the same waters, there are a lot of differences between the two.

page 42 — *Eagle Eyes I*

2. Mondrian looked over the **mountain** and **spied** smoke from ~~the~~ the enemy camps.
3. **The** basketball **game** **Friday** night was **really** close. We only won **by** 3 points in overtime.
4. "That wasn't Terrel I saw last night," Dad said. "I think it **was** his brother."
5. Mozart was composing and performing music at **the** **age** of six.
6. Zoe sat looking at **the** **principal's** door, wondering if she had done the right thing.
7. **Bicyclists** who ride against traffic **are** only living ~~on~~ on **borrowed** time.

8. Do you stop liking really loud music when **you** turn thirty?

9. Although **I'm** a big fan of that **director**, his new movie, **Chump**, is awful.

10. Stefano **looked** the crowd over and began, "I am not here ~~to~~ to amuse you."

page 43 — *Eagle Eyes II*

The Basketball Debate by Trevor Johnson

Which brand of U.S. basketball do people **think** is best? **Some** people prefer college **basketball**. **Others** think pro basketball is better. Everyone seems to have an opinion on this subject. Of course, ~~both~~ both kinds of basketball **have** 3-point shots, shot clocks, and **great** players. But some still **say** one kind of play is better than ~~the~~ the other. Maybe this paper will help you decide which kind of basketball **is** better.

College basketball used ~~to~~ to be one of the most popular TV spectator sports. Although a lot of people still watch men's **college** basketball on TV, the sport **doesn't** seem as popular as **it** once was. This might be because many of the best college players are going to the NBA before they graduate. **They** would rather make millions of dollars than play for **their** schools. Another reason men's college basketball may be losing popularity ~~is~~ is the rise in popularity of women's college basketball. Some people think that women **play** harder and are more competitive than men. Others think the **women's** game is just too slow.

NBA fans are some of the most loyal around. They believe NBA players are the best in the world, and the performances **of** the "Dream Teams" in ~~the~~ the **Olympics** **seem** to prove it. **Although** many NBA fans also **watch** college basketball, they think the NBA game is **faster**, higher scoring, and more entertaining than college play.

As you can ~~can~~ see, fans of the NBA and

college basketball only **seem** to agree on the fact that they love **basketball**. So what do you think? Which kind of basketball is your favorite?

page 68 — *It Can't Get Much Verse*

Topic: computer screen
sight rectangle screen, fingers, letters, pictures dance, watches what I do
sound whistle, one-note song
smell electrical heat
taste eats numbers
touch feel fuzzy static
simile like an old friend
metaphor screen is a squashed TV, whistle is a one-note song, screen is an eye that watches me

page 82 — *Get Your Thanks in Order*

August 14, 1997

Dear Grandma Zaleski,

Thanks a lot for the basketball shoes you gave me for my birthday. You know I've been needing a new pair and you bought just the right kind. I'm breaking them in now and they feel great.

Thanks again for remembering my birthday, Grandma. You always seem to know exactly what I want.

Love,
 Brandon

page 88 — *State Your Business*

2. ★
3. ●
4. ●
5. ★
6. ▲

page 118 — *Title Wave*

- Operation Neighborhood Rescue
- Recipe for a Hollywood Hit
- From Railroad Tie to Rock and Roll
- Victories off the Battlefield

page 119 — *How Resourceful!*

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page 125 — *A Different Approach*

1. a
2. c
3. b
4. a
5. c
6. b



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