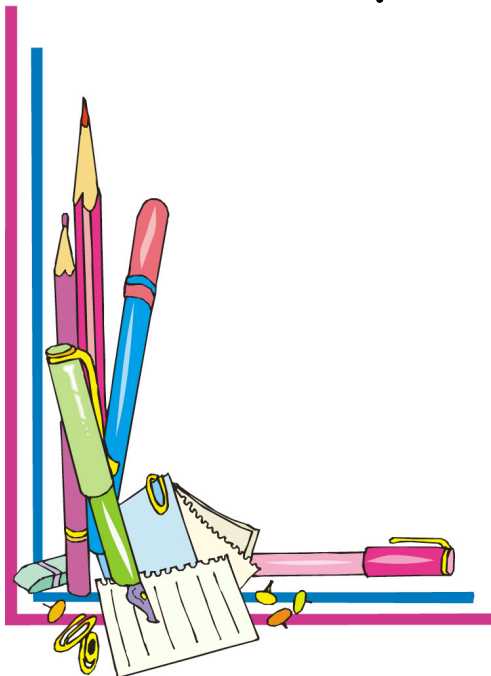




# Writing Workshops

## A Collection of Tips and Websites

Compiled by Rebecca K. Fraker





# Why Writing Workshops?



With the growth of e-mail, desktop publishing, the internet, etc., writing is now more important than ever. Students no longer have the option to be non-writers. Each student must be able to write in every subject. Teachers in every branch of learning need to improve the writing their students do.

Some reasons why students need to learn to write competently:

**(1) Writing is an essential skill as students enter adult life.**

Reading and math are of course essential skills. Much of our education is concerned with input. Writing is output—it allows a student to put ideas on a page and sort them out with proper deliberation. Writing is one of the best tools for making sense of an education and a life.

**(2) Learning to express one's self raises confidence and contributes to improvements in self-esteem and behavior.** Being unable to express one's self and communicate with others is a very frustrating feeling. As communication improves, this frustration lessens.

**(3) Written output is a great way to assess student knowledge.**

Writing is a simple and direct way to get a glimpse of individual thought process.

**(4) A person who can write clearly is thinking clearly.**

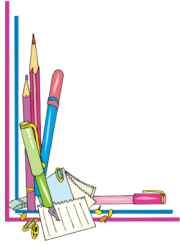
Students who are thinking clearly have a better chance of making their way through the minefield of adolescence.

**(5) Writing is power.**

It won't take much of a search to find the power of writing. Read some of history's great documents and great speeches. Years after they influenced history, most of them will still send shivers down your spine.



# Tips for using the Writing Process



**(1) Set intermediate deadlines.**

When assigning formal pieces of writing like reports, base the students' work schedule on the stages of the writing process. Set intermediate deadlines for each stage and encourage students to keep up. You don't necessarily have to "correct" each stage; you do need to help them budget their time.

**(2) Model writing process activities** at the appropriate stages.

It does not need to be elaborate or lengthy, but you should demonstrate brainstorming or listing or revising.

**(3) Allow students to choose** their own topics and formats.

We all write better when we have some choice and control. Guide them gently, but don't unnecessarily restrict them.

**(4) Use mini-conferences.**

Work one on one with students. Even a few minutes with each student can help with focus and greatly improve writing. If you have a number of students, rotate the days you interface with each one.

**(5) Share and critique.**

When drafts are completed, allow time for sharing. Notice this says "drafts". It is important to share before a product is finished. It provides a way for you to see progress, but also for other students to get a chance to encourage a classmate or improve a classmate's work.

**(6) This is real life!**

Make sure students know they are writing for their peers. In real life, that is who will be reading the material.

**(7) Publish the work.**

Students will buy into an assignment and will take more care if they know an assignment will be attractively published and shared. Sharing can be done between classes or grades. Look for outside publishing opportunities. Make a big deal of the publishing.



# Tips for Note-Taking

## Ineffective Note-taking Techniques:

### 1. *Copies of instructor's notes:*

Students remember their own notes better.

They may not understand the teacher's notes.

Construction of personal associations through the use of the student's own words is critical.



### 2. *Use of transparencies*

Raforth cautions that transparencies force students to both read and listen during a lecture.

## Effective Note-taking Strategies:

1. *Skeletal notes:* Teacher provides a basic outline before the lecture with blank spaces to fill in.

2. *Put note-taking cues on the board:* Cue with important words or phrases, or even direct students to "write this down".

3. *Have students reorganize their notes & elaborate.*

4. *Use a split page:* important points on the left, supporting details on the right.

5. *Review notes and make specific suggestions.*

6. *"Summary note-taking":* Talk for five minutes. Then have students summarize what they heard. This can be done as a small group. Then share.

# Casual Writing Ideas:

## Lists

Anybody can write a list. There's no chance a student can fail at list-making.

So try this:

Have students make a list of topics they think they will enjoy.

Then choose one of the topics to "write a report". When a student is done, have the student read their report and list a few questions.

## What Do You Think? Why Do You Think it?

Find an expository passage and answer the two questions.





# Where Do People Use Writing In Jobs?

**Historians:** research, letters, documentaries, journals, research grant proposals, current events, interviews.



**Biologist:** lab reports, descriptions of processes, observations, letters, research grants, persuasive articles about environmental issues.

**Computer scientist:** technical documentation, instructions, analysis of test results



**Construction:** job bids, communication with customers

**Car mechanic:** job bids, describing what is wrong with a car, communicating with customers



**Nurse:** patient care plans, reports on patient progress

**Teacher:** lesson plans, report cards, letters to parents, newsletters, grant writing, individual education plans

**Secretary/Personal Assistant:** letters, board minutes, proposals, memos, grant writing





# Examples of Content Area Assignments

## Social Studies:



You are a newspaper reporter. Choose from one of these famous speeches. Listen to the speech, and then summarize it. Write a newspaper article that informs the public about this speech, tell why it was given, and "predict" how you think it will change public opinion.

## Science:



You are a biologist. Create a brochure to explain Global Warming. Analyze current suggestions for alleviating this, choose one, and write to persuade the public that they should adopt your idea.

Write a newspaper article about the latest weather event in North America.

Create a play to educate the class about some great volcanic eruption (such as Mt. St. Helens) or earthquake (like the San Francisco Earthquake).

## Math:



You are an expert in measuring. Create a "chapter" for a younger student that would help them learn to measure.

Write "word problems" for younger children to practice addition, subtraction, multiplication, and division. For older primary grades, be sure to add "extra information" that isn't needed for the solution.

## Social Studies:



Pretend you are the tourism director for a country. Write several pages convincing someone to visit your country for a vacation.

A "Writing Across the Curriculum" Organizer can be found at:

<http://www.angelfire.com/wi/writingprocess/>



# Tips for A Research Project

## (1) BECOME AN EXPERT

- All of us do research, even if it is as simple as trying to find a new brand of deodorant. You may not be an expert in a topic or subject, but you are an expert on you. You know the things you like, what you do for fun, what you are interested in, and so on. To be the “expert” in your topic, you need to find out more about the topic than your audience knows.
- To do that, you need to find information from the REAL experts in the field. Check the sources of your information. Your Aunt Pitty who paints wonderful pictures, for example, probably is not an expert on dentistry while your dentist is.
- And watch what that website is selling you! If the National Veterinarians Association recommends Crunchy Doggie Bites, they are probably high quality. If the company that makes Crunchy Doggie Bites tells you they are high quality and are needed to keep your dog alive, you should be a little suspicious.



## (2) MAKE YOUR TOPIC NARROW AND MANAGEABLE

- The main reason for this is time! Even if you are only 10 years old, it would take a long time to write your autobiography. You would need to research where you were born, where you lived, ask your relatives about what happened when you were little, look at family albums to find details, and so on.
- Pick something that matches a personal interest. Are you interested in space? List different space areas: development of space rockets, planets, the moon, stars. Then pick from that: the moon. Then list topics for the moon: details, phases, used in literature, famous stories and myths about the moon, trips to the moon.
- Then pick one of those details! Get the idea? Keep detailing down—it may take you ten levels before you decide on “Apollo Mission 15”.





### (3) ANSWER SPECIFIC QUESTIONS IN YOUR RESEARCH

- Sometimes your research will be answering only one question: "What should I look for in a Mountain Bike?" Often during your research, you may find something that sends you in a different direction: "How important are the safety features that I see on some bikes? Are they worth the extra \$150?"

As you pick your nice, narrow, manageable topic, you should develop some questions.

### (4) ASK YOURSELF: WHO IS YOUR AUDIENCE?

- You are probably writing something for your teacher. But he or she is expecting you to present your piece to your classmates. So your classmates are your audience.
- But your assignment might be to write a piece for five year olds. Obviously, you will use different topics and language than if you were writing for high school seniors.

### (5) NOBODY KNEW WHAT THE RESEARCH RESULTS WOULD BE

- Don't pick a topic you know everything about! Don't present results that everyone already knows! Maybe your audience already knows that "ducks fly south in the winter". So make sure you add other details that they probably don't know: a bird-banding program in your area, or the wounded duck that stayed in your pond all winter.

### (6) THINK ABOUT YOUR PRESENTATION

- Presentations are far more effective if you can involve more senses than just hearing for your audience. Can you add slides, posters, something to handle, smells, manipulatives? Would a handout help your audience? What about a model? Are you trying to persuade the audience of a certain action?







# Planning Once You Have That Good Idea

Name: \_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_\_

Your Idea: \_\_\_\_\_

**INTEREST:** Who is your audience? Think about the age of your target audience. Are they very young? Do they do a special job? Why would they be interested in your topic, and what do they need to know to enjoy and understand your piece?

**VALUE:** What will your audience get from reading your piece? Will they read it for entertainment or for learning something new? What will you put in it that will make them want to read the whole way to the end?

**FEELINGS:** What feelings about this idea do you want to communicate? Is there some place in this piece that where you will want to emphasize your feeling?

**KNOWLEDGE:** What are the most important things you want your audience to know about your topic? Are there facts you want them to know?

**DETAILS:** What are some of the important details of your work, and why are they important? How do they help your audience understand your topic or want to read further?



# Tips for Writing Process Websites

## ABC's of the Writing Process

<http://www.angelfire.com/wi/writingprocess/>

This site provides a user friendly online resource, for students or teachers, no matter what they are being challenged to write.

## Steps of Writing a Basic Essay

<http://www.essaypunch.com/>

Users develop an idea and write their own short essay, consisting of an introduction, a two- to three-paragraph body, and a conclusion. The web site provides questions that help to guide users step by step through pre-writing, writing, organizing, editing, rewriting, and publishing.



## ESL teachers!

<http://www.kyoto-su.ac.jp/information/tesl-ej/ej08/a2.html>

ESL teachers, look at this site! Teaching Writing as a Process and Teaching Sentence-Level Syntax: Reformulation as ESL Composition Feedback.

## Learning Transitions

<http://www.unc.edu/depts/wcweb/handouts/transitions.html>

This is a great website for learning transitions. In both academic writing and professional writing, your goal is to convey information clearly and concisely, if not to convert the reader to your way of thinking. Transitions help you to achieve these goals by establishing logical connections between sentences, paragraphs, and sections of your papers. In other words, transitions tell readers what to do with the information you present them. Whether single words, quick phrases or full sentences, they function as signs for readers that tell them how to think about, organize, and react to old and new ideas as they read through what you have written.

## Writing Effective Conclusions

<http://www.kcmetro.cc.mo.us/maplewoods/writeplace/conclusions.html> One of the main things a reader remembers after having read a piece of writing is the last words the writer uses. For that reason, a writer should understand and take advantage of the power of an effective conclusion. Effective conclusions are particularly important in persuasive essays since they are the last chance the writer has to convince the reader. The following is a collection of suggestions for writing effective conclusions.



### Learning to Write Hooks

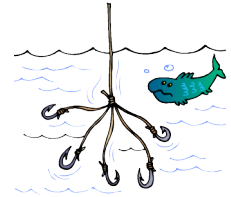
<http://www.kcmetro.cc.mo.us/maplewoods/writeplace/writingintros.html>

Effective introductions do two basic things--grab the reader's interest and let the reader know what is to come. Effective introductions usually incorporate the thesis statement and lead up to that statement with one of a variety of hooks. The hook you select will have a lot to do with the purpose of the essay you are writing. This site has a variety of techniques you can use as hooks in your introduction.

### On-Line Writer's Workshop

<http://www3.sk.sympatico.ca/fiss/newpage1.htm>

This web site is an online workshop for classroom teachers that are interested in implementing the writing process known as "Writers Workshop" in their classroom.



### Writing a Basic Paragraph

<http://www.paragraphpunch.com/>

This web site takes users through the actual steps of writing a basic paragraph. Users develop an idea and write their own topic sentence, body, and a conclusion. The web site provides questions that help to guide users step by step through pre-writing, writing, organizing, editing, rewriting, and publishing.

### Writing Terrific Paragraphs

<http://www2.pvc.maricopa.edu/tutor/eng/engessbody.htm>

Teachers, mainly higher grade levels, this is an excellent website for writing terrific paragraphs. Body or support paragraphs should specifically support the thesis or main point of the paper. Support paragraphs should not vaguely or loosely discuss the topic of the paper. Each body paragraph should be unified, meaning that nothing in the paragraph strays off the main point of the paragraph.

### Steps in the Research and Writing Process

<http://karn.ohiolink.edu/~sg-ysu/process.html>

Writing a research paper is a big project, but approaching the process as a series of steps will make it feel less overwhelming and help you do a better job. It's important to stay flexible and give yourself a lot of time to work through the research and writing process.



### **Five Paragraph Essay**

<http://www.geocities.com/SoHo/Atrium/1437/structure.html>

The five paragraph essay follows a defined format. The first paragraph introduces us to the thesis of the essay and directs us to the three main supporting subtopics. The second through fourth paragraphs are all similar in format. They individually restate the subtopics, and are developed by giving supporting information. The fifth and last paragraph restates the main thesis idea and reminds the reader of the three main supporting ideas that were developed. All of these paragraphs are important.



### **Learn to Evaluate and Edit**

<http://www.geocities.com/SoHo/Atrium/1437/eval.html>

This is a great place to learn about why it is important that every writer learn to evaluate and edit his or her own work. One always wants to put their "best foot forward" and have their efforts and appreciated. It is amazing how even little things can detract from the reader's appreciation of the work.

### **Writer's Corner**

<http://ccweb.norshore.wednet.edu/writingcorner/writingprocess.html>

Teachers, welcome to the Writer's Corner. It is full of writing ideas for everyone! The Writing Process is here to help students become better writers we need to help them internalize the processes that bring about quality written communication.

### **Teacher's Ideas**

<http://www.urich.edu/~writing/wweb.html>

Teachers, this is a wonderful place to broaden your knowledge base and find ideas that can be adapted to work in your classroom! Take a look, it is a very extensive site!

### **Outline of the Basic Writing Process**

<http://www.csuohio.edu/writingcenter/writproc.html>

Look here for some exciting ideas involving the Writing Process. Writing is a task that no two people do the same way. However, there are some logical steps that every writer seems to follow in the creation of a paper. The process described here outlines those basic steps.



### The *Word Dance Web*- On-Line Writer's Magazine

<http://www.worddance.com/>



Teachers, students and parents, this is a great place to get a free subscription to a web-based magazine! The *Word Dance Web* site gives you a sample of what you will find in this non-profit children's literary magazine. It includes short stories, poems and artwork by kids in kindergarten through Grade 8. The site also has games and additional resources meant to entertain and educate.

### Writing Examples and Fabulous Ideas

<http://freedom.up.net/~msbones/ww01000.htm>

This website has great student writing examples and fabulous ideas for the writing process. This website is quite extensive.

### Step by Step - the Writing Process

<http://www.planet.eon.net/~bplaroach/>

The purpose of these pages is to provide middle school students (about Grades 4 through 7) with links to online resources that will take them step by step through the writing process. The steps in this process are those used in Writer's Workshop. The pages are designed for use by an individual student or small group of students working on a project, but could also be used by a child working at home or by a whole class. There is also a page for teachers with links to additional creative writing resources and some writing projects.

### Young Writer's Clubhouse

<http://www.realkids.com/club.shtml>

Students, this site is called the Young Writer's Clubhouse. Check it out to see if you are interested in visiting it often! You can write for the world to see and improved the writing that you are doing. Grades 4-8

### Teaching That Makes Sense

[Here is an excellent article about writers workshop in the classroom.](#)

The website, [www.ttms.org](http://www.ttms.org) (Teaching that Makes Sense) has a wonderful explanation of how to run writers workshops in the classroom. Click [here](#) to read this article.





# Become a Book Critic

Becoming a “book critic” does not mean that you find things wrong with a piece of writing. Instead, it means that you examine it closely and objectively, for both its good and bad points. In order to do that, use these “big investigations” as a guideline.

## Getting Started

The best way to learn how to use Five Big Investigations is to ask them of yourself and the pieces you write. Some of the questions, like questions 3 and 4, will be easier to answer for your own pieces than for the work of other writers. But questions 1, 2, and 5 will probably be harder.

### **Big Investigation #1: What makes this book good?**

Critics have a responsibility to add value to our experience of a book. They can add more value when, as the old song says, when they **accentuate the positive**.

**Big Investigation #2: What would make this book better?** As a critic, it's important to be honest. And honestly, some parts of some books are pretty bad. Like the impartial umpire behind the plate, you gotta call'em as you see'em when you're a critic. If you don't, people won't trust your opinions and you'll lose your influence.

**Big Investigation #3: What's the one most important thing the author wants you to know?** This is the main idea. It's almost as though you could squeeze a whole book down to a single sentence and say that's what it was all about.

**Big Investigation #4: Why did the writer write this?** Why did the author bother to tell this story? What is it about this particular story that the author thought was so important?

**Big Investigation #5: What does the audience need to know to understand and enjoy the book?** Sometimes, the critic's job is to unlock a mystery within a book by supplying an extra piece of information most readers don't see. This is, in my opinion, what critics do best, and why they are so essential to our appreciation of art and of the world.



# Big Investigations

Name of "Book Critic" (you): \_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_\_

Title of Book/Writing Piece: \_\_\_\_\_

Author: \_\_\_\_\_ Illustrator: \_\_\_\_\_

Publisher: \_\_\_\_\_ Copyright: \_\_\_\_\_

**#1: What makes this book good?**

**#2: What would make this book better?**

**#3: What's the one most important thing the author wants you to know?**

**#4: Why did the writer write this?**

**#5: What does the audience need to know to understand and enjoy the book?**



# Tips To Take You Through the Writing Process

## 1. Prewriting

- Prewriting is any writing that gets you started! It can be notes, lists, reading, or even sketches. Just like an athlete needs to warm up and stretch muscles before playing, the brain needs some warm up, too.
- Here are two basic principles about topic selection for your writing.
  - Write about things you really care about. Strong feelings make good writing.
  - Write about things you know. Life experience makes good writing.
- You may have to suggest broad areas, but writing works best if students can select their own topics from within these areas.
  - To help students on their way, here are some lists:
  - Things you are proud of, and things you regret
  - Things that are hard, and things that are easy
  - Things you are good at and things you are not
  - Places you like to go, and places you don't
  - Things that you consider yourself to be an expert in, and things you need to know more about
  - First time doing something, and the last time
- Few professional writers use the popular webbing or outlining techniques we so dearly love. They do, however, make random notes. Think scratch paper. Even little sketches can help.

## 2. Drafting

Drafting is a way of getting pulled into your topic. Put your pencil on the paper and let it go! A draft is not a finished document. But don't handicap yourself! Maybe one line of thought will be no good in the end. But this isn't the end! Being a writer is about writing even when it is slow and hard.



Try to encourage kids to put their brains on paper. It isn't necessary to be "correct", "coherent", and so on in a draft. You can always edit later!





### 3. Sharing

Share the work with others. These can be peers, other adults, younger or older students, teachers, or grandparents. It is better to share several times before finishing. Remember to train the student audience. Their job is to encourage, not find all the faults. The writer needs to know how and why the piece affects the audience. How should work be presented? A student might read the selection aloud, give the person a copy to read, or even record it.

Encourage students to write down feedback they may get. A student should also do frequent self-assessment. Use a traits form to do self-assessment.

These traits include:

- Ideas: having interesting things to say.
- Word choice: the best, most interesting, and descriptive words for your ideas.
- Organization: the way it goes together.
- Sentence Fluency: the way it sounds when you read it out loud.
- Voice: whether it is first, second, or third person, it sounds like you talking.
- Conventions: spelling, punctuation, grammar, capitals, sentence structure, etc.

### 4. Revising

In this stage it is time to think hard about your audience. Is there some way you can say something in a better way so that the audience will understand how I feel, and so that they will feel that way too? This is probably the most important stage, and can take a long time. Don't expect to get everything perfect on the first try.

Plan your revisions. You have four things you can do: moving something to a better place, cutting something out, leaving it alone, or adding something new. If you are working on a word processor, you may want to save your document under a new name, like "The Cat2". That way you will still have the original document to refer to if you cut something you would like to save. If you are working on paper, just lightly cross out the words or sentences. Don't completely obliterate them.

Write out your revisions. You may use arrows pointing to the place an insertion should be made. Then these insertions can be put on another piece of paper.



Make a clean copy. Unless you type at least 15 words a minute, using a computer will probably be frustrating. Copying is time consuming and laborious. However, it is necessary. Watch that students who have problems with handwriting do not get overly discouraged.



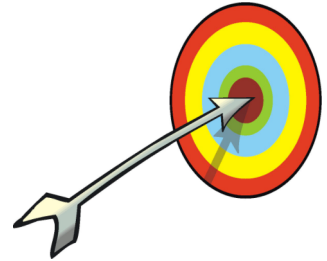
## 5. Editing

Take care of the problems you know about, and can fix. You probably know to start sentences with a capital letter and end it with a mark. Check for errors there. Watch for indentations and too-long paragraphs. Then ask for help from others. Ask questions! No one is perfect all the time.

Circle things you aren't sure of.  
Now, get someone else to proofread.

### Tips for Teachers for Proofreading:

- Help if kids have tried to fix something but can't.
- Help if kids haven't been introduced to something yet.
- Help if kids are obviously at a standstill.
- Correct the work in the child's presence, and give reasons.
- Make sure the child knows that corrections don't mean "bad writing" but make communication easier.
- Don't send papers home for correction.
- Do not make corrections or comments on a finished or near-finished piece. Use post-it notes or a coversheet.
- Don't set up a system that tracks the number of errors a student makes



## 6. Publish

Publishing can be a very satisfying ending to days of writing and revising. Just about anything goes: plain paper, cover sheets, illustrations, etc. Remember the point is to make writing readable and attractive to the audience.

Publishing class anthologies can be a great way to share, and also make wonderful keepsakes. Encourage students to read each other's work.

## 7. Assessing & Reflecting

After a piece has been published, let it alone for a while. Then take it out and read it again. This time, jot down a few thoughts about the piece. Use the six traits to help analyze the piece closely.

## 8. Review Comments, Seek a Wider Audience, Compare With Previous Writing

Keep all papers, notes, and comments on the piece together. Look at previous work. How does the piece compare? See if a finished piece can be shared with a wider audience, perhaps through the internet.



# Assessment Traits Form

Assessor's Name: \_\_\_\_\_ Author: \_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_\_

<p style="text-align: center;"><b>IDEAS</b></p> <p>What's your favorite part of this paper? Why?</p>     <p>What part could you tell the reader more about so they would understand it better?</p>	<p style="text-align: center;"><b>ORGANIZATION</b></p> <p>What's the best thing about the way your paper is organized? Why?</p>     <p>How could you improve the organization of your paper?</p>	<p style="text-align: center;"><b>VOICE</b></p> <p>What part of this paper sound most like you? Why?</p>     <p>How could you make other parts sound like that?</p>
<p style="text-align: center;"><b>WORD CHOICE</b></p> <p>What are your favorite words in this paper? Why?</p>     <p>Are there any words you would like to change or that you can suggest to make the paper more interesting? Which ones?</p>	<p style="text-align: center;"><b>SENTENCE FLUENCY</b></p> <p>What are you favorite sentences in this paper? Why?</p>     <p>Are there any sentences you would like to change to make them sound better? Which ones?</p>	<p style="text-align: center;"><b>GRAMMAR CONVENTIONS</b></p> <p>Do you think you did a good job with spelling, grammar, capitals, punctuation, and other conventions? Why?</p>     <p>Are there any arts of your paper that you think someone might have trouble reading? Which parts?</p>