



Curriculum Units by Fellows of the Yale-New Haven Teachers Institute  
1986 Volume IV: The Process of Writing

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## **Painless Writing**

Curriculum Unit 86.04.07  
by Richard Guidone

### **INTRODUCTION**

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Johnny may be able to read, but can he write? Not as well as students of ten years ago according to the National Assessment of Educational Progress. The results of the NAEP; 1979-1980 National Assessment of Reading & Literature showed that the ability of 17 year-olds to analyze, interpret, and express their views about written prose had declined by about 20 percent since 1971. Only 41 percent of the students tested in 1980 were able to compose reasoned, thoughtful answers. The NAEP researchers recommended a number of changes in the curriculum to provide more opportunities for students to practice writing and analytical skills.

One recommendation was the incorporation of writing instruction into all subject areas. My unit provides many such opportunities for teachers to implement some of the suggestions of the NAEP in that many of the ideas presented can be adopted to many grade levels, competency levels, and subject areas. If such an approach to writing is to be effective it must begin at an early level.

But elementary teachers with little practice in the use of writing with young children may not be eager to add this new element to their program without a convincing rationale and some tools for doing so. I hope my paper provides you with enough rationale and the tools needed to do the job. Why should elementary school teachers be concerned with writing instruction?

We learn as we write. We invent ideas, see relationships and learn information as we try to describe, explain, illustrate, or justify something to someone in writing. Writing skills introduced in language arts classes must be used across the curriculum if they are to be mastered by children. By providing experiences in many subject areas we can help students refine, expand, and further develop their writing skills.

Also, writing is thinking in action. It involves relationship-making and relationship-sensing as youngsters seek to connect bits of information to form or support ideas. Writing also involves other cognitive skills, including classifying, analyzing, and evaluating.

Research over the past decade has provided insight into how young children compose, as well as a variety of instructional techniques that help them as they compose. Much of this research focuses on writing as a process that usually include three stages: 1.) The prewriting stage in which the writer thinks through the task, 2.) The composing stage, in which the actual writing takes place and 3.) The rewriting stage,

in which the writer clarifies, refines, revises, proofreads and shares the writing. Many of the suggestions for writing in the coming unit are based on there research findings and provide many experiences in the writing process.

The focus of my paper is that of an elementary class teacher in New Haven, that, more than likely, has a contained classroom where all subjects are taught. This is the perfect environment for my unit because the teacher can add writing to all subject areas quite easily. The students will expect it and not be too surprised when the teacher suggests some free-writing based upon a playground experience that may have just occurred.

Other grades and subject matter were also in mind as I prepared this unit evidenced by the fact that many references throughout the unit were directed at upgrading the material to make it relevant to upper grade curriculum and subject matter.

"Take out a pencil and paper and write a composition on what you did on your summer vacation," the teacher drones hiding behind the morning sports page. The response, as you might suppose, is not one of enthusiasm. Over in one corner of the room two students snicker at one another wondering if the teacher really wants to hear about their escapades. Another student, having written similar assignments since second grade, begins to write immediately knowing exactly what the teacher wants. In still another corner, hidden from view, lies a perplexed soul unable to think of a single event over the course of two months worthy of repeating.

All of these students obviously have something to say but they just don't know it. This might be an opportune time to introduce the notion of free writing or writing in an unstructured, nonthreatening, free association mind search. Macrorie, in his book *Telling Writing*, likens free-writing to hitting practice shots. If what you write is bad or dull no one will object. The purpose of free writing is to get the student over the fear of the blank page. As students learn to overcome this fear they will gain renewed self-confidence. They will be in closer touch with their feelings and what they write will be closer to the truth telling that Macororie seeks to illicit from his students.

Free writing is introduced first because it is relatively easy to implement, it is fun, it involves little or no correction and it is instantly gratifying to the student to see that he indeed has something worthy to say.

It is also done quickly, not requiring more than ten minutes of class time, so it is a good settling assignment when a noisy group enters. It can be done in any discipline across the curriculum and only has a few ground rules:

"Write for five minutes (more for secondary school children) as fast as you can never pausing to think about what you are saying. If you get stuck and can't write on the topic just write "I can't think of anything to write", until a new thought emerges. Don not concern yourself at this time with correctness in spelling, grammar or punctuation. Just keep writing for the entire allotted time."

At the conclusion of the assigned time, allow students to reread their free-writing in search of a phrase or a sentence that they feel sums up the topic, or merely a sentence or incomplete sentence of which they are particularly proud. This allows everyone to have something to read aloud without taking up a lot of class time in reading papers which might otherwise be very similar in focus. This is also a good activity designed to help focus the student's attention on the main idea of a paragraph.

At the conclusion of several brief free writing sessions it will become readily apparent to the student that the

teacher is not acting in the usual critical mold thus making it more possible for the student generate a number of ideas that the student feels are important to him. Gabriel Rico in her book *Writing the Natural Way* calls this giving way to the Design mind—that part of the brain which processes information in non-linear fashion rather than being overtaken by the more predominant Sign mind—that part of the brain which normally is called upon in schools to provide the “correct” answer.

Free-writing also provides students the opportunity to:

- 1.) Discover a bank of topics and ideas for writing.
- 2.) Write a sense of self-expression and enjoyment.
- 3.) Engage in non-corrected and non-threatening writing practice.
- 4.) Consolidate skills learned in class and reinforced in corrected compositions.
- 5.) Overcome the fears of the blank page and the feeling they must have all ideas firmly in mind before they start to write.
- 6.) Explore the materials of experience, imagination, and intellect as a prelude to formal composition.

From these more pleasurable origins, students can build almost unconsciously toward the following competencies in writing: incorporating more precise sensory detail; engaging in intellectual and imaginative exploration; and focusing more consistently on one topic throughout the free writing session.

Many studies critical of education point to the amount of time students actually spend on writing, finding that no more than 15-20 minutes per day is spent on writing. The kind of writing would also be suspect too. Most of the writing probably consists of the sentence completion type where little or no creative activity is involved.

I would suggest a plan similar to U.S.S.R.-Uninterrupted Silent Sustained Reading—a practice where everyone in the building, including the principal and the custodian, stops and reads for a certain number of minutes per day. Why not do the same with writing? To prove a commitment to writing building-wide, it would be fun for the principal to suggest the writing assignment from time to time over the P.A. system with the other daily announcements. This would help to reinforce to students that writing is important. Teachers can then suggest the best papers and the principal may want to read one of the best.

Some ideas for free writing exercises are included in the following pages but teachers of other subject matter would not be limited to the language arts emphasis which most of these appear to have.

I hope that teachers of other disciplines will see the relevancy of this style of writing since it is true that thinking is the basis of all writing, and writing is, in one sense, merely one of the ways we formalize thinking. Free-writing is a way to practice the thinking skills which all disciplines require, whether they rely heavily on writing or not.

The length of time devoted to free-writing may vary from teacher to teacher. It is suggested that two weeks of a nine week marking period might be a workable time frame for most. Students working with free-writing are basic writers with very little skill in the composing process. Students may not necessarily become better writers at the end of two weeks but the quantity of their writing will dramatically increase. Once teachers are comfortable with this process they will want to get back to free-writing many time during the term. The methods outlined in this unit should flow together as one with no starting or stopping period. Referring to the appendix, you will note that free-writing is part of a continuum that begins with and ends with free-writing.

The lists that follow on the next few pages are ideas that teachers can use to enhance the free-writing experience for the student. Included are many story starters that help to increase the readiness of the student to write. Since most students cannot write without extensive prompting or coaching many of these activities will enable the student to see a clearer focus for writing.

### **A. Picture Starters**

The suggestions that follow under *section A* are beneficial in helping students to explore their feeling and emotions and to get a sense of focus in their writing.

A picture file, a collection of photographs and pictures for motivational use, is essential. Collect and mount a variety of pictures. Pictures of humorous incidents involving animals and children elicit the best writing response from slow-starting writers. Other categories of pictures that are productive include:

- people showing emotions, especially children
- sports action shots
- vacation activities, camping, hotels, famous landmarks
- everyday objects, hamburger, ice cream cones, teddy bears

Asking questions about the picture stimulates thoughts, directing the child toward inferences that can be drawn:

- What happened before your picture?
- What happened after your picture?
- What is happening now in your picture?
- Is there a “main character” in your picture?
- How do you feel as you look at this picture?
- What do you think the person’s name might be?
- How could you describe the character?

How could you make someone see this picture using only words?

Next, brainstorm with the child to gather words or phrases that come to mind as you look at and think about the picture. At least ten ideas, words or phrases should produce a good free writing.

### ***B. Creative Listing***

Since early writers are not very good at organization the second *list B*. Creative Listing-gives students some organizational focus to their writing, which list making forces us to do.

Three by five cards of motivational ideas may be prepared. Students are asked to list as many things as they can from the card idea in three minutes. Some suggestions:

- List things that ring.
- List things you hear in a department store.
- List things that light.
- List things that crunch.
- List things that melt.
- List things that chill.
- List things that crawl.
- List things that write.
- List things that are soft and round.
- List things that are had and rectangular.
- List things with a point.
- List things that are sticky.

Students should include these writings in their portfolio.

### **C. Free Writing Starters**

List C. Free Writing Starter, with the unfinished sentence beginning, encourages language exploration and the use of images in writing as well as providing a focus to the writing.

Write several sentences about the card ideas:

Three things that make me *mad* are . . . .

Sometimes I am as lonely as . . .

What would you do if you woke up on morning and everyone had three feet . . .

Nancy came whizzing down the street on her shiny 10-speed bicycle. Just as she rounded the corner at the end of the street . . .

I can't wait until I'm old enough to . . .

Sometimes I am as happy as . . .

Sometimes I am as sad as . . .

Write a story about the day your nose disappeared . . .

If I had one thing to do over in my life, I would . . .

Three things that worry me are . . . Explain why.

If I lived at the North Pole . . .

If I were a doorknob . . .

### **D. Creating Stories with Unrelated Words.**

The fourth listing of Unrelated Words is helpful in that it promotes some logical thought and some playful use of language to somehow make these seemingly unrelated words mesh into an idea that makes sense at least to the student though often not apparent to the audience.

Three by five cards should be made listing three unrelated ideas on each card.

Use the three words to make a sensible or silly story.

Coffee-Wolves-Wife	Boot-Ouch Valentine
Lamp-Basketball Groceries	Peanut-Nightgown-Propeller
Bell-Chimney-Ice	Tomatoes-Glass-Coal
Sister-Snow-Iron	Pie-Rain-Brother
Fireplace-Grass-Doll	Banana-Armchair-Shorts
Elevator-Fish-Tent	Shovel-Walrus-Stove
Iron-Perfume-String	Horse-Angel-Tea
Skirt-Crayon-Grandma	Ladder-Ant-Carpet
Beauty-Log-Chemical	Legs-Meter-Cabbage

### ***E. Creative Stories***

The ideas in the next list-Creative Stories-call on the student to recall images and detail, both very important skills that all good writers must attain.

Ask students to list all the words they can think about in a 3-minute timed period. Then write a story using as many of those words as possible. A sample list might be:

Camping	Sports	Animals	Traffic
House	Winter	Picnics	Water
Refreshments	Forest	Vacation	Buildings
Airplanes	Air	Science	Freedom

### ***F. Sustained Writing***

Following are suggested activities for developing freewriting in a “sustained writing” style. Students write spontaneously in response to questions. The first group is a list of 3-minute story ideas. The second group of ideas listed are for 15-minute stories.

*Group 1: 3-minute story ideas:*

1. How would you feel if you were the last Christmas tree left on the lot?
2. How would you feel if you were Paul Rever’s horse?
3. How would a bull feel in a bullfight?
4. How is a paragraph like an egg?
5. You are a small letter sitting in a word next to a capital letter. How do you feel?
6. How is a book like a light bulb?
7. How is a mailbox like a wheelbarrow?
8. You are a banana and you are being peeled. How do you feel.
9. You are a dollar bill in the hands of a beggar. How do you feel?
10. You are a can of soda who’s just been shook up and someone’s about to pull the tab. How do you feel?
11. How do you feel as a school lunch plate?
12. You are a freshly-baked pizza ready to be cut into wedges. How do you feel?
13. You are a school locker talking to yourself at 5:00 p.m., after the students have all left. How do you feel?

14. Which is faster, 5 or 8? Why?
15. Which is slower, red or blue? Why?
16. How do you feel as a clock being started at six hours a day?
17. How do you feel as a snow flake floating down from the sky?
18. How do you feel as a mirror?

*Group 2: 15-minute story ideas:*

19. You are a spoonful of pancake batter spreading slowly across a griddle. Describe your sensations.
20. You are a teddy bear in the arms of a four-year old. What is it like?
21. You are a record on a turntable, and the needle is approaching. How do you feel?
22. You are a sand castle, gradually diminishing with the incoming tide. How do you feel?
23. You are a bull who is sensitive to green, not red. How does this complicate your life?
24. You are the rope that has just squeezed the life out of a lynched man. How do feel?
25. You are a mud-pie being fashioned by a two-year old. How do you feel?

After using some of the previous lists in free writing the teacher and student would like to now move on to the next logical step in this process, which would be to take some of the free writing and develop a more finished piece of writing. To accomplish this I suggest in the next two week section to employ a rubric or a set of written and posted rules or criteria by which a teacher has communicated to the student that they will be graded or evaluated. The students are ready for this now because they will begin to want more feedback on their writing where as the free-writing does not necessarily call for correcting or revising.

To aid in revising a piece of writing it is important for the teacher to follow the following seven steps:

1. Choose a piece of student free writing.
2. Have students proofread the copy from an opaque projector or make copies for each student.
3. Look for and mark errors in punctuation, spelling and capitalization.
4. Look for run-on sentences or incomplete sentences.
5. Look for choppy sentences and incomplete thoughts.
6. Ask questions on how to elaborate and/or reconstruct the sentence idea.
7. Reread, then rewrite the corrected copy as a group activity.

Once this activity is done a few time by the teacher with the group, the next step would ideally be for the students to exchange papers on their own and follow the steps themselves with a view toward whatever rubric has been constructed by the teacher.

Suitable display or publication of the students writing also goes a long way toward developing pride in the work performed. Enter papers in literary contests, construct student writing portfolios, send pieces to the school newspaper or magazine, or ditto off copies of each students' best work as a culminating unit.

The easiest kind of rubric is the one I use when I brag about being able to walk into any class room and have students writing a paragraph in the very first lesson.

I tell the students that their paper will receive an A if the papers have the following:

1. Four sentences.
2. A period at the end of each sentence.
3. Capital Letters beginning each sentence.
4. First sentence is indented.

Notice no mention was made of neatness, spelling, margins, crossoffs, grammar or punctuation other than a period. Not that these items are not equally important or critical. The purpose of the rubric is to communicate to the students before they begin to write the basis on which they will be graded.

Next I employ the concepts of J.E. Sparks in his so called "Power Construct of Writing." My method is to start by asking a question, then rephrase the question into a topic sentence. For example: What are two reasons you like McDonalds? The student then rephrases the question into the first sentence of his paragraph:

"There are two reasons why I like McDonalds." The student is now forced by the nature of the topic sentence to provide two more sentences which support the topic sentence. He might say "My first reason is that I like the crispy french fries. My second reason is that the price is reasonable." Next, I ask the students to sum up what they have said. They might add, "These are my reasons why I like McDonalds."

The teacher can then glide around the room to check to see whether to four criteria have been met.

1. Four sentences.
2. Four periods.
3. Indented.
4. Capital letters.

If those four criteria are satisfied the student sees a big "A" on his paper. Instant gratification.

From this simple rubric can be constructed other rubrics building upon skills as they are presented during the year. These more complex rubrics require students to gain control of any number of skills before they can be graded on them.

One such rubric follows, which merely makes use of good writing techniques that may have been used in grading a paper of high school seniors on a Social Studies exam.

Your paper will be scored on the following criteria:

- "F"—Insufficient information
  - Major points missing
  - Garbled writing
  - Obvious lack of understanding
- "D"—Factual errors
  - Incomplete discussion
  - Lack of some basic information
  - Lack of real understanding
  - Poor organization
  - Lack of clarity

“C”—General presentation of all main points

Contains all basic information

Clearly stated

Shows general understanding

Good development of individual elements

“B”—Complete discussion of all major points

Plus more detailed information

Good use of examples

Good organization and grouping of ideas

Individual points are presented as more than isolated bits of information

Relationships clearly shown

“A”— The individual elements of the paper are combined to create a complete, coherent, unified whole

Reveals ideas gathered not just from class but through the writer’s own analysis

Original insight

Smooth, seamless organization

According to Sparks the power paragraph, a way of building unified paragraphs, offers two distinct advantages. First, it trains a student to differentiate between general and specific terms. Second, it eliminates repetition of writing errors since, according to Sparks, students will make every error in three of four sentences as they would in longer compositions.

The objective is of course to get students to write more lengthy on a topic. To achieve this, Sparks offers to extend his formula by referring to a sentence as Power 1,2, and 3 sentences.

A power 1 sentence would contain the main idea. A power 2 sentence provides the major detail which explains or supports the power 1 sentence. A power 3 sentence explains or supports a power 2 sentence.

To extend this concept further to more capable groups of high school level would be to have them add 4th power sentences which explains 3rd, 5th power which explains fourth etc.

Some terms or phrases that can be later introduced to add more variety or smoothness to 2nd power ideas are the following:

first	Besides	in addition to
second	furthermore	lastly
third	also	finally
a-b-c	likewise	some
and	again	others
more	next	still others
even more	then	above all
moreover	to begin with	another
more than that	as well as	equally (important, necessary, etc.)

The following list contains words and phrases which usually signal 3rd power ideas:

that is to say (i.e.)	for example (e.g.)
namely (viz)	like
as	in the same manner
just as	to be specific
specifically	for instance
to be sure	in other words
in such cases	This can explained
analogously	This can be made clearer . . .

This can be clarified Because of this . . .

It is necessary to pause here to . . .

The following is a small list of questions that can generate a simple four sentence paragraph with a simple rubric for correcting:

- 1.) What are two things to do to conserve energy?
- 2.) What are two things that really aggravate you?
- 3.) What are two things that teachers do that bug you?
- 4.) What are two ways a car phone can be helpful?

- 5.) What are two ways a nurse helps a patient?
- 6.) What are two ways older brothers can help younger brothers?
- 7.) What are two ways that your best friend has helped you?
- 8.) What are two steps necessary for washing clothes?
- 9.) What are two ways that being tardy could harm you?
- 10.) What are two rules that are very important in your home?

Get the point? Now you try it. If you are a math teacher try to think of ten questions you could ask that can be asked like the above. Science, Social Studies, Art, Home Economics, Automotive Mechanics and even P.E. teachers could all come up with at least ten such questions that could elicit a power paragraph without the teacher having extensive experience in writing.

Using a rubric to judge paragraph writing naturally leads us to next consider the possibilities of correcting by means of that which is known as holistic grading. Like holistic medicine which considers treating the whole body rather than just the specific ailment, holistic grading seeks to judge a written work as whole unit.

Basically and simply, the technique calls for the teacher to read a paper quickly and judge the work as a whole without counting individual errors or analyzing specific elements of the paper and then assign a rating from 1 to 6. If this were being done to score a large set of papers as on an achievement test, a second person would read the paper and rate it also from 1 to 6. If there is more than a one point discrepancy a third reader is required to solve the discrepancy.

Of course, this would not be practical to do for every paper you students produce. But the germ of the idea is what is important. By applying a rating scale of your own A-F, 1-5, alpha to Omega, or whatever, you can quickly sort your students papers into as many piles as you wish.

The rubric that is generally used to score using holistic grading follows. It is the standard reference form used when hundreds of papers need to be graded. It does not have to be your rubric, but only a guideline. You can choose elements from it, add you won, or modify it any way to suit the ability level of your students.

#### SCORE CHARACTERISTICS FOR WRITING

- 6      Central focus & several effective reasons or details
- Fully developed paper with clear sense of order
- Fluent in words and/or ideas
- Originality of thought or expression

- Generally clear mechanics
- 5 Central idea and specific facts, details, or reasons
- Consistent development
- Generally clear mechanics-errors do not interfere with overall effectiveness
- Less insightful, imaginative, concrete, or developed than a "6" paper
- 4 Several clear ideas or specifics relevant to topic
- Evidence of fluency but not of unified development
- Generally clear mechanics-errors do not interfere with overall effectiveness
- Less insightful, imaginative, concrete, or developed than a "6" paper
- 3 At least one idea with some supporting material or several unrelated ideas
- Less fluent, developed, or detailed than a "4" paper
- Sentences, vocabulary and thought may be simplistic
- Mechanical errors do not seriously affect readability or more serious mechanical problems accompany above average content and fluency
- 2 At least one relevant idea
- Fluency and thought are minimal
- May have many mechanical errors, but paper is readable
- 1 May be almost devoid of content and/or totally inadequate in development
- May be unreadable due to spelling, hand writing, or other mechanical problems

Remember that when using this scoring method certain truisms are evident. First that the unit being measured is the whole of a piece of writing, not its individual parts. Secondly, good writing, though difficult to define, is easily recognizable. Thirdly, though not all teachers would agree on the weight to be assigned any one trait, they would rank papers in a similar fashion when judging a work on the whole.

The establishment of peer response groups, another way to make writing painless, helps the student to catch errors before they get to the teacher. Groups such as these have long been used by to help students prepare for tests, share notes, and prepare literary criticism as well as for other problem solving skills. They also can have important value for writing.

Groups provide a sense of audience other than just the teacher, which is an important consideration when you want your students to expand their horizons and write to another point of view. Peer groups provide positive reinforcement, which in turn helps encourage reluctant young writers. Peer pressure is also working here, as student assignments need to be exchanged and therefore done, while a teachers' assignment may go left undone. Also, the lonely feeling a writer has as he is left to write and re-write is negated since everyone in the group sees what happens to each other in the writing process. Each can appreciate how the writer struggles to change a sentence, and a word, or clarify a meaning.

To be most effective, a few ground rules must be established within the groups. They must know that the purpose of the writing groups is:

*NOT* to

attack

criticize

concentrate on surface error

tell the writer what he meant to say

*BUT* to

be supportive and kind

let the writer know that "I hear you saying.."

help the writer to communicate

give the writer some useful and specific feedback for revision

A good leader should be chosen from each group, a group which contains a good mix of students with differing capabilities. In organizing the group, the teachers need to adhere to the following rules and make sure they are understood clearly by all. The rules are a must for good functioning of the writer response groups. They are as follows:

1. All writings must be reproduced using carbon paper or typed on ditto master.
2. While in groups, you must sit facing each other.
3. Everyone must have a copy of everyone else's paper.
4. You must read your own paper aloud to the group.
5. Readers are not allowed to "apologize" or say anything about their writing before reading it to the group. You may talk only after everyone in the group has responded.
6. Other group members, while following along as papers are read by the writer, should mark words, sentences, etc., that strike you for some reason. Anything that jumps out from the page and makes an impression on you should be marked.
7. After each paper is read, the group must wait from 30 to 60 seconds in silence. During this time the respondents can either do more marking, formulate responses in their heads, etc. This time often allows new perceptions and criticisms to surface in the minds of the audience. These might otherwise be lost if feedback began immediately.
8. After the writer has finished reading his/her paper aloud, the person on the writer's right is the first one to respond; the next person on the right is the second to respond, and so on around the circle. Then the writer can respond to his/her paper and/or to the feed-back just presented.
9. Respondents must point to specifics in the papers. "I liked it. It was "good" is not a valid response. It tells nothing. You must discuss the writer itself and support your contentions with specifics.
10. One possibility for respondents (Elbow, et. al.) is to summarize by: 1) selecting one word from the writing that best summarizes the whole piece, and 2) selecting one word that is not in the writing to summarize the whole piece.
11. As a writer or responder, never quarrel with someone else's reaction.
12. Respondents would avoid beginning their commentary with small points. First, let the writer know your large reaction, especially if you plan to make suggestions later, such as to cut out a word or to change a phrase that doesn't seem to fit.
13. The first few papers will be restricted to positive feedback only. After that, feedback must be either positive or positive-negative. Solely negative feedback is not allowed.

One lesson plan will detail setting up the groups, provide more ground rules, and suggest assignments for writing longer compositions that would better lend themselves to group dynamics.

The following pages can be used by the group to critique each others writing. Note that positive as well as negative comments were possible and that suggestions for improvement were a vital part of the process from the critiquers and the writer. This forces the writer to critically examine a piece of writing in view of comments what were made.

At this stage the student is becoming a more accomplished writer because he can now look at writing and find errors in omission and commission in others and himself.

Author's name \_\_\_\_\_

Critiquers

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

"They really like this about my essay!"

\_\_\_\_\_

"They offered the following suggestions for improvement;"

\_\_\_\_\_

"I asked for some suggestions about improving the following:"

1.

2.

3.

4.

\_\_\_\_\_

Before turning in my essay, I am going to do the following:

1.

2.

Another component of my writing program is the use of journals. I recommend it be used in weeks five through nine because students can do more personal, expressive writing at home, while employing many of

the techniques already acquired in the previous units, especially using free writing.

Many teachers in the seminar have made mention of the use of journals in their writing classes. It seems that there are as many approaches to the use of journals as there are teachers so I wish to offer my viewpoint, keeping in mind that I am looking for a variety of ways of getting students to write without putting undue strain on the teacher.

For this reason, most of my suggestions for using the journal stem from its adaptability to various assignments. Since journal writing can be used by teachers of all subjects, it becomes quite a useful tool for getting students to write across the curriculum.

Journals can be kept for any length of time that seems suitable. A year-long journal would be sure to show students and teacher real evidence of growth and development as a writer. Practicality, however, dictates a much shorter period of time of perhaps a month.

My class would be given a three-times-a-week assignment for writing at home. I would require they write for ten minutes a day by noting their starting and stopping times in their journal entries.

A total of twelve assignments would be given in the course of a month. If the student completes all twelve assignments when the journals are corrected at the end of the month he/she would receive an "A." Thus the student sees that the mere act of putting words down on paper will yield an "A" whether or not the writing is of "A" quality.

The purist may complain that the quality of the writing may not warrant such generosity and that may well be so. However, you must take into consideration that for some of the students with whom we work, completion of twelve writing assignments may be quite an accomplishment despite the quality of same. Here the teacher is rewarding effort not so much content.

Indeed, the teacher may choose to read very few of the twelve assignments. Students may want to choose one assignment that they feel is representative of the whole or one that they judge to be best. This gives them the opportunity to judge a piece of their own writing also. If student still find themselves unable to write without difficulty teachers may want to try a way I have found to be most helpful & enjoyable.

Perhaps the most successful way I have found to generate ideas for writing comes from my experience in using the idea of clustering as proposed by Gabriele Rico in her book, *Writing the Natural Way*. When she "discovered" clustering she began to notice that students, "Almost all demonstrated a coherence, unity, and a sense of wholeness; a recurrence of words and phrases, ideas, or images that reflected pattern sensitivity; an awareness of the nuances of language rhythms; a significant and natural use of images and metaphors; and a creative tension."

"Another by-product of clustering seemed to be a significant drop in errors of punctuation, awkward phrasing even spelling." " . . . it soon became clear, that once students discover something to write about or at least a sense of direction, they become so involved in expressing this direction, they worry less about how the parts fit together or what errors they might be making than about communicating the whole thought." <sup>1</sup>

Students are exposed to clustering the fourth week to the ninth week in my continuum in the appendix, but clustering can really be taught at any stage of the cycle and would be useful to generate ideas in free writing or for more complex writing assignments what will be suggested later. Clustering can also be useful in journal

writing as well. Indeed, Rico introduces clustering in her book in the early chapters, then proceeds throughout the book to relate all further writing assignments to clustering by beginning every exercise with clustering for an idea, image or feeling.

To achieve a sense of quality in writing, teachers need to understand and experience Rico's clustering. Rico contends that the human brain functions in a dual capacity due to its hemispheric nature. She refers to this as Left-Brain and Right-Brain. The left brain is responsible for most motor functions that we have and is also responsible for linear type thinking. The right side of the brain, meanwhile, has the responsibility of providing wholeness to what we encounter throughout senses.

Her technique of clustering enables the two sides of the brain to operate as they normally do, but at some magical moment the right side gives substance and form to writing while the left half considers the outline that the writing will follow.

The technique is best described by example. Start by writing a word in the center of a blank piece of paper, for example, "school." Circle the word. Now let your mind wander and run free. Connect the center word to as many other circles emanating out from that word as possible. Do this for about five minutes.

At some point in time, which Rico refers to as the trial web shift, enough has been clustered to provide you with a frame work to begin writing. What you then proceed to write is a short ten minute piece of personal response-writing know as the vignette.

This idea is also helpful to focus your attention on that which you think you don't even know, but may be buried in your mind.

## LESSON PLAN ONE

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**Objective** *To develop one theme using supportive descriptions.*

**Writing Task** *Compose a descriptive paragraph.*

### **Prewriting**

1. Motivate the children by telling them you have brought a machine into the room that can do their homework.
2. List questions that may stimulate ideas for writing and brainstorm some responses to list on the board:
  - What does the machine look like?
  - Where is it kept in the classroom?
  - How does it work?
  - When can you use it?
  - Does it always work correctly?

**Composing** *Write a paragraph describing the homework machine. Encourage students to refer to ideas on the board if necessary.*

**Intervention** *Student is attempting to write a perfect copy.*

Teacher's response—"We want this to be a first copy. We'll look it over for errors later and then you can write your final copy."

Student is unable to get started.

Teachers response—"Tell me what your machine looks like."

Student omits parts of the description.

Teacher's response—"Look at the board. Have you written about all the things we discussed?"

Student isn't writing because of inability to spell words correctly.

Teacher's response—"Don't worry about the spelling now. We it later. Right now I'd like you to get your ideas down on paper."

Student has not written a conclusion.

Teacher's response—"What is your last thought or opinion about this machine? Do you think the machine would be helpful or not? Would you like to have it in our room?"

**Assessment/Revision/Proofing** *Share stories with a partner. You may wish to assign partners at this level.*

Ask student to underline the sentence they like best in their partner's story. Have them read this aloud to class.

Ask students to help each other correct their spelling and check for capital letters at the beginning of each sentence and punctuation at the end.

Teacher proofs for final copy.

Students write final copy.

## **Evaluation**

### *Rubric*

1. Read stories aloud to class.
2. Display with a general title on the bulletin board in the hallway for other students, staff, and parents to read.
3. One story can be submitted to the school newspaper.

## LESSON PLAN TWO

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**Objective** *To employ appropriate peer group responses.*

**Writing Task** *Write a collaborative story.*

### **Prewriting**

1. Have students select a partner. Ask one in each pair to tell a favorite story or fairy tale to the partner. Then have the partners switch roles and tell another story.
2. Bring the class back together as a group and ask individuals what was the beginning of their tale, the ending, and the main body of the tale. Note that all three are important elements of a story.
3. After the discussion, one of the pair should be selected as a recorder for the composing task.

**Composing** *Students write a story together, taking turns adding one complete sentence. After 20 minutes or so of writing time, ask them to write an ending.*

This activity could be repeated, with either the teacher assigning another topic or each pair of students selecting an original idea.

**Intervention** *Students may not be writing and ask, “Do we have to read this aloud?”*

Teacher’s response—“I’ll give grades only on whether or not you participate.”

One student cannot come up with a sentence.

Teacher’s response—“Think of what you want to say and ask your partner to help you put the idea into a complete sentence.”

Student pairs ridicule each other’s ideas.

Teacher’s response—“It’s alright if your story is not a masterpiece. The important thing is to learn to work together.”

### **Assessment/Revision/Proofing**

When the story is complete ask the pairs to correct their stories for spelling and punctuation.

Ask students to form small groups of two pairs, read their stories to each other, and check the other pair's story for complete sentences, spelling, and punctuation.

**Evaluation** *Invite students to read aloud. Focus on how the writers felt about working together. Some stories, written collaboratively, may not be appropriate for a general audience. If it is required of every child to share their writing in the future, a description of the final audience should be provided before the next writing begins.*

## **Notes**

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1. Gabriel Lusser Rico, *Writing the Natural Way* (New York, 1983) pg.11.

## **TEACHERS BIBLIOGRAPHY**

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Strunk, William., E.B. White. *The Elements of Style*. 3rd ed., New York: Macmillan Pub. Co. 1979. Published first in 1959 this book remains the leader in bibliography of writing style. It is concise precise, and decisive; everything we should be as writer according to the authors.

Zinsser, William. *On Writing Well*. 2nd ed., New York: Harper & Ron, 1980. Is it o.k. to laugh while reading a serious treatment of writing? You will reading this book. Book grew out of a course Zinsser taught at Yale for many years.

Schoen, Carol. *The Writing Experience*. Boston: Little, Brown & Co, 1979. Integrates carefully structured basic skills components with purposeful & challenging classroom writing experiences.

Clayes, Stanley., David Spencer, Martin, Stanford. *Contexts for Composition*. 4th ed. Englewood Cliffs, N.J.: Prentice Hall, 1976. Text can be used with better high school and freshman comp classes since it covers various writing styles from the viewpoint of well-known authors. Questions and writing assignments that follow provide student an opportunity to model good writing.

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Adelstein, Michael., Jean Pival. *The Writing Commitment*. New York: Harcourt, 1976. Freshman college text that starts from the write-oriented personal journal & auto-biographical narrative and proceeds to audience-oriented exposition & argument.

The following are useful books on writing in as much as they offer reference material as well as ideas for writing.

Leggett, Glen., C. David Mead, W. Charvst. *Handbook for Writers*. 3rd ed. Englewood Cliffs, N.J.: Prentice Hall, 1960. This book is an excellent handbook useful both as a guide and a reference work. As a summary of grammatical usage and elementary rhetoric, it

provides the essentials of clear writing.

Robey, Cora., A. Hedrick, E. Morgan. *Handbook of Basic Writing Skills*.

## STUDENT BIBLIOGRAPHY

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The following consumable workbooks were selected for the variety of writing experiences and for the fact that they are inexpensive and come in a format most familiar to students.

D. Joan, Berboich, Ph.D. *Writing About Amusing Things.-Writing About Curious Things*. New York, N.Y.: Amsco School Publications, 1982. Both books build upon the natural curiosity and humor in children as the basis of focusing for writing. Vocabulary associated with the curiosity or humor is presented first along with interesting facts to bring creativity to writing. For better 6th, 7th, 8th.

Graham, Louise., Young, Miriam. *Writing Power*. New York: Globe Book Company, 1973. Good book that builds skills useful in writing, for example, looking for details and discovering feeling. Also has good use of visuals for added interest. Audience 7th & 8th grades.

Elson, Peggy, Palmer, Geraldine. *All Write*. San Diego, CA: Benefic Press, 1981. Covers areas of sentence writing, paragraphs, messages, reports, stories, plays and poems. Makes use of holistic grading by a number systems measuring twelve important writing skills. Audience 6th, 7th & 8th graders.

Kessler, Rikki, Friendland, Joyces. *Writing for Life*. New York: Glove Book Company, 1981. Books in this series are geared to the functional part of writing in everyday life examined with adequate explanation and examples. Topics include writing at home, to friends, in school, filling out various forms, writing resumes and handling your money. Audience is mainly high school students entering work for the first time.

Goodman, Burton. *Scoring High In Survival Writing*. New York: Random House, 1979. Books in this series are also of workbook format applying skills in basic writing for very specific functions such as writing or filling out forms such as voter registration forms, classified ads, recipes, accident reports, R.S.V.P. notes, college applications and driver license applications. Low reading level that would apply more specifically to work bound high school students.

Wulffson, Don. *The Basics of Writing*. New York: Globe Book Company, 1985. This book combines creative writing with skills needed for good writing such as dialogue, opinions, letters, and short poems.

(figure available in print form)

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