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Introduction

The ability to write well is a skill every student needs. Good writing will be demanded throughout the high school and university years, but the need to write clearly does not end with school. Although many adults would not consider themselves professional writers, many of the careers by which they earn a living require the ability to communicate via the written word in one form or another.

Some written communications used in the workplace involve a combination of professional expertise and composition skills, such as is true for science or technical writing. Other forms of writing require the knowledge of certain formats, while some are subject to strict time constraints. All forms of writing necessitate the use of language which is easily understood by those who read it. Even writing on-the-job logs and anecdotal records demand clear language. Any writer must always write for his or her reader.

This book contains simulations of real-life situations in which competent writing is a part. Some of the simulations require only one or two days to complete. Others will occupy the plans for several days or weeks. Some basic writer's guidelines begin on page six with Tips for Good Writing. Other features of *Writing Simulations* include the following:

- Producing a television infomercial
- Publishing a literary magazine
- Writing online
- Writing in an emergency
- Historical writing
- Producing a television news magazine
- Writing in time: Essay exams
- Writing an autobiography
- Writing fiction: A class novel
- Writing a letter of complaint

In addition, activities are designed to increase vocabulary, to teach editing and proofreading skills and to illustrate how to target student writing toward the reader. *Writing Simulations* can be used as the central resource for a whole language unit or parts may be used on their own. This versatile unit gives specific writing strategies and is a must for the teacher wanting to teach a variety of writing applications.

Producing an Infomercial

Topic

Writing and Producing an Infomercial for Television

Objective

Students will write and produce a one minute infomercial for videotaped television. They will learn to write sparingly and to aim what they have to say to a specific audience. They will learn the importance of identifying the *who*, *what*, *where*, *when* and *why* on which the success of an infomercial depends. They will act and film the infomercial and after producing a finished product, they will evaluate their own success.

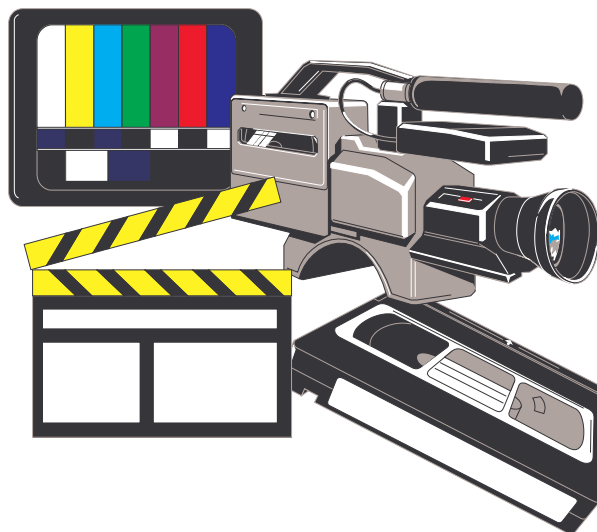
Materials

- overhead transparencies of pages 14, 15 and 17
- reproduce copies of pages 14, 16, 18 and 19
- overhead projector with marker
- videotape
- tape of two or three television commercials
- television monitor

Preparation

1. Reproduce pages 14, 16, 18 and 19.
2. Make overhead transparencies of pages 14, 15 and 17.
3. Prepare a short list of suggestions for items or services to 'sell'.
4. Arrange for use of video-camera.
5. Tape two or three commercials advertising products or services which students might be interested in for use in the classroom. These might include commercials for breakfast cereals, runners, sports equipment, etc.

Note to teacher: The best time or place to find an example of an infomercial which you can tape and show to the class might be either during a political campaign or on a business program.



Producing an Infomercial *(cont.)*

Procedure

1. Tell the students they are going to look closely at some television commercials because they are going to be making a special kind of commercial of their own, using procedures like those that television stations use. Tell them that each commercial is usually only 30 seconds long and that commercials are produced for one reason only—to sell a product or service. Much information must be sent out to the viewer during that time limit.
2. Show the commercials one at a time. Ask the students to tell you what kinds of information are provided by each and then list their answers on the board or chart paper. The answers should include the name of the product or service, where the product or service can be obtained, when it is available and why they should want to purchase it.
3. Show one of the commercials again, this time stopping whenever the scene changes. Explain that each scene change is called a frame and they are to be thinking in terms of writing ‘frames’ of a commercial. Ask students to describe exactly what they see and what they hear in each frame and how all the frames go together to form one whole.
4. Explain that there is a special kind of commercial called an ‘infomercial’. An infomercial is a commercial which operates under false pretenses. While we all know a commercial when we see one, we don’t always recognise an infomercial at first, because it seems to be a news feature. It seems to offer only factual information, but just as a commercial is made to sell a product or service, so too is an infomercial. A typical infomercial consists of two people in a scene such as an office. One of them acts as a ‘teacher’ or expert giving out useful information while the other acts as the ‘student’ who is learning. A commercial can look like this too, but the big difference is that a commercial comes right out with the sales pitch whereas an infomercial sneaks it in under the guise of important information. Some political advertisements take the form of infomercials.
5. Distribute the Infomercial Objective Questionnaire (page 14). Explain that when an organisation or business wants to have an infomercial made, their representative receives a questionnaire similar to this one to help the station and the business come to an agreement about what the infomercial is to accomplish. Infomercials are expensive to make and no one wants to waste time planning infomercials with which no one is going to be happy. The students will use this form when planning their own infomercials.
6. Display the Video Storyboard transparency (page 15). Explain that this is the next step in planning an infomercial. It helps ensure that the video and the audio will match. Students will use this form. In their planning, they will have to include the name of the product, where and when it can be obtained and why the viewer should purchase the product.

Infomercial Objective Questionnaire

Station Name _____

Business Representative _____

Business Name _____

Business Address _____

Phone/Fax Number _____

Please double-check spelling and numbers for accuracy.

1. Describe the product or service you represent.
2. Who is your competition?
3. How is your business different from others like yours?
4. Who are your present customers?
5. What customers do you want to reach?
6. What points are most essential in your infomercial?
7. What do you want the viewers of your infomercial to do?

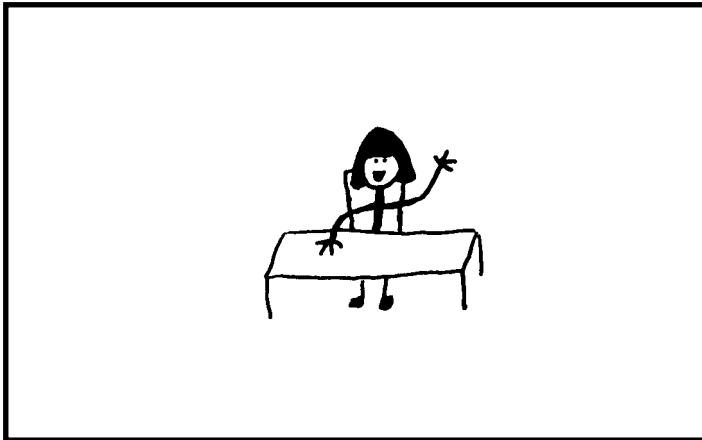
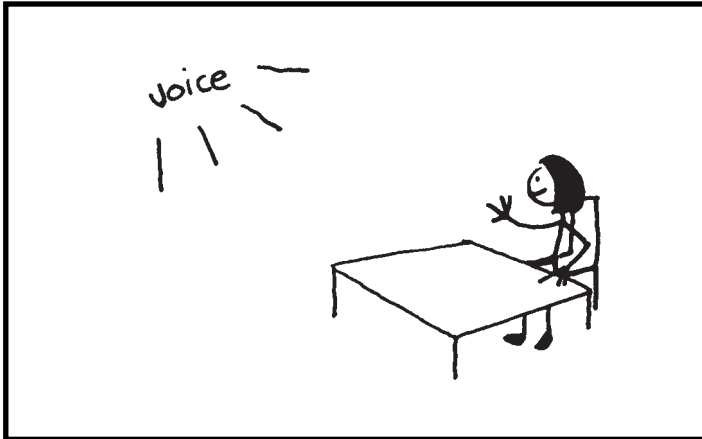
Video Storyboard

Project: Benefit Invest

Date: 16-3-97

Writer: MN

Video



Voice: Ladies and gentlemen,
Ms Poppins

What is this I hear?

That is correct.
It's geared to what the client wants.

Incredible!

Just call!