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# PERSONA WRITING—Teacher's Guide

## What is Persona Writing?

Quite simply, PERSONA WRITING is imaginative writing with a focus. Although we teachers may recognize the ease with which young people move in and out of the world of pretense and fantasy, we sometimes overlook the relationship it has with writing maturation. Whether we label it day-dreaming, projection, or just fanciful thinking, imagining oneself to be another person or participating in an event vicariously has always been a part of creative development. Just as actors and actresses mature in their craft by assimilating and internalizing the characters they portray, so, too, PERSONA WRITING widens each student's range of expression—through invention, experimentation, and refinement of roles or rhetorical guises. Students discover that for each new identity they assume for their writings, there is a corresponding growth in and expansion of their imaginations. What professional writers have learned—that they must adjust their voice for each writing context—can be taught to students through PERSONA WRITING. For PERSONA WRITING offers focused writing activities, each requiring students to be aware of and in control of the relationship they have with their subject matter—or simply, in control of their voice.

PERSONA WRITING teaches voice by offering students more than 80 stimulating selections: news events, poetry, novel excerpts, advertisements, descriptions of scientific phenomena, historical accounts, essays and anecdotes. Each selection is accompanied by a series of "personas," or rhetorical guises, and it is through these personas that students practice and perfect their imaginative voices. The search for the Titanic, the assassination of Julius Caesar, the possible existence of a tenth planet, a female Paul Revere: these are some of the writing stimuli that fill the pages of this program. As your writers work their way through each of the following activities, they will be asked to crawl into the skin of others, think as they might think, act as they might act, and write as they might write. In doing so, they will gain the confidence, growth, and experience that will lead them successfully through future writing activities.

## How shall I present the concept of Persona Writing to my students?

One way is to present an example of a persona to the entire class. Choose a well-known character from your literature anthology—Romeo from *Romeo and Juliet* would be a good example. Tell students that if they are to be Romeo, they will need to know a few things about him:

- How old is he?
- What sort of family does he have?
- Who are his friends?
- What are his friends like?
- What motivates him?
- What is life in Verona like for him?
- What does he think of the Capulets?
- What pleases and displeases him?

In fact, to really appreciate and write convincingly about the experiences or dilemmas of any character—Anne Frank or Huck Finn, for example—one must become Anne or Huck, and view the world through that character's eyes. For it is by assuming the persona of a character, and thereby expanding one's experience and perspective, that voice is learned. With voice, the young writer discovers the entire world of creativity opening up to him or her.

## Will Persona Writing replace my current composition program?

No, but it can supplement and strengthen your current writing program. PERSONA WRITING works especially well as an introduction to letter writing, narration, description, script and dialogue writing, and persuasion. It can also enliven your present curriculum by offering timely and stimulating assignments that engage the reluctant as well as the gifted writer. In addition, PERSONA WRITING offers opportunities to integrate literature,

# Editing Sheet

Unlike proofreading, which focuses on mechanical correctness in grammar, spelling and punctuation, editing places the emphasis on purpose, organization, style, diction, and audience.

*Date of Reading* \_\_\_\_\_ *Title or Author of Reading* \_\_\_\_\_

Total number of corrections needed for final draft (spelling, punctuation, paragraphing, sentence fragments, run-ons, usage errors, or others) \_\_\_\_\_

## Checklist and Evaluation

	YES	Needs Revision		YES	Needs Revision
1. Have the directions for this assignment been followed?	_____	_____	11. Does the writer give you an interesting view of the event?	_____	_____
2. Is the writer's purpose clear?	_____	_____	12. Is there adequate detail in the writing so that you are not left wanting more?	_____	_____
3. Considering the assignment, is the persona believable? Is the persona someone you can visualize?	_____	_____	13. Is there sufficient dialogue to make this writing come alive?	_____	_____
4. If the writer changes the setting, would the characters or plot change? (If so, a revision may be in order).	_____	_____	14. Is the description such that you can visualize each of the characters?	_____	_____
5. Is the setting (time and place) clear?	_____	_____	15. Is the tone (humorous, serious, explanatory) clear to you?	_____	_____
6. Do you have sympathy or concern for any of the characters?	_____	_____	16. Is the language, sentence variety, and vocabulary appropriate for this writing?	_____	_____
7. Are the emotions or feelings of the characters or persona clearly demonstrated?	_____	_____	17. Does the writing style fit the audience it was intended for?	_____	_____
8. Are the minor characters important to the story?	_____	_____	18. Is the paper ready to be submitted to the teacher for grade or evaluation?	_____	_____
9. Is there a clear beginning, middle, and end?	_____	_____			
10. Is there a relationship between the events and the outcome of the paper?	_____	_____			

# Letter Writing

## GUIDELINES

Your first activity in Persona Writing is Letter Writing, a format that you most likely recognize but, perhaps, one you have yet to perfect. You might hear some say that the telephone, which has given us such rapid access to information and people, has replaced our need for personal or business letters. But a quick survey of businesses, agencies, and organizations, as well as friends and family, should convince us that we still need to know how to communicate with letters. In fact, according to the U.S. Postal Service, we are now sending and receiving a larger volume of mail than any generation in history.

Letters come in many forms. There are those with personal messages, letters of application, letters of complaint or appreciation, requests for information or products, thank you's, letters of condolences, and letters to the editor. As you practice the activities in the following pages, you will be given opportunities to try each of these letter forms and, while doing so, develop your own writer's "voice"—the particular way you respond to a subject. Through a series of "personas," you will learn point of view and begin to see an increased range of creativity in your writing.

Before you write that first "persona" letter, let's review a few concepts about letter writing:

1. **Make your letters clear, correct, and interesting.** Think for a moment about letters you have received. Can you remember feeling frustrated or impatient when important details were left out? Or laughing and feeling good when you received a letter that was well thought out? As writers, we sometimes forget that we are not there to answer questions that recipients of our letters might ask. Plan in advance what you are going to say and the way you are going to say it. You may find that one draft is not enough, especially with business letters. Two drafts may give you clarity and make for a more effective letter. Remember, too, that correct grammar, punctuation, and spelling are as important as your letter—good mechanics will always have a positive impact. Whenever possible, make your letter as exciting and lively as you can.
2. **Use proper letter-writing format, even for a friendly letter.** Friendly letters require a heading, salutation, body, closing, and signature. Business letters add an inside address and should be written in block or standard form to ensure a clean, formal appearance. On the following page, Andy Benson's letter demonstrates the correct form for a business letter.
3. **Write about those things you would personally want to hear.** Be generous with your details. Notice that Andy's letter deals with a problem we are all aware of: being cheated. His letter contains specific examples and, consequently, makes for very entertaining reading.
4. **Have a strong opening and closing.** Make each opening paragraph so interesting that the reader will want to read more. Examine the opening paragraphs of letters you have enjoyed. Reread the closing as well. This combination, a lively opening and a strong closing, is one of the important secrets for successful letter writing.

**2 Persona Book II**  
**Letter Writing**

**S T U D E N T** The following is Andy Benson's response to the first Letter Writing assignment, "Personal Messages." Look closely at the assignment to note the format, tone, and other important characteristics of letter writing.  
**S A M P L E S**

1171 Kimberly Place  
West Linn, Oregon 97068  
April 12, 1985

Better Business Bureau  
P.O. Box 450  
Portland, Oregon 97201

Attention:

Several weeks ago, I answered an ad in the newspaper that promised to "mold me into a new person" if I sent them \$450 and followed their course of action. Well, I sent them the money—and on my salary as a dishwasher it wasn't easy—and waited for materials that would change my life. They sent me two things: an address to O'Reilly's Gym and a body sculpturing kit.

I went to O'Reilly's and showed them the card of introduction I was sent, and a guy who was a lookalike for Rocky laughed and said he would mold me into a new man. The next thing I knew, I was in the ring with him running for my life. How I survived those three rounds with him, I'll never know. But I got bruises to last a lifetime, and I never did find all of my teeth.

The body sculpturing kit was nothing more than rubber muscles and padding that I was supposed to wear to "give me that new image."

I know I have been ripped off and want to know what I can do to get my money back. I wrote to a man called Hugo but he never answered my letter.

Desperate,



Andy Benson