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Introduction

The ability to write well is rarely based on raw talent. Like anything of value, learning to write well requires instruction, exploration, observation, practice and commitment. Time-consuming, frustrating and challenging, the art of writing well is worth the labour of learning it.

Writing, like speaking, is pivotal to good communication – regardless of occupational or vocational goals. Once the writer has mastered the mechanics of writing clearly, he or she will have control over all types of communication. Those possibilities include expressing ideas on paper, establishing a point of view, exploring a theory, reflecting upon an experience or feeling, recording an event of merit, narrating a moment of sadness or happiness or simply expanding a dream into a vivid story.

Learning to approach writing as a process will help remove the anxiety many students feel when assigned a writing task. Easy to learn, the writing process will build confidence rather than fear when students are asked to respond to an idea in writing.

This book will teach students a practical writing process for composing written assignments and will help them to become good writers. It is not necessary to follow this book in a sequential order, as the chapters can be used individually to match the needs of students. However, if you are planning on developing a full understanding of writing strategies for different types of writing, then it may be beneficial to follow a chapter-by-chapter approach.

Each chapter contains an explanation of the section to be covered. The teacher's page will help you with the best approach to the learning activities provided for students. It will help you to prepare students and to assign any outside work that will be necessary to improve their understanding of the concepts and strategies.

Teaching writing strategies to students is a challenging and awesome task, but it has its rewards and is worth the effort. Students will become more confident as their skills improve and they master the art of the writing process.

CHAPTER ONE

Beginnings

Searching for Ideas

TEACHER INFORMATION

The writing process begins fairly easily. It encourages students to begin to understand their ability to gather and organise ideas for assessment for writing projects. As the teacher, you will be able to guide them through this first step of idea selection and storage. The habit of gleaning ideas from daily life will help students to think and to assess what is viable and what is mundane. The writing process will help them to gain material for future tasks.

Students will benefit from learning to collect ideas from a variety of sources. They need to understand that to become good writers they need to assess the ideas they have about any given topic or assignment. They have to become familiar with what is happening in the world. They need to practise collecting ideas and staying aware of things around them. Most middle-years students need help in understanding that ideas are everywhere and that developing the habit of paying attention to them will improve their writing.

This chapter will help students develop the habit of idea gathering. They will learn to be alert to things in the world that can be used for future writing topics. The activities and examples provided will offer them practice and build their confidence in understanding which ideas to collect and how to develop them into more than a one-sentence idea. With practice and repetition of some of these tasks, they should be confident to start writing.

One thing that will help students is to ask them to use a spiral notebook so they can record ideas. This idea journal will help them remember the events unfolding around them. They will want to form the habit of recording what they hear from the news, such as the details of the event and their reaction to what happened. Once recorded, they will have some topics they can discuss with their family members for further expansion of ideas. They can write about and expand these topics into written expressions of their ideas.

When you assign a class project, students can refer to their idea journals and find topics to use. The biggest challenge for writing their assignments will not be finding topics, because they will have collected several ideas from everything around them.

The more comfortable they are with finding ideas, the more willing students will be to start the process of writing a composition or an essay or a report. It is worth their time and effort to learn the process of being idea-prepared.

The activities in this chapter provide opportunities for students to practise gathering ideas using the beginning of the writing process approach. Each section addresses a specific way to gather ideas, depending on the type of writing task. The purpose of this idea gathering is to help students understand what they know about a given topic and empower them to search to learn more. The more they know about a topic, the more ideas they will have to develop a composition or writing assignment.

Each section is titled to identify the task and can be used according to the needs of skill mastery. Students will learn that they are responsible for learning about their world and for forming opinions and exploring ideas about the events that are shaping their lives and the lives of other people around the globe. With practice, students will learn that selecting key ideas for use in a quality composition is like picking gems from the rock. They will learn to make good, intelligent choices regarding what ideas will enhance their assignments.

Look and Listen: This activity will help students gain confidence in understanding what they actually know now. Typically, middle-years students have opinions, but they lack the confidence to express them in a writing assignment. This activity helps them to understand that they know more than they realise, and it helps them to begin the process of staying alert to ideas around them.

A World of Ideas: This activity combines gleaning ideas, improving concentration skills, and taking notes from a source other than a textbook or blackboard. This activity is a homework task, but it can be used in a classroom if students need practice taking notes from a television program. Using a videotape of the previous night's news may help students understand how to approach this task. Doing it one time in class may prove beneficial for students. After doing the assignment together, they will be ready to try it at home.

Extra! Extra!: This activity can be done at home or in the classroom. Once again, it provides an opportunity for students to explore new ideas for writing papers and practise note-taking skills.

Stay Tuned!: Listening skills are the focus of this assignment. While students listen for more ideas from the news in their city, state, country and world, they will be able to practise focussed listening and note taking.

Who Is That Person?: Providing exposure to resource material and expanding the idea that information is everywhere for the taking, this activity will help students work with encyclopedias, resource books and the Internet, if it is available.

You and Only You: The autobiography activity helps students to generate ideas for their compositions by helping them to assess what they know about their own history. It also helps them to realise that they need to gain more information about their lives by interviewing family members and researching other reliable sources. They will better understand their personal history once they complete this task and write an autobiography.

Look and Listen

Writing on a subject you know very little about is a difficult and frustrating task. It is a challenge to organise, but if you have no knowledge or very little knowledge of a topic, it becomes almost overwhelming. However, this situation can be remedied very easily. It only requires that you begin to collect ideas and develop a good base of things you do know.

Your life is filled with information. You can find out all sorts of things about what is going on around you in your city or suburb, and what is happening half-way around the globe. All you have to do is find out what you know now, take a good look at what you would like to know, and then start to look and listen to what is happening. Once you become comfortable with really observing things, you will begin to learn more about people, society and the world. The more you know, the more you can express in a composition that will now have supporting information to make your writing believable.

A good place to start is listing what you do know now. Consider what is happening in politics, schools, your suburb, sports and the news media. Jot down what you know, to begin understanding how aware you are of things that are happening in your world. From this first assessment you can decide how to be more tuned in to your world so you will have something to write about in future compositions.

Directions: List what you know about current situations that are happening in each of the following:

Your neighbourhood _____

Your school _____

Your local government _____

Current news events _____

Current sporting events/happenings _____

The political scene in your country _____

What is happening on a global scale? Explain what and where. _____

Next, begin the process of actually paying attention to the areas you just considered so that you understand what you need to learn if you want to be a writer capable of adding depth to a composition. For a few days, look and listen and add new details to the same areas. Pay attention to how much you learn by just listening and asking questions. Remember, the more you know, the stronger your supporting information in a composition.



Directions: Add more information to the same areas that you worked with before. Compare your lists before and after you decided to look and listen to your world. Make an effort to become more alert to your changing world.

Your neighbourhood _____

Your school _____

Your local government _____

Current news events _____

Current sporting events/happenings _____

The political scene in your country _____

What is happening on a global scale? Explain what and where _____

Any other area of interest. _____
