

TEACHING THAT MAKES SENSE

Prompted Writing

*Tools for Helping Students Maximize
Their Writing Scores on High-Stakes State Tests*

by
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Prompted Writing?

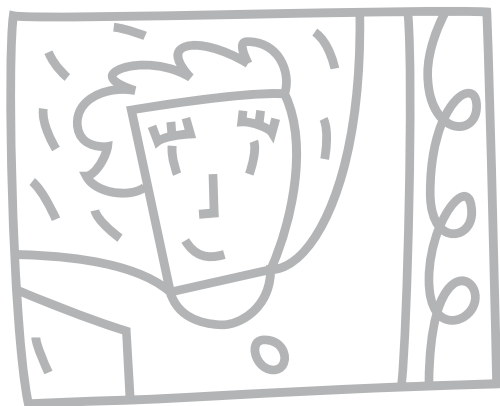
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To Prompt or Not to Prompt

Should we require students to write to prompts on a regular basis? That's a question that comes up often these days. In general, prompts are regarded as a necessary evil: necessary because our testing systems use prompts and because prompts represent the tradition of writing instruction in school; evil because common sense tells us that no one really likes writing to prompts and that people rarely do their best work in prompted writing situations.

In my work as an education consultant, have encountered three positions on the prompted writing issue:

- **Students should write frequently to prompts.** This is the traditional position. It reflects the way writing has always been taught. From a teacher's perspective, this is the easiest position to take because it requires the least amount of effort. From the perspective of an administrator, board member, or politician it is also the safest position to take because it is grounded in tradition, it is what people are familiar with, and it is mirrored in our current testing systems.
- **Students should rarely if ever write to prompts.** This is the minority position held by only a small number of educators.
- **Students should experience a balance of prompted and non-prompted writing experiences.** Many educators have arrived at this position. It represents a compromise between traditional values and the ideals of a contemporary minority who place an unusually high value on authentic learning.

For some educators, the position they hold on prompted writing is rooted in strongly held beliefs. For others, their position reflects a lack of knowledge, a lack of experience, or a lack of clarity regarding the attitudes, behaviors, and skills they want students to develop. Many educators are simply unsure of themselves and choose to go along with the majority. And finally, for some, I suppose the issue doesn't matter at all.

Examining the Three Positions

Position #1: Students should write frequently to prompts. The most common arguments that I hear in favor of regular prompted writing practice are fairly straightforward: **(1)** Our testing systems rely exclusively on prompted writing tasks; having students write frequently to prompts is the best way to prepare them for this eventuality. **(2)** In our lives outside of school, particularly in the world of work, we have to write to prompts. **(3)** Prompted writing is the most effective way to prepare students for college. **(4)** Most children do not like to write, or do not know what to write about, so the only way to get them to write productively on a regular basis is to give them prompts.

Position #2: Students should rarely, if ever, write to prompts. The arguments in favor of letting students choose their own writing topics (and against prompted writing as a means of instruction) are fairly simple: **(1)** Logic tells us that students will write more effectively if they choose topics they know a lot about and have strong feelings for. **(2)** Common sense tells us that students will have more to say, and will be more motivated to engage in the hard work of saying it, if they have a personal investment in their topic and develop ownership in their work as a result. **(3)** Personal experience tells us that anyone who has ever been to school knows the difficulty and unpleasantness of writing to a topic picked by someone else. **(4)** Professional writers tell us that being able to choose their own topics and determine their own content is one of the most important aspects of writing; it is critical that children learn how to do this well.

Position #3: Students should experience a balance of prompted and non-prompted writing instruction. The arguments in favor of this position are most often stated as negative reactions to the first two positions: **(1)** Students write better when choose topics they know a lot about and have strong feelings for, but if they did that all the time, they wouldn't be able to pass their tests. **(2)** Students who are forced to write to prompts frequently and on a regular basis often tend to dislike writing and to produce work that is dull, formulaic, and of poor quality. **(3)** Children face both prompted and non-prompted writing situations in their lives and will therefore benefit from a balanced approach in school. **(4)** Taking a balanced approach seems the most prudent, logical, and responsible course because the other two positions are simply too extreme.

So where does that leave us? How can we sort out the issues of prompted writing and provide consistent and responsible instruction for our children that not only insures their success in school but in their lives outside of school as well? Each of three positions seems clear, thoroughly supported, and well justified. Perhaps there is no single right answer. Maybe each position is correct in its way. Or perhaps it doesn't make any difference at all. If each position produces the same end result, what difference does it make which one we choose?

Real Life Writing

Why teach writing at all? Before we can decide what children should be writing about, we ought to be clear about why we want them to write in the first place. Writing is very difficult, most people struggle with it all their lives. Why do we want our children to go through this?

Clearly, as a society, we value the written word. We live in the Information Age and much of that information is written. Writing is an indispensable real world skill, something most of us use in one form or another almost every day, something that enriches our lives and enables our livelihood. With the advent of e-mail, instant messaging, and other text-based forms of communication, writing is probably more important now than at any time in our history.

In addition to the obvious real world application, there is also an important academic application of writing. Of all the ways teachers can assess learning, writing remains the most popular and, in many cases, the most appropriate as well. There's nothing like a written statement to help an instructor discover what students have learned and what they might need to learn next.

So, as educators, we have at least two clear purposes for having our students write: **(1)** We want students to be prepared for life in the world outside of school; and **(2)** We want to be able to accurately assess student learning so we can use those assessments to guide our instruction.

Writing in Real Life. One of the best arguments in favor of prompted writing is the “real life” argument: In real life, especially in the workplace, adults have to write to prompts. But is this true? What is writing really like out there in real world?

[Please note: I wrote the following during May of 2001 when I was working for Exem Company in Issaquah, WA, a provider of Internet content management software.]

Today was a typical work day for me. Currently, I'm the Director of Product Development for an Internet company. When I'm not in meetings, I'm usually at my desk writing. Today I didn't have any meetings so I had plenty of time to work. Here's a list of what I wrote:

E-mail. I wrote 15-20 e-mails, most of them short, a few rather involved because I am planning to be out of the office for a few days and I needed to make sure that the people I was managing knew what to do in my absence.

Product Release Specification. I wrote a brief product release specification: a thousand word document describing the parameters of a product my group is launching at the end of July and detailing the major milestones in the project.

Real Life Writing, cont.

Competitive Analysis. I spent some time updating an ongoing analysis of competing products. Mostly this has involved research on the Internet followed by a few paragraphs synthesizing known information as it relates to the products our company develops. I also collect URLs of important articles that I have encountered on the web.

Conference Report. I recently attended a conference in San Francisco. The Vice President of Global Products, my boss, asked me to write a short report about it when I returned.

Expense Report. I compiled a list of the expenses I incurred at the conference.

Status Report. I typed up my weekly status report and sent it off to my boss along with my projections for what I thought our group would accomplish in the coming week.

Brochure Copy. I helped our Director of. This involved maybe 300 words about the product I am currently focused on.

All in all, it was a typical day — except for the fact that I didn't have any meetings which means I got more work done than I usually do. I'm sure that literally millions of people spent their day in similar situations writing similar documents. But did we all write to prompts?

First of all, we certainly didn't get little assignments like we had in school: "Write an expository essay of no less than 1000 words describing the information you gained at the conference in San Francisco. Please list the important presentations you attended and discuss the impact of the information you acquired on our company's strategic plan." And yet, I certainly was "prompted" to write about very specific things. What does this mean?

In the real world, we don't write to prompts, we write to people. More generally, we write to an audience that is defined by the person or persons we hope will be reading what we have written. We write to this audience for very specific purposes, so specific, in fact, that if we are not aware of the purpose, we probably don't write at all. In the real world, most of us are too busy to spend time on purposeless writing. There's just too much purposeful writing we all have to do.

In the case of my conference report, I knew that my boss had just spent several thousand dollars out of her budget so I could attend. I also knew that in order for her to justify that expense, she would need information she could use to make strategic planning decisions for the company. Audience? My boss. Purpose? Provide strategic planning information.

A “Real Life” Prompt

But isn’t that a prompt? To some people, it might seem like I’m writing to a prompt. After all, I was easily able to create a prompt that matched my real life writing situation. Isn’t this exactly what we do for kids in school when we give them prompts?

While it’s true that prompts can be “reverse engineered” from most authentic writing situations, writing to a prompt in school is nothing like writing in real life. The differences are easy to see when you consider the example of my conference report:

Uniqueness. The “prompt” I came up with was written specifically for me and my exact situation. I’m the only person who will write this document.

Authenticity. I was there. I went to the conference, attended sessions, took notes, etc., knowing all the while the kind of information I needed to gather and who I might need to share that information with.

Knowledge. As my company’s Director of Product Development, I’m an expert in my subject.

Feelings. I like my job and I want to do well at it. I also understand how what I do is reflected in my position and in how much I get paid.

Content. Because I am an expert in this subject, I have a thorough understanding of the information that needs to be included.

Purpose. I have a clear sense of why I’m writing this document and how it will be used by my company.

Audience. I know my audience very well. I understand my boss’s needs and expectations in this context.

Form. I have written many of these documents before; I know what they should look like.

Assistance. I have a computer, word processing software with spelling and grammar checker, access to the Internet, the phone, print resources, and if that’s not enough, there are 10 people in the office who can help me if I need it.

Feedback. Even if I write the whole thing, turn it in, and find out three days later that it stinks, my boss can just send it back to me and I can fix it.

A Prompt in Real Life

Now this is a prompt. Let's look at a typical prompt from a typical prompted writing assessment: "You recently purchased a product you had wanted for a long time from a local store, but after using it for only a little while, it broke. Write a letter to the store manager that will persuade this person to replace the product or give you back your money."

How does this prompted writing situation, intended here for 4th graders, compare to the real life situation we just looked at?

Uniqueness. Over 70,000 4th graders wrote to this same prompt.

Authenticity. Many kids might have had the experience of getting a toy and having it break. Few, however, would have written a letter like this before or had much experience with this kind of writing situation in their own lives.

Knowledge. Kids who had had similar experiences might have some knowledge if they can remember what happened.

Feelings. None of the writers is likely to have strong feelings for this situation because it isn't happening to them at the moment.

Content. Some kids might have an inkling of the kind of content a letter like this would need.

Purpose. The real purpose of the writing is to pass a test. Kids will have to focus on the fake purpose of the prompt and do the best they can.

Audience. The real audience is an adult rater. The best students can do is imagine a person they might be writing to.

Form. All kids have probably had experience with the form of a letter. Many may not have written a letter of complaint, however.

Assistance. Students may not get help from anyone. They can't use a computer. They may have limited access to a dictionary or thesaurus.

Feedback. None. In fact, most kids won't even know what their score is.

As you can see, prompted writing in school is quite different from writing in the real world. And prompted writing situations make it almost impossible for kids to do their best work.

Back to Work

Prompt? What Prompt? I've been a professional writer for about 15 years now. I've also written extensively as a professional in work situations that ranged from high tech to the music industry to education, corporate consulting, and journalism, to say nothing of the thousands of personal documents just about any adult living in an industrialized nation would need to create.

When I wrote my report on the conference, I wasn't writing to a prompt. I was writing to the executives in our company who need to if our long term product strategy is consistent with market trends. Knowing this helped me decide what to say and how to say it. I received more than 200 pages of printed notes and I wrote several thousand words myself while attending the sessions and I received several hundreds pages of product literature and speaker's presentation notes. But I know my superiors don't want that. They want something tailored to them and to their unique situation. Given a prompt on the same topic, I would never really know what to leave in or leave out. At best, I might reflect on a past situation and make something up. But today I didn't have to make it up and that made my writing better and easier at the same time.

When I wrote a series of e-mails to the people on my project team, I gave specific instructions to each person. I was also able to vary my tone effectively so as to address each person in a way that they would regard as respectful and appropriate. If I were writing to a rater, how would I know exactly how to address this person?

When I worked on my competitive analysis I thought a lot about who would be using the information. Specifically, I thought about several of our salespeople. I tried to take into account their level of technical knowledge and the kinds of sales situations they would be in where the information I was gathering would come in handy. Specifically, I had to keep in mind that our sales force includes people from several different countries, some of whom are more familiar with English than others. I also had to account for the fact that some sales calls are done in person or on the phone while others are done over the Internet.

When I compiled my expense report, I knew exactly how our controller needed to see it. She has established strict guidelines and I know I need to follow them if I want to get reimbursed. Of course, if I mess up, she'll just send it back to me and I'll get another chance to do it right.

When I wrote up my weekly status report for my boss, I used actual information about my actual work during the week. I didn't have to make up anything at all. I also knew the length and level of detail my boss looks for in this kind of report. I only knew these things because I had written status reports for her before and she had communicated to me her needs.

This is the reality of writing in the world. Of course, writing on tests is also a reality, and we have to make sure kids are prepared. Is it possible to do this without having kids write to prompts?

Still Think We Write to Prompts?

Even if you think that the writing I just described is just like the prompted writing we ask kids to do in school, you'll have to admit one thing: these so-called prompts were written just for me and nobody else. In fact, most of them were written by me. I am choosing on my own to create these documents. I am also choosing the format, length, writing style, and dozens of other things. I can even create different versions of the same document for different purposes and audiences, something I've had to do recently as our company has grown and I now have a larger and more diverse audience to reach.

Everything I've said here speaks to the importance of authentic purposes and authentic audiences, two things that are, by definition, not available to writers when they write to prompts. But there are also a few other things that I think are worth noting:

Clarity of Motivation: In the real world, writers are motivated to write by real life situations. When writing to a prompt, writers have no real world social context. The question of "Why write?" doesn't have a satisfactory answer. Because of this, prompted writing often lacks direction, energy, and focus.

Clarity of Task: In the real world, writers have many cues about what it is they are supposed to accomplish. Most of these cues come from their readers. In prompted writing, it's easy for writers to get confused. This is because we're not used to answering prompts, we're used to answering people.

Clarity of Feedback: In the real world, writers get a lot of feedback which can be put to good use in revision. In prompted writing, especially the kind of prompted writing that is required of students in high stakes testing situations, feedback may not only be unavailable, it might be against the rules. Traditionalists think this is the perfect way to measure writing ability. But being able to use feedback for revision is one of the most important abilities a writer can have.

Clarity of Result: Not only is it relatively easy to figure out what to do in real world writing situations, it's pretty easy to find out how well you did it. In work situations, for example, readers will often go out of their way to let writers know how they're doing. In prompted writing situations, it may be difficult or impossible for the writer to ascertain his or her result.

From the perspective of a writer, the biggest problem with prompts is that they are never very clear. No matter how thoroughly described and unambiguously worded a prompt may be, it will always seem confusing: there's simply no way to know for sure what people are looking for when they give out a prompt. In the real world, it's at least possible to find out and to know you succeeded.

Teaching with Prompts

Even if you love using prompts, you have to admit that as a means of instruction prompted writing has its drawbacks:

Prompted writing encourages conformity. The narrower and more specific the prompt, the more students are encouraged to write more or less the same things. In a classroom situation where 20-30 students are working on the same prompts, and where students are sharing their work, those students who have less interest in and knowledge of the topic are more likely to copy from those who do.

Prompted writing discourages risk taking. In prompted writing situations, students tend to play it safe. The formality of the process discourages them from experimentation. Of course, one of the biggest risks writers take is the risk of choosing their own topics. Obviously, that's not possible at all.

Prompted writing decreases independence. The more students write to prompts, the more they become dependent upon the teacher to choose their subject matter. They also become dependent on the teacher to know when they are finished and to know how and what to revise.

Prompted writing decreases ownership. Writers don't care as much about their writing when someone else is telling them what they can and cannot write about. Kids who don't take ownership in their writing aren't accountable for it either. They tend to see the work as merely the completion of an assignment as opposed to the crafting of effective communication.

Prompted writing does not inspire students. Talented and enthusiastic writers generally hate prompts; it's not nearly as much fun for them as choosing topics they really care about. Though many poor or reluctant writers enjoy having the burden of topic selection shouldered by their teachers, the prompts they receive don't encourage them to value writing or to become excited about it.

Prompted writing tends to produce mediocre writing. I have never known students who write better to prompts than they do when choosing their own good topics. Even the best young writers tend, in prompted situations, to produce work that is safe, dull, formulaic, and perfunctory.

Prompted writing is more difficult to revise. Because there is no authentic audience or purpose in a prompted piece, writers have a harder time knowing how to improve their writing after an initial draft.

Teaching Authentically

While authentic writing may not pose the same challenges for students, it is certainly more challenging for teachers:

Authentic writing instruction requires significant instructional

time. In order to make good progress, beginning writers at the elementary level need to be writing 4-5 days per week, 45-60 minutes per day. More accomplished writers at the secondary level need a minimum of three days a week.

Authentic writing instruction requires a well-trained teacher.

Prompted writing can be taught out of a workbook with little or no previous experience or formal training. Authentic writing with student-selected topics requires that the teacher have a broad repertoire of proven instructional strategies.

Authentic writing instruction requires the creation and maintenance of an authentic writing community.

Managing a classroom of kids writing to prompts is much simpler than managing authentic writers. For one thing, with prompted writing there's more of a chance that many kids will end up doing the same thing, the same way, at the same time. When kids choose their own topics, they require more dynamic instruction. Authentic writing also requires authentic response. Kids have to share and get good feedback, something that often requires significant training for both author and audience.

Authentic writing instruction requires flexibility. In choosing their own topics, students may discover that some work better than others. They may start a piece and drop it shortly thereafter only to begin something new. Teachers have to be just as flexible in the way they manage their expectations of what kids will be doing when.

Authentic writing instruction requires a consistent, long term

time commitment. Prompted writing can be done on an ad hoc basis. A teacher can spend a few days on a piece and then not worry about writing again for several weeks or months with almost no impact on student learning. Authentic writing has to be practiced on a consistent basis in order for it to be effective.

Authentic writing instruction represents a departure from tradi-

tion. Prompted writing can be taught using the same techniques teachers experienced when they were students in school. Authentic writing requires that teachers learn something new.

The Heart of the Matter

Values, priorities, and the challenge of teaching. I don't think anyone would disagree that authentic writing is better for kids, but prompted writing is easier for teachers, and that, more than anything else, is probably why it has always been so popular in the past and why it continues to be so today. Prompted writing is also easier to implement within an entire school system because it requires no training and is easy to control, monitor, and administrate. It's also easier to test with prompted writing and to evaluate test results.

The simple truth of the matter is that teachers are overworked and under trained. Because our curriculum is so broad, and our school day so short, many teachers feel they don't have time for authentic writing instruction. Even among those teachers who make the time, many don't know where to begin because most teachers teaching today — even those teaching at the secondary level with Language Arts certifications — have received little or no training in authentic writing instruction, either in elementary or secondary school, in college, in pre-service training, or through in-service workshops.

So what's the solution? I choose to believe that at any given moment we're all doing just about the best we can and that teaching isn't much different from anything else we do. Everybody has a full plate: if we don't have time for something, and we don't feel that it's extremely important, we just don't do it. Even when we do find the time for writing, most of us don't know how to use that time effectively. The solutions to our problems, then, involve better training and a heart-felt re-evaluation of our priorities.

Culturally, we consider writing to be the second of the “Three R's” which have formed the foundation of our national public school curriculum since the 19th century. We've always said we value writing but we've never acted on that alleged priority by training teachers how to teach it or by scheduling it during the school day in proper proportion to other subjects. This unfortunate tradition is now supported by federal mandate: The yearly national testing proposed in the *Leave No Child Behind Act of 2002* includes math and reading only; writing won't be tested at all. If we're going to make progress, this tradition has to be abandoned.

Despite commanding a significant position in the public mind, writing has historically been afforded only a marginal position in our public schools. Worse yet, the little time and limited instruction we have offered has been devoted almost exclusively to handwriting, punctuation, spelling, and grammar with scant attention paid to original composition. In short, the problems of the present are the practices of the past: most teachers, in addition to lacking formal training in the delivery of authentic writing instruction, never had a chance to experience it as students when they were in school. If we continue to do what we've always done, our next generation of teachers won't be any more prepared to teach than the current generation.

But What About the Tests?

Even if you believe, as I do, that prompted writing is inferior to authentic writing as a means of instruction; even if you believe, as I do, that too many prompts turn kids off to writing and encourage poor attitudes and bad habits; even if you believe, as I do, that prompted writing isn't the same as writing in real life, you still have to contend with one thing: Prompted writing is part of life in school. So what do we do about that?

The peril and the prompt. Your students are taking a formal state writing assessment that involves responding to prompts. Instead of having them write to prompts throughout the year, you've guided them in the selection of their own topics. They've been writing well, they enjoy it, they've improved. But in a month, they'll have to face prompted writing. What do you do?

Teach test writing as a genre. Every teacher knows how to do a genre study. Test writing is its own genre. It has its own rules and formalities, it's own peculiar style, it's own way of being assessed; it's different from real writing and kids need to know what those differences are. Teach kids how test writing works the same way you teach them about fiction writing, or letters, or book reviews, or reports. Spend two or three weeks studying it and trying to reproduce it well.

Don't write to prompts, pre-write to prompts. It might take a student one or two weeks to finish an entire piece of writing but most kids can do the pre-writing for a piece in 15-20 minutes. So, give out all the prompts you want during your test writing genre study and have kids pre-write to those prompts instead of writing out their full pieces. Both you and your students will be able to tell how well a piece is going to turn out just from the pre-writing. This way, your kids can practice responding to dozens of prompts in a very short period of time.

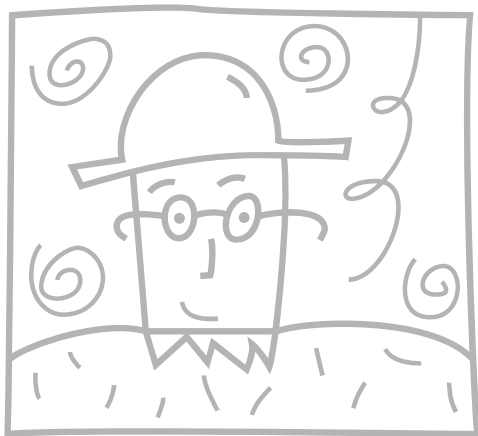
Use pre-writing "strategy sets" that are matched to each type of prompt. Your kids have been pre-writing all year with strategies like Draw-Label-Caption, Action-Feelings-Setting, What-Why-How, Idea-Details, etc. Just tell them which ones to use for which prompts:

For narrative prompts. Draw-Label-Caption, Action-Feelings-Setting, Transition-Action-Details, Tell-Show, Lead and Ending strategies for narrative pieces.

For expository prompts. What-Why-How, Idea-Details, Content-Purpose-Audience, Lead and Ending strategies for expository pieces.

For persuasive prompts. What-Why-How, Idea-Details, Content-Purpose-Audience, Lead and Ending strategies for persuasive prompts.

For fiction prompts. Five Facts of Fiction, Transition-Action-Details, Action-Feelings-Setting, Tell-Show, Lead and Ending strategies for fiction.



2

Designing Prompts for Prompted Writing

The way it is now; the way it's always been. When we think of writing assessments, we think of writing prompts. We also think of rooms full of students writing silently for a class period or two in little test booklets as teachers keep a watchful eye to make sure that everything is running smoothly: no talking, no walking around, just everyone writing — doing their very best, we hope, despite the awkwardness of the situation — until the time runs out and the papers are collected. In less formal situations, like the typical prompted classroom writing assignment, students enjoy more flexibility about how they get their work done, but many still struggle with the inflexibility of what they've been asked to do, often straining to produce writing of a quality far inferior to what they might be able to do easily if they chose their own good topics.

Writing is hard enough for kids when they have a deep understanding of their topic and strong feelings they want to share with an authentic audience who is eager to hear what they have to say. But it's darned near impossible to produce one's best work when someone else is choosing the topic, form, length, etc., and when the only audience is a teacher (or a tester) who is really just looking for some way to come up with a score or determine a grade.

It doesn't have to be this way. There are far more interesting, fair, and effective ways of giving kids practice with writing and assessing their ability. But for the time being, until we as educators get more comfortable with authentic teaching, this is the way it is.

The most important thing to keep in mind when we work with kids and prompts is this: The prompt itself, and the process of responding to it, has a huge influence on what students write. When we evaluate prompted writing, we're not just evaluating the writer, we're evaluating the prompt as well. What students write to prompts often varies greatly from what they write in authentic situations. For this reason, when we look at student writing that was written in response to a prompt, we must always use caution when drawing conclusions about writing ability and specific needs for future instruction.

Prompts and Assessments

Some prompts are better than others. There are different kinds of prompts you can use for assignments and assessments and some are arguably better than others in terms of being fair to all students and gathering more accurate data. However, all prompts suffer from the same basic weaknesses: lack of authentic purpose or audience, lack of explicit connection to the writer's life, general incomprehensibility, etc. You will always find that the particular prompt you select has some noticeable effect on your results and that this effect cannot easily be accounted for. That is to say, when you use a prompt, you never really know for sure what a writer can really do.

There are also different ways to conduct formal assessments. Like the inevitable difficulties that arise with prompted topics, the assessment format and other logistical considerations present their own unique challenges that affect different students in different ways. If we want to collect reliable data, we need to do our best to minimize the effect of the assessment itself on the results.

Each decision you make in creating a prompt and defining the constraints of the assessment influences the work your students do and the validity of the data you gather. It just makes sense, then, to think carefully about the prompts you choose and the rules you establish, and even more carefully about how you interpret the data you end up with.

The purpose of assessment. Assessing writing takes a lot of time, so it's important to do it in a way that is both efficient and effective. Try to keep this in mind: We conduct writing assessments not to check up on teachers or schools, or to make sure kids are “making the grade” or “meeting the standard,” but to assess student writing ability for the purpose of guiding instruction. These other issues are certainly important, but this is not the best way to assess them; formal, prompted assessments are not reliable indicators of strengths and weaknesses in these domains because they are not authentic “real world” measures of performance.

The first question to ask yourself whenever you think you want to give an assessment is: How will the information gained be used to improve the instruction students receive? Unless you can answer this question in some detail, conducting a writing assessment will be of little value to you or to anyone else. In this case, you're much better off spending your time with your kids, helping them in any way that you can, reflecting on their needs as learners and your needs as their teacher, primarily through individual conferences, sharing, and student self-assessment activities.

Assuming that you can answer this all-important question, the task of selecting a writing prompt comes to mind. But before you create a prompt and ask students to write to it, you may want to consider not giving a prompt at all. There's really no reason to give a prompt — it's just the way we've always done it. And it does impact the quality of the data.

Prompts and Quality

How prompts affect quality. Conducting a formal, prompted assessment makes assessing some abilities difficult — the traits of voice and ideas most of all; organization may also suffer if the student recognizes the prompt as encouraging a certain type of formulaic writing. If the student has no strong opinions about the given topic, or if they have little knowledge of the subject matter, their writing may be lackluster — functional at best, incomplete or incorrect at worst.

The formal structure of the assessment itself also affects student responses. Students who like to share their writing with others to get constructive feedback, or those who prefer working in a less formal setting, will find that their typical writing process has been short-circuited, and as a result their writing may lack energy, depth, or coherence.

So, as you choose prompts, and think as well about how you want to conduct the writing sessions, ask yourself this question: “How will the writing prompt and the testing conditions influence the kind of writing students produce and the validity of the data acquired?”

A key concept to consider when selecting prompts. An important concept to consider when selecting prompts for writing assessments is this: The narrower the prompt — the more specific a response it requires — the more likely you are to get mediocre writing as low writers will tend to come up and high writers will tend to come down. Narrow prompts produce a narrow range of results. This only makes sense as narrower prompts encourage more similar responses, and similar responses should receive similar scores. The more open the prompt — the more it leaves the choice of content, purpose, audience, genre, form, or mode in the control of the writer — the more likely you will be to get a look at how writers exert this control, and to get a range of responses that is more reflective of the true range of abilities present in a given student population.

Quality or Obedience? The last important element to consider is whether or not you will be assessing the writer’s ability to respond appropriately to the prompt. For example, what kind of score or grade will a writer receive who produces a brilliant response that is off topic or off mode? The difficulty in measuring this aspect of a writer’s performance comes from the fact that in school we often confuse following directions with student ability.

Students who succeed at writing to prompts often cannot write effectively for real world purposes and audiences because the conditions in real life situations are rarely spelled out for them so conveniently. Students who write well in authentic situations often struggle with prompts because they are so sensitive — as the best writers are — to the authentic social context of authentic communication.

How Writers are Affected

Who is affected most? Whenever you think about giving a formal, prompted writing assessment, think about this: high and low writers often perform quite differently in formal assessments with prompted topics than they do in authentic real life writing situations.

High writers, those who write well consistently and independently, draw much of their inspiration from the topics they choose themselves and from the social situations that “prompt” them to write in their daily lives. In life there are no prompted topics, only purposes and audiences; it is the authentic social context of real life situations, and not the constraints of a pre-selected topic, that determine the writer’s choice of content, style, and method of execution.

When given a prompted topic, talented writers often lose inspiration because they have little to say about it, or because they sense that the social context is meaningless or otherwise contrived; there’s no real audience for them to get a fix on, no person or group of people to write to, and no real reason to communicate. In short, there’s no real need to write as well as they can. This leads, not surprisingly, to the production of mediocre work by otherwise talented students.

More talented and enthusiastic writers are also writers who spend a lot of time on their writing, often writing outside of school on their own and of their own initiative. If the assessment is timed, they will be at a disadvantage relative to the conditions under which they would normally produce their best work. (Ironically, the better a writer is, the less likely a prompted assessment is to reveal his or her true abilities.) Additionally, these writers are often the ones who make the most of sharing and feedback, two vital activities they are denied in formal assessment situations.

Low writers, those who have trouble often just getting started, are sometimes buoyed by the prompt and the well-defined structure of the assessment. At least they know what they’re supposed to write about, and often they view responding to the prompt as though they are simply answering a question, something they are often more comfortable with than, for example, staking out an original position on a real life issue that might actually mean something to them or to someone else. They’re also helped by timed assessments. Given two or three class periods in which they are required to write, and no other alternatives, they often produce more writing than they might under normal circumstances.

At first glance, having low writers write to prompts may seem like a good idea. But the artificial structure of the assessment masks more serious problems and taints the data we can gather. When low writers perform better than expected on prompted assessments, we tend to ignore their real needs. Specifically, we fail to identify the problems they have writing in authentic, real world situations that reveal real problems we need to help them address if they are going to improve.

Open Prompts

No constraints. This first prompt is not really a prompt at all. It is merely an invitation to the writer to write something good. In many ways, this is the fairest prompt that could be used because each writer has the same opportunity to pick something they know they can write about effectively. Because of this, an unconstrained prompt guarantees that you will get the best assessment of what writers can really do.

Create a piece of writing that shows the kind of writer you are. You may write on any topic, in any form, genre, or mode, (except poetry, song, or drama). Pick something to write about that you will be able to write about well, something that will inspire you to produce your very best work.

Though the advantages of this kind of prompt are clear, it is rarely used for the following reasons:

- It tends to encourage very diverse writing, something that makes scoring more of a challenge.
- There is the possibility, however slight, that students could memorize something and merely write that down from memory.
- It tends to favor those students who have had significant amounts of authentic writing instruction over those students who have primarily experienced traditional prompted writing instruction.
- It is unsettling to traditional teachers who don't feel they can prepare their students adequately for this kind of unstructured writing because they don't do very much of it in their own classrooms.
- Open prompts are not part of our tradition of testing student achievement. Many educators are simply uncomfortable when they break from tradition.

Some educators, and almost all testing specialists, feel that this type of prompt is not fair because it allows different students to produce different pieces. This is, ironically, backwards. What's unfair is forcing so many different students to write to the same narrow topic. Obviously, when a prompt is very narrow, those students who are more familiar with its subject matter have a huge advantage over those who don't.

In the classroom, this kind of prompt can be used a bit more comfortably. Teachers who know their students well will have a better idea of what to expect and will therefore have fewer concerns regarding scoring, cheating, fairness, and any other issues that may arise.

Slightly Narrower “Open” Prompts

Constrained by broad subject area but not by topic, mode, context, or form.

This type of prompt may represent a reasonable middle ground for educators who recognize the problems inherent in all prompted writing but who still want to use prompts on a regular basis. Each of the following prompts is constructed in a similar way. The intent here is to constrain the broad subject area but to give students great freedom when it comes to everything else. Much thought has also been given here to creating prompts that are fair to all students regardless of age, ethnicity, or social background. The prompts are based on opposing types of feelings and experiences from real life that are easy to identify with.

There are things we really like in our lives and things we don't like at all. These are the things that give us our strongest feelings, and our strongest feelings often produce our best writing. Write about one thing you have strong feelings for, something you like or something you don't like at all.

There are typical things that we do all the time in our lives and unusual things that happen only once in a while. These are the things we know best in our lives, and the things we know best are often the best things to write about. Write about one thing from your life that you know very well, something typical or something unusual.

Everybody loves to do fun things, but we all have to do things that aren't very fun. Sometimes we have to do things just because we have to. Write about one thing you do for fun, or one thing you do because it is something you just have to do.

There are times in our lives when we feel very proud about something we have done, and other times when we feel bad about the things we do. Write about one time when you felt proud about something you did, or one time when you felt bad about something you did.

There are things in our lives that are easy and things in our lives that are hard. Write about one thing in your life that has been easy for you, or one thing that has been hard.

As with the completely unconstrained prompt, these prompts are rarely used for similar reasons. An additional concern revolves around the fact that these prompts often produce narrative writing, a kind of writing that is thought to be inferior to expository and persuasive writing among traditionalists. Some educators also feel that these prompts are too simplistic and therefore not suitably challenging.

Topic Prompts

Constrained by subject area. These prompts are just a bit narrower than the previous set. Because of this, they tend to produce more similar writing even across highly diverse groups of students. This makes responses easier to compare and rank, an aspect that makes this kind of prompt more palatable to tradition-minded educators.

Life is full of surprises, both good and bad. Most of the time our life goes along pretty much the way we think it will. But every once in a while something so unexpected occurs that it changes the way we think about things. Write about a time in your life when you were really surprised about something that happened. What did you do? How did you feel? How did this experience change you? What did you learn?

Your parents send you to school to learn, but some of the most important lessons in life aren't learned in the classroom. Think about something important that you've learned outside of school. How did you learn it? Why is it important to you? Who or what taught you about it? How has this learning helped you in your life?

Everybody wants something. Some people want money or toys or other fun things, some people want to go places, other people just want to be happy. Think of a time in your life when you really wanted something. What was it? Why was it so important to you? Did you get it? Was it as good as you thought it would be?

This type of prompt occurs regularly on state writing assessments. It usually produces a narrative result. It is also a common type of prompt for an undergraduate college entrance application. It is not as easy to respond to as the previous set, but most writers — even very young ones — can usually come up with something.

These prompts share a particular stylistic quality: they all end with a series of questions. This is, of course, optional; it's certainly easy for kids to figure out what they're being asked to do without the direct questions. But, for lower writers, younger writers, or for those writers who may not be proficient speakers of English, I have found that adding these questions improves the likelihood that everyone will understand exactly what they are being asked to do. The downside is that a few students always seem to answer the questions directly and leave it at that. As a result, their pieces are about five or six sentences long.

Topic and Mode Prompts

Constrained by topic and mode. This is another common type of prompt. Many educators like it because they can exert a lot of control over the writing their students produce. The key difference here is that the mode of the response is clearly indicated. In this case, all of these prompts are either expository or persuasive. This is the kind of writing traditional academics value above all others. As a result, these kinds of prompts show up often on formal assessments.

Everybody knows how to do something. And usually there's somebody else who wants to know how to do it, too. Think of something you know how to do and explain clearly how to do it.

Frequently, adults tell you that things will happen "when you grow up," and that you will know things "when you grow up." Explain clearly what it means to you to be grown up and how you think your life will be different as a grown-up.

Some valuable things can be bought in a store, other valuable things cannot be bought no matter how much money you have. Think about what is most valuable to you. Explain clearly what it is and why it is so valuable.

Some kids get allowance, some don't. Some kids get a little, some get a lot. What do you think about allowance? Give your opinion and provide clear details that would convince another person that you are right.

Think of a rule you would like to have changed. The rule can be a school rule, a home rule, or even a city, state, or federal law. Convince someone that the rule should be changed by giving good reasons for the change.

As with the prompts in the previous category, each of these follows a predictable style. In particular, certain key words have been emphasized to clue kids into the desired mode of response. This makes the responses more targeted and thus easier to score. Occasionally, very talented writers mix modes effectively on these types of prompts. In some testing situations, this is considered an "off mode" response and the paper is marked down or rejected as something that cannot be scored. This is unfortunate and unfair, a perfect example of how an inauthentic assessment fails to assess authentic writing.

The obvious problem with these prompts is that there exists a fairly high chance that a significant number of kids might not have much to say about any one of them. This problem can be alleviated by giving kids a choice of several different prompts for the same assessment. As logical and thoughtful as this sounds, it is almost never done on official writing assessments.

About as Narrow as They Get

Constrained by topic, mode, context, and form. This is the most highly structured type of prompt. While it provides teachers with a very focused target to score against, it tends to produce responses that are so similar as to be indistinguishable from each other in terms of quality. If kids can respond to the basic issues, and if they write at least a four or five paragraphs, they'll probably earn an average score regardless of how well they write.

A game manufacturer has hired you to design a new game for kids your age. The game can be about anything you think your friends would enjoy, and it can be any kind of game (board game, video game, computer game, card game, etc.) The president of the company would like you to write a letter to the people who will be making the game to tell them about the kind of game you think they should make. Explain the game clearly and tell why you think kids like you would enjoy playing it.

You need money to buy something that's very important to you, and you know that the best way to get the money you need is to get a job. But ten other people have applied for the same job you want, so you've been asked to write an essay to convince the company to hire you over everyone else. Tell why you should get the job.

These prompts are very risky. First of all, with such narrow scope, you're almost guaranteed to encounter papers from kids who simply have no life experience that they can bring to this situation. Second, a significant number of kids may not address the prompt in its entirety. During a testing situation, kids have a tendency to misread complex instructions. Quite often, with prompts like this, kids will write a great piece that doesn't quite address the prompt thus causing some head-scratching among the scorers. Finally, some kids won't choose the correct form or mode. This puts scorers in the awkward position of having to decide between scoring the piece simply as a piece of writing, or scoring it as though it were the answer to a test question. Some scoring systems actually require their scorers to give a score of "0" to papers that fail to address the prompt.

These kinds of prompts are very popular among traditional educators and testing specialists specifically because they are so narrow.

All prompts should be assessed for their own validity. There are two ways to do this: (1) Determine the percentage of "off topic," "off mode," and "incomplete" responses. The more of these you get in a given assessment, the less valid the prompt for a given student population. (2) Determine the variance in quality between responses. The more similar the quality in responses, the less valid the prompt. When a large group of writers produces both very few low or high responses, you know you've got a bad prompt on your hands.

Conceptual Prompts

A few thoughts about abstract and conceptual prompts. Some of the prompts typically used for writing assessments are highly abstract or conceptual. Prompts that ask students to address in a general way such topics as “Courage” or “Honesty” or “Heroism,” for example, pose a unique challenge for writers and assessors alike. Even though most of us think about these things from time to time, and are generally aware of the cultural contexts to which they apply, rarely, if ever, do we give them serious thought — the kind of thought that would lend itself to strong writing. And so it’s not surprising that the writing we see on assessments that use these types of prompts is often very weak. There are three reasons for this:

(1) The writing is general. Most writers respond to prompts about general concepts with equivalently general prose — hackneyed adages, well-worn clichés, and the banal meanderings we’re all guilty of when pressed for specifics on things we’ve long taken for granted. We’re just not used to this kind of writing or thinking, it is not natural at all (none of us, adults included, does it very well or very comfortably; it can even be a little embarrassing).

(2) The writing lacks a true main idea. “Courage” is a theme, not a main idea. It’s up to the writer to take a position on that theme, and to support that position with details. But few writers have the maturity to stake out positions on topics like this that are any more definite than “It’s good to have courage,” or “Courage is important,” ideas which one could easily infer from the prompt itself, and which don’t inspire much in the average reader.

(3) The writing isn’t real. The overwhelming emphasis in contemporary writing instruction is on students selecting their own writing topics in order to communicate with real audiences and for real purposes. When writers get prompts of a more conceptual nature, prompts which they know reflect a kind of thinking and writing they haven’t had much call for in their lives, they pull back, they play it safe, they tend to repeat what they think adults want them to say, rather than writing about what they really feel. There’s nothing truer than the time-honored adage: “Write what you know.” And all writers, young ones especially, are encouraged to heed this advice. But if the prompt asks them to respond to something they haven’t thought much about, they may find themselves lost. In this situation, writing becomes a formulaic exercise or at best an academic guessing game where children devote most of their energy to figuring out some kind of socially acceptable “right answer” instead of concentrating on creating a good piece of writing.

A Glossary of Prompts

- 1. The Perfect Prompt.** Create a piece of writing that shows the kind of writer you are. You may write on any topic, in any form, genre, or mode, (except poetry, song, or drama). Pick something to write about that you will be able to write about well, something that will inspire you to produce your very best work.
- 2. Memorable Moments.** Everyone has done something they will remember all their life. What did you do that you will always remember? Why was it so memorable? Tell your story in a way that will make your readers remember it, too.
- 3. Typical and Unusual.** There are typical things that we do all the time in our lives and unusual things that happen only once in a while. These are the things we know best in our lives, and the things we know best are often the best things to write about. Write about one thing from your life that you know very well, something typical or something unusual.
- 4. Things That are Easy, Things That are Hard.** There are things in our lives that are easy and things in our lives that are hard. Write about one thing in your life that has been easy for you, or one thing that has been hard.
- 5. The Box that Talks.** A teacher brought a box into the room and left it beside her desk. During lunch, you came back to the classroom and she wasn't there but the box started making sounds. Tell a story about what happened next? What was in the box? What did you do about it?
- 6. Enjoyment and Responsibility.** Everybody loves to do fun things, but we all have to do things that aren't very fun. Sometimes we have to do things just because we have to do them. Write about one thing you do for fun, or one thing you do because it is something you just have to do.
- 7. Animal Farm.** Make believe that you were asked to spend the day taking care of a bunch of unusual animals. What happened? What kind of animals were they? How did you feel about it? Do you think you'll ever want to do it again?
- 8. Things You're Proud of, Things You Regret.** There are times in our lives when we feel very proud about something we have done, and other times when we feel bad about the things we do. Write about one time when you felt proud about something you did, or one thing when you felt bad about something you did.
- 9. Chores, Chores, Chores.** Almost everybody has chores to do. Most of us don't really like them but we do them anyway. How do you feel about chores? Are there any that you like? Are there some just dread doing? Explain your feelings about chores.
- 10. The Perfect Snow Day.** As soon as you feel asleep one Sunday night in the middle of winter, the snow started to fall. When you woke up in the morning, you found out that school was cancelled. What did you do? Describe your perfect snow day.
- 11. Your Favorite Teacher.** Everyone has a favorite teacher. Who is yours? Why was he or she so special? Describe your favorite teacher and explain why this is someone you'll always remember.
- 12. The Trouble with TV.** Adults always seem concerned about the TV shows kids watch. Why do you think that is? Is TV bad for kids? Are there some shows kids shouldn't watch? What are your opinions about TV and kids?
- 13. Frontier Daze.** Imagine that all of a sudden, you were whisked back in time to the frontier days of the wild, wild West. You're confused and afraid. Where are you? What are you doing? Tell a story about what happened while you were there.
- 14. Things We Like and Things We Don't.** There are things we really like in our lives and things we don't like at all. These are the things that give us our strongest feelings, and our strongest feelings often produce our best writing. Write about one thing you have strong feelings for, something you like or something you don't like at all.
- 15. The Stamp of Approval.** Every year, the post office makes new stamps, some with pictures of famous people on them. Who do you think should be on a stamp? What makes this person special to you? Why is he or she worthy of the honor?
- 16. Ads, Ads, Everywhere.** Everywhere we look, we see advertisements for things. On TV, in magazines, on billboard, on the Internet, it seems that we're bombarded by ads all the time. Do you think ads work? Do they make people want to buy stuff, go places, do things? Or are the advertisers just wasting their money?
- 17. Life in the Fast Lane.** The pace of life today is very fast. People like to eat fast food. They want to drive fast cars. They want to make fast money. Why is everything so fast? Why do people seem so attracted to these things? Will life ever slow down?
- 18. The Heart of the Matter.** Courage is something you hear about all the time. We all seem to value people who act courageously. But what is courage exactly? Do you know anyone who is truly courageous? Have you ever shown courage? Why is courage important?
- 19. What is this, the Army?** Many schools now require their students to wear uniforms. What do you think about this? Is it fair? Do you think it makes a school better? Who do you think should pay for the cost of clothes? What are your opinions about schools requiring kids to wear uniforms?
- 20. Budget Blues.** Your school district is having a severe budget shortfall. Things are really bad. They have only two choices. They can cut the football, baseball, and basketball programs at all the high schools, or they can fire 100 teachers. Which course of action would you recommend and why?
- 21. Problem Child.** Every kid has problems. Sometimes you get help with them. If you're lucky, they just go away. But often, you have to solve them for yourself. Think of a problem you had to solve for yourself. What was it? How did you work it out?
- 22. The Incredible Interview.** Imagine that you could spend an hour talking with any human being in history, living or dead. Who would you pick? What would you talk about? How do you think that talking with this person would change your life?
- 23. Taken by Surprise.** Life is full of surprises, both good and bad. Most of the time our life goes along pretty much the way we think it will. But every once in a while something so unexpected occurs that it changes the way we think about things. Write about a time in your life when you were really surprised about something that happened. What did you do? How did you feel? How did this experience change you? What did you learn?
- 24. Life Lessons.** Your parents send you to school to learn, but some of the most important lessons in life aren't learned in the classroom. Think about something important that you've learned outside of school. How did you learn it? Why is it important to you? Who or what taught you about it? How has this learning helped you in your life?
- 25. You Want What You Want.** Everybody wants something. Some people want money or toys or other fun things, some people want to go places, other people just want to be happy. Think of a time in your life when you really wanted something. What was it? Why was it so important to you? Did you get it? Was it as good as you thought it would be?
- 26. How Do You Do?** Everybody knows how to do something. And usually, there's somebody else who wants to know how to do it, too. Think of something you know how to do and explain clearly how to do it.
- 27. When I'm Grown Up.** Frequently, adults tell you that things will happen "when you grow up," and that you will know things "when you grow up." Explain clearly what it means to you to be grown up and how you think your life will be different as a grown-up.

A Glossary of Prompts, cont.

28. Something of Value? Some valuable things can be bought in a store, other valuable things cannot be bought no matter how much money you have. Think about what is most valuable to you. Explain clearly what it is and why it is so valuable.

29. The Allowance Issue. Some kids get allowance, some don't. Some kids get a little, some get a lot. Do you think kids should get allowance? Give your opinion and provide clear details that would convince another person that you are right.

30. Sometimes You Just Gotta Break the Rules. Think of a rule you would like to have changed. The rule can be a school rule, a home rule, or even a city, state, or federal law. Convince someone that the rule should be changed by giving good reasons for the change.

31. Game Consultant. A game manufacturer has hired you to design a new game for kids your age. The game can be about anything you think your friends would enjoy, and it can be any kind of game (board game, video game, computer game, card game, etc.) The president of the company would like you to write a letter to the people who will be making the game to tell them about the game you think they should make. Explain the game clearly and tell why you think kids like you would enjoy playing it.

32. Job Application. You need money to buy something that's very important to you, and you know that the best way to get the money you need is to get a job. But ten other people have applied for the same job you want so you've been asked to write an essay to convince the company to hire you over everyone else. Tell why you should get the job.

33. School Memories. Sometimes the things that happen at school aren't very interesting. But occasionally something unusual happens that you know you'll remember forever. Tell about a school experience you remember well. What was it that made it so memorable?

34. Scary Stories. We all know about scary stories in books and in movies but sometimes real life is scary, too. Tell about a time in your life when you were really scared. What happened? How did things turn out in the end?

35. A Great Vacation. Everybody loves vacations. Sometimes people travel to new places. Sometimes they visit family members. And sometimes they just stay at home and have fun right where they are. Tell about your favorite vacation. What made it so much fun?

36. I Knew I Shouldn't Have Done That. Every once in a while, it seems like we end up in some kind of trouble. Sometimes we don't know that what we're doing is wrong. But at other times, we do something bad even though we know we shouldn't. Tell about a time you did something you shouldn't have and got in trouble for it. What did you do? How did you get caught?

37. After School Activities. The school day is long and hard. But it ends around three and most kids have several hours before dinner. What is your favorite thing to do right after school? Why do you like it so much? Explain your opinion about your favorite after school activity.

38. Books, Movies, and TV. Some people like to read books. Others like to go to the movies. And just about everybody watches TV. What's your favorite book, movie, or TV show? Just pick one and explain your opinion about it. What makes it so good? Why is it your favorite?

39. Subject Matters. In school we study many different subjects. Some we like and some we don't. Pick a subject you really like or one that you really hate. Explain your opinion about it. What's make it your most favorite or least favorite school subject?

40. Honesty is the Best Policy. Everyone in our society seems to value honesty. But what is honesty exactly? How do you know if someone is being honest? Are there times when it's OK to lie? Is honesty always the best policy? Explain your opinions about honesty. Use examples from your own life to support your argument.

41. Your Best Friend. Everybody has a best friend. Who's yours? Why is he or she your best friend? What makes a good best friend? Is it possible to have more than one? What are your opinions about friendship?

42. Advice for a New Student. Just about everyone knows how awkward and uncomfortable it is to be the new kid in school. What advice would you have for someone coming to your school for the very first day? What could you tell this person to make him or her feel better?

43. That's Entertainment. Some people have their favorite TV shows, others like movies, and some like to watch sports. What's your favorite form of entertainment? What do you like about it? Why is it your favorite?

44. Your Favorite Holiday. Holidays are usually a fun time for everyone. Sometimes we just take the day off. Other times we get together with our families. What's your favorite holiday? Why is it your favorite? What do you do to celebrate it?

45. Kids and Jobs. Some kids like to have after school jobs. For some it provides extra spending money, for others it's a way to gain experience and to take on more responsibility. But jobs take time away from other things. Sometimes kids fall behind on their homework or don't spend enough time with friends when they have jobs. Should kids who are in school have jobs?

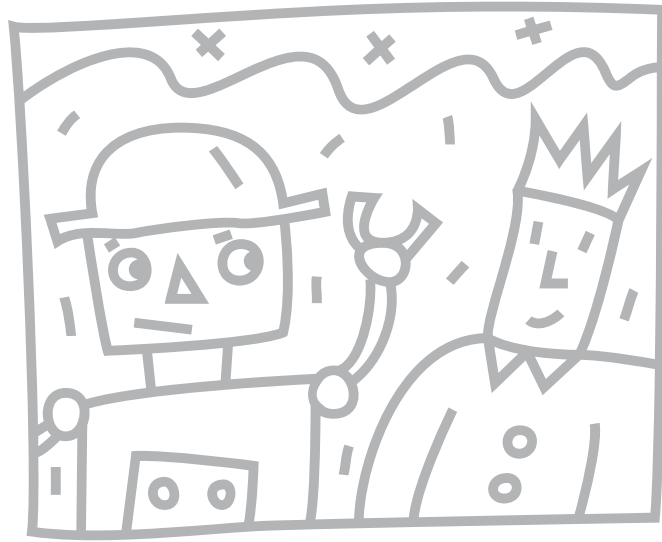
46. Heroes and Heroines. Everyone seems to have a hero or a heroine, someone we admire, look up to, or want to be like. What makes someone a hero or a heroine? Why are these people so important to us?

47. If I Could Change the World. Think of one thing about the world that you would like to change. What is it? How would changing make a difference to you or to others? Convince someone that you're right.

48. The Greatest Invention of All Time. The airplane, the computer, the automobile, microwave popcorn. History is full of amazing inventions. Which one do you think is the greatest invention of all time? Why do you think it is so important?

49. Family Matters. No matter how much the people in your family love each other, there are always problems to contend with. Think about a problem you had in your family. What was it? How did you solve it? What did you learn that might help someone else in a similar situation?

50. Your Favorite Place. Many of us have a special place where we like to go. It may be an exotic vacation spot or it could just be somewhere in your house or your community. What's your favorite place? Why is it so important to you?



Prompted Writing

“Taken by Surprise”

“Surprise” Narrative Prompt

Last year year my dad buogth A bike for my two sister and my brother. I felt good and I did to and we sied thankyou. To are dad for the bike what did you learn I learn dad can be nice.

“Surprise” Narrative Prompt

Taken By Surprise

Life is full of good and bad surprises all around the world. Gifts, animals, games, rules, birthdays, babies, surprises surprises what a wonderful thing. They come in different shapes and sizes round or square. There all surprises so share your surprises with other people so they have fun to. Surprises can come in any time in any where. Young or old, rich or poor, mean or nice, stupid or smart, they always can have surprises.

“Surprise” Narrative Prompt

It's today the day, March 31, 1998, the day of the family meeting. We have one every last day of the month. (couple mins. later) Yes! Dads home. Family meeting time! I run down stairs, my sisters come too. My dad took a deep breath, He said, “We are going ot take a trip. My sister's and I yell “YEAH”! See, I knew this guy who lives in Australia, He was thinking we could trade homes. “I think it's a great idea!” said vanessa. I'm kinda scared. I'm really excited. This trip is going to be a once in a life time surprise.

“Surprise” Narrative Prompt

A few years ago I found out my aunt was getting married. To a nice wonderful man she said. At that time I thought it was a joke.

So the I said I was going to have a new Uncle. But then I had to dress up. I hated to dress up. So I had to be ring boy. I agreed to do it. After the cake came I wanted to eat now. After it all they were happily married.

“Surprise” Narrative Prompt

Ketchup In My Mouth

It was the day of my moms birthday, January fifth. We went to a restaurant called, “The River Rock.” They didn’t have a childrens menu. So I got fish and chips. (I will never get it again.) They gave me ketchup. (It was gross.) My mom made me eat it anyway. I did get a drink. (My mom wanted me to have water.) So I only had my water in front of my plate. I was just about to take a drink of my water buy instead of grabbing my water I grabbed the ketchup and put it in my mouth! And that is why I do not eat at the River Rock.

“Surprise” Narrative Prompt

In the summer last year my friends asked me if I would like to go with them to wild waves, enchanted village. I was not really sure if I would have fun with them because they would fight a lot. Well, I didn't want to tell them no so I told them sure I'll go. It was a blast. We went to enchanted village went on the wild thing. We had to wait in line for one hour but then we got on and when it would have been over they asked us if we all wanted to stay on we all said, "yes". So we stayed on it was the best ride I've ever been on. I don't like going on rides that go up side down.

“Surprise” Narrative Prompt

It was a cold October morning when my friend Simone and I were on our bikes to meet our friend Lisa at her driveway. Her driveway was real long so it was kind of tiring but we were having some fun to pass the time.

“Are we there yet,” I said, over and over again.

“No now be quiet or else they’ll hear you,” Lisa said softly. I had no idea why she said that and why she said it so softly so I just started to talking as loud as possible.

“SSSShhhh,” Lisa said.

“Oh now you’ve done it Jaimee,” Simone yelled. Then four fierce dogs came running after us barking and slobbering. I went as fast as I could and one almost bit me but they stopped running. I was so scared. It changed my life because every time I went there I never made a peep. I also learned to listen to your friends even if you don’t know what they’re talking about.

“Surprise” Narrative Prompt

Taken by Surprise

On a sizzling hot summer Saturday my birthday struck.

“Party!” I yeld so rapidly the whole neighborhood could here me.

As soon as everybody was here I opened my gifts. I got a very big baseball card binder, cards for the binder, Goosebump books and best of all a 15 mile per hour remote control racing car. I was so freaked!

When I had my car it was the only thing I did. I loved my car.

After I notised the batteries ran out so fast I stopped using it so much. I felt good now that I had a car. Having a car changed my life to a reck 'cause it was the only thing I did.

I had my car for a while but a year later I crashed it. Next time I get a remote control car I won't crash it. How I wont crash it is I will keep it in a safe place.

“Surprise” Narrative Prompt

Taken by Surprise

We're home!

We were at a carpet store, looking for carpet, and by the time we got home, it was 9:00 all ready.

Me and my brother HAD to go to bed, because it was a school night, and moms are picky about bedtime on school nights. We laid in bed for a couple minutes still full of energy.

Then I overheard mom and dad talking about Nintendo 64, and the safe.

When I went up to them and asked them what was wrong, they said “the Nintendo, the safe and all that, have been stolen!”

After my dad said those very words, I could hardly believe it! Us being broke into? It was just not possible.

I went in my room, and looked in my bank, all my money was gone! Now I was convinced we were broken into.

My parents were mad especially my dad. As for me and my brother, we were both scared but excited.

My dad called the police to investigate, he also sent out flyers. A few weeks later somebody had found our Nintendo! Boy was I perk up when I heard that, but we never got the safe or my money back.

That experience changed my life forever, because I never thought that would happen, but now I know, it can happen to any body, even me.

“Surprise” Narrative Prompt

About three years ago I was coming home from school, it was a day like any other until I went in the house. My mom had a panicked look on her face and she was running around frantically getting my brothers and sisters dressed. When she had finally calmed down, I asked her what was the matter. Then in a very sad and afraid voice she told me that my grandmother had been in an accident and was at the hospital. My Mother then explained she had hit a patch of black ice and rolled her car.

After hearing this news I quickly helped her get every thing together.

When we finally arrived at the hospital we were seated in a large white room, where we met up with my grandfather. He looked even more worried than my mom. It seemed like we sat there for hours but finally a man in a white coat came out and told us that grandma was going to be okay, and she had only suffer a mild concussion and a bruised back.

I was so relieved. This experience had really taught me something, life is a very fragile thing and we must live it to the fullest.

“Surprise” Narrative Prompt

It was a cold day in Washington and I had just gotten back from jazz class when my oldest sister ran outside to tell me and my mom that “Uncle Harvey is on the phone and . . . Aunt Frieda died last night.” Terra was crying and I now realized I was too! I ran in my room and stuck my head in my pillow. How could this of happened? It had only been about a month sinse I had seen her and we had the most fun I’ve had in a long time.

Uncle Harvey and Aunt Frieda lived on a farm in Iowa. Aunt Frieda always called her husband Daddy. Everyone would laugh at that! She also had an air hockey table that me and my cousins would play on whenever we visited.

Aunt Frieda was also the best UNO player I knew! (UNO is a card game I love!)

When I visited my Grandparents everyone would come and talk. Aunts and Uncles. Cousins and friends would sit and talk but Aunt Frieda would say to me “Want to play UNO this is boring?”

She died of an asma attack. I talked with my family and friends about what happened and that made me feel better. I also cried which helped a little. I was so scared. No one that close to me had ever died before. This changed my life so much because I would never see her again. I learned I should stay close so someone even far away because you never know what might happen.

“Surprise” Narrative Prompt

The Most Scareist Day Of My Life

The most supriseing thing happened to me on January 22, 1998. Well it starts like this.

We were comeing home from the doctor at 7:30pm. And suddenly my mom sees a redish-tan car in the road. So she pushed the brake really hard while pulling the e-brake trying to stop. But instead of stoping it just slides right into the redish car. Pushing it all the way on the sidewalk hitting a repair shop sign.

We got out of the car and my mom was crying. A lady came out and said, “don’t cry its just a car accident.” But she still cryed because this was her first car accident. I was crying because I hit the dashboard with my head and left side.

We looked for the owner but he wasn’t there he was in his house. When he came out he thought his car was stolen. But really it was across the road.

Someone called the police for us. When they came I saw some blue and red lights comeing down the road. He got out of his car he was wearing a blue-black colored suit very tall also. The red car had a broken axle for the wheel. But the ownwer didn’t know and he was trying to push it. But it didn’t go anywhere it just sat there broken as a bone. He called the tow-truck to get the red car because ours was driveable.

We cleaned it up and went home. The next day our car was fixed and we never saw the owner again. But the important thing is you never want to be in a car accident. Because you have to wait a long time to leave.

“Surprise” Narrative Prompt

Surprise Snowstorm

It was a snowy day in January. It was a Surprise Snowstorm with about 6 inches of snow. Grandma and grandpa came over from Ellensburg. Mom and grandma went to a baby shower and my sister Julia had our friend Lil over. Our grandpa wanted to see my dad’s jobsite and we had to go over Whitney Bridge hill to get there. The roads were very icy so when we got to the top of the hill, I felt a big lurch and dad yelled “hold on”! But it was too late. We slid into the ditch.

Two other cars slid to the side of the road. Grandpa’s truck did too, a few yards ahead of us. Dad got out of our truck to go help put chains on grandpa’s tires. But when he got in, the chains fell off and the truck skreeched and slid to the bottom of the hill.

Dad’s truck’s tire had popped off, so dad, Dyllan (my other sister) Lil, Julia and I jumped down from it toward grandpa at the bottom of the hill. I sat in the sled with Dyllan to calm her, dad pulled us and Julia and Lil carried grandpa’s chains. We started down the hill and a big truck passed by. When we started walking again, I slid on my knees in between some abandoned cars by the road. I felt the cars moving and one hit my head. I could not do anything but crawl through the tires to the ditch on the other side. Quickly, a man pulled me out.

I learned that the big truck had bumped into the cars causing them to move.

Everyone was okay. Julia and Lil had been in front of the cars. Grandpa gave anyone who wanted one a ride and dropped them off where they wanted to go. Then we went home. That is a story I will never forget!

“Surprise” Narrative Prompt

Attack of My Older Brother

I just hate it. I mean really, really, really positively hate, being taken by surprise. Just thinking about it makes me shiver.

Boy, I’ve been taken by surprise lots of times, lots of ways, by many different people.

In my opinion, I think the worst surprise I have been through must have been when I got home from school and expected to see my older brother waiting for me or watching television. But no, my brother wasn’t home (at least it seemed like it to me) so, I yelled for my dad outside. No dad. Poor me scared without a brother or father (yeah right) and right when I was walking to my brother’s room, boom! Ahhhh! I screamed, my brother jumps out of the closet in the hall. I was really frightened. I’ll never forget that, it will scar me for life.

After that I figured out my dad was outside somewhere where he could not hear me.

I have also been taken by surprise many other times but none of them as worse as “The attack of my older brother.”

It is so annoying when they do it more than once. Example: Laura jumps out of the kitchen and scares Trish and then she leaves. Seconds later Trish passes by the kitchen again, Laura screams “Raahh,” Trish doesn’t scream but is now annoyed.

Getting taken by surprise happens most unexpected.

I think I will get scared more if you don’t make it so fancy, make it original. Example for original: She jumps out screaming “Raahh,” is original. Example for fancy: He jumps out screaming, “Ooga, Booga,” along with streamers, confetti etc. That is way too fancy.

Me, Trisha Arnold, will give you some advice that I learned: don’t take it seriously. It might be scary but, go be free, live along with your life, that’s the best cure. Even for “The attack of my older brother.”

“Surprise” Narrative Prompt

Middle of the Night Surprise

I woke up swiftly. My senses were blurred, except for my hearing. All I could hear was the sound of footsteps stepping on the creaky board in the hallway. I waited for the footsteps to go into the living room.

I walked as lightly as I possibly could but no matter how hard I tried, I still made noise. I slipped past my parents room and entered the living room very cautious. I searched the room and found nothing. I went into the kitchen to find three small wrapped presents on the table.

I sleekly ran back into my brothers' room. I brought them into the kitchen. We opened the present and found three sheets of paper. One piece had little lines with symbols under them. The other two made up the key. I pieced together: on January 8th we are going to. The last I spelled out loud. “D” “I” “S” “N” “E” “Y” “L” “A” “N” “D”!! I got up to see my mom. I jumped for joy and was thrilled out of my mind.

“Surprise” Narrative Prompt

Silence. The crowd stared. I trembled. I had felt confident earlier that week while I practiced my piece, Pachebell Cannon in D minor, but as I watched each and every set of eyes stare at me as I took my seat at the large piano bench, my knees turned to mush. My palms began to sweat and I felt my confidence rapidly escaping me.

As I looked out into the audience I could see my dad wink at me, meaning: “You’ll be great, honey.” But the sick feeling in my stomach made me think otherwise. My mom was sitting next to him, smiling as if she owned the world. But I couldn’t smile back. There was nothing at all for me to smile about.

I was sure I was going to mess up on the first note and as I sat down and began, my prediction came true. Now the silence seemed even worse. Instead of people being quiet because they expected me to fill the room with beautiful music, they were all quiet because they realized that it wasn’t going to happen. The audience was in shock, my parents were in shock, and I was about to wet my pants.

I don’t remember much after that, only the first and last note, both of which bombed, and the sick realization that I would never again touch anything that even resembled a piano.

That was the first time in a very long time that I cried myself to sleep.

“Surprise” Narrative Prompt

On April 21, 1998 a very strange thing happened to me. It was an event that would change my whole week's schedule and throw off my routine. That surprise turned out to be a 9th grade writing assessment.

As I came to class the next day and sat down at my desk, I was shaking with fear and my stomach felt as if I was on the zipper (a carnival ride) after eating an earthquake burger. I nervously glanced around me I saw my other classmates shaking in fear and writing for the dreaded writing assessment. One poor student, I will not mention his name for his reputation's sake, started to cry uncontrollably and fell to the ground. I looked calm and composed to my peers that day, but inside I was scared — real scared.

Now you see the effects of a state wide test, pretty scary huh? You may think this whole thing is a big joke, but I know it's true — well almost — okay it's not, but still I think writing assessments are pointless. Why waste my valuable class time with some question I'm supposed to spend two days writing about? Why? So some people can see how smart I am compared to other kids, to see if I measure up?

I personally don't care about how someone I don't know thinks I write because I know. I know I have have terrible handwriting, atrocious spelling, and I misuse punctuation, but I can write a story worth reading and I can write a paper worth putting on the refrigerator.

Usually when you do something in class you get points for it. Well why not this? I mean I could use a few more points in english and so could everyone else, but not that's just not how it works I guess.

During this whole thing you did do one thing, take up class time so I don't have to do any real work, but still this thing wasn't fun. I think I'll be absent next year when this thing comes along, or better yet have this writing assessment be absent — forever.

“Surprise” Narrative Prompt

My Little Fat Friend

Surprised at what he looked like, I found out what love at first sight truly means.

I had been wanting a pug since I was four. To my amazement I would get one.

As my parents, my friend, Randi, and I drove up the gravel path of my mom’s old work partner Nancy Degraff, I found out what all my hard work had paid off for.

Opening the door of our red car my heart was pounding rapidly.

Inside the house I could hear the soft barks of two small girl pugs which were the grandmother, Porcia, and her half sister, Munchy.

Hearing the barks of their Jack Russel Terrier, Nancy helped me find out which bark belonged to the pug I would get.

Walking up to the door and hearing the soft crackling under my feet, I could see the dark shadows racing about the old house.

“Come on in,” a sweet voice called. As we walked in it felt like one hundred little dogs were zooming around me licking me, rubbing against my legs, and trying to get on my lap.

As Nancy cleared away all but the one I wanted, she announced, “This is Sherman.”

As I looked at him my heart melted. Looking at his little smudged in face, and little white spot on his chest, I just about died.

His all black fur and the cock of his head made me run over to him and throw my arms around his chubby little body.

One thing did stand out about him. He was way bigger than I had ever imagined he would be.

Even though he was chunky, I still loved him. I learned that Sherman’s not like other dogs. He’s got his own way of doing things, and his own way of looking. That’s what makes him special.

Yet to my surprise he’s the perfect dog in every way.

“Surprise” Narrative Prompt

As a child there were no races, colors, or classes. There was no hate for people, no stereotyping, and no discrimination. But the innocence of not knowing didn't last. By grade school you were aware that certain people were just . . . different, perhaps only slightly, but you noticed because people said things, kids commented, adults and other leaders acted certain ways toward those different people, and you grew to look differently at them because they weren't like you.

It's hard moving from one school to another. But to find after several years that your community is full of racism, stereotyping, and discrimination is shocking. The shock eventually turns to anger and hostility. The biggest surprise is to find out that it's not just your town, but the world with the problem.

For some odd, unknown reason, our society is convinced that things today are better than they were centuries ago. True, we have eliminated slavery and sweatshops (they're illegal anyway), blacks can vote, women can vote. However, Native-Americans still live separated, and communities are not evenly mixed. Races complain about unfair treatment. Cultures say they aren't given equal opportunities. Women whine about their rights or lack of. Men get upset that women are treated better in workplaces and in court situations. Groups are keeping our country from being a place of equality.

Looking at our town you can see that the community as a whole is mostly white. The kids and adults here are very racist. Kids comment on different colors in the halls. People make fun of the Mexicans and the Muckleshoots. Why? Because that's how they were raised — to be prejudiced and racist.

Although the white people have created a racist country, they are not entirely to blame for the mess. The natives choose to live on separated land. They then complain that they aren't given enough, that they're treated unfairly. By doing this they are dividing our country even more than it already is. If this is looked at with great thought, you can see that the racism goes both ways. No one can look at anyone equally if everyone is treated differently.

People tend to live as they were raised. I act as my parents have taught me. My children will most likely be raised as I was. Our country has been raised from the start to be a place of prejudice. That may sound appalling, but that's reality: until everyone changes, we will remain a racist society.

This, to me, is not only shocking but surprising as well. America is supposed to be a place of freedom and equality. That's what I've been taught, anyway. But the older I get the more I wonder if it truly is an equal country.

“Surprise” Narrative Prompt

A Jog and a Dog

Having already stretched and run a fourth of my distance, I arrived at my favorite spot and halted. It was the beginning of fall, the leaves of maple trees swirled down around me, crunching under my weight as I strode toward a gigantic tree trunk. Sitting, just taking in my surroundings, I noticed dusk turning to dark and decided to start home.

As I moved to stand up, I saw something crouching across the road. I took a step back, it took a step forward. Fear hadn't registered yet, but my curiosity had. Walking forward to get a closer look, I recognized Bear, a neighbor's friendly black lab. Sighing, I reached to pet the dog, but stopped short as a low rumble in the animal's throat grew to a loud growl.

I quickly pulled my hand to safety and backed off. Staring at the dog, I shrugged my shoulders in bewilderment, turned, and walked away. The clicking of the dog's claws on the pavement followed. Thinking nothing of it, I resumed my jogging, only to have the gigantic Labrador growling right at my heels again. Scared now, I broke into a run, and that's when the dog bit me, hard into the flesh of my leg.

I fell to the ground, screaming in agony. The owner of the dog came out, wondering what the noise was about. Yanking on the dog's collar, the man struggled to pull the vicious animal off of me, which after several tries he managed to accomplish.

While all this happened, another close neighbor who had witnessed the incident called 911. It was decided afterward that the dog had contracted rabies and he was soon put to sleep. I was given a series of shots and a few stitches only, and after a couple of years, my leg healed, but the scars remain on both the inside and out.



Prompted Writing

“Heroes & Heroines”

“Heroes” Expository Prompt

Robin Williams

My Hero is Robin Williams because He sent me a autograph pitcure because I wrote to him & I've seen al most all his movies Hook, Fathers Day Mrs. Doubtfire, Flubber Jamanji Jack, The Birdcage & Good will Hunting.

“Heroes” Expository Prompt

Master P, My Hero

He is a rapper. He has cool CDs. He is Tupac friend. He has a lowrider car. He helps Tupac. He has hydraulics on his car.

“Heroes” Expository Prompt

My Parents

My parents are my hero because with out my parents I would not be in this world. They would be there when I needed them. When Im dirty they would give me a bath. They would dress me up. teach me how to keep my room clean not dirty. They would teach me how to dress myself up.

My parents are special because they are generous, respectful. They are the person I know and they live with me. They take care of me, they care about me.

“Heroes” Expository Prompt

My Hero

I think it is important to have a hero because it's somebody you can look up to as a role model or someone you want to be like. If you have a favorite basket ball player or an actor that you think is your hero why do you think so is it because you think there good at something you like or there cute is that why you like them or did they do something to help you or your famley. My hero is my Dad because he got me and my sister out of a situation that was very bad. That we had to go through it. You would not want to go through what I did. It's to bad that I had to go through that.

“Heroes” Expository Prompt

My hero is Martin Luther King Jr. because he helped the black people that had to go to different schools than white people. He made the white people let the colored people go to the same school with whites and drink from the same water fountain and he passed away for what he believed for in life.

He gave a speech in front of more than one thousand white people and when he was giving his speech somebody shot him right by the heart then he rolled over and passed away when he got shot no white people tried to help him only the colored people did and after he got shot all the colored people stood up for themselves.

Rosa Parks stood up for herself when she didn't stand up because she was tired and she just wanted to sit down until she got home from a long day if there was no room in the bus colored people had to sit in the back and if there was no room they had to stand up and let the white people sit down.

“Heroes” Expository Prompt

My Hero, Kobe Bryant

My favorite player in the NBA (National Basketball Association) is Kobe Bryant. Kobe Bryant plays for my second favorite NBA team the Los Angeles Lakers. (My first favorite NBA team is the Minnesota Timberwolves.) I like Kobe for many different reasons. Here are some reasons why I like him. He scores a lot of points. And he has made the allstar team. One more thing I like is when Kobe does a windmill jam off vertically, but his most spectacular and rim shaking move is when he dribbles the ball behind his back and makes the rim tremble in fear with his dunks.

When I grow-up I want to be just like him. That’s why I consider Kobe Bryant my hero and most favorite player in the NBA.

“Heroes” Expository Prompt

My dad

My dad is my hero. He treats me nice. He also comes up with good ideas on what to do. He supports what I participate in. And when I feel bad he cheers me up. He takes me places, for instance, skiing. He also let me go to gameworks. On summer vacation he often might take me to San diego, California and then Lake Havasu, Arizona. He will also help me with my homework and when I am out of school he gives me math facts to work on. He helps me with the sports I play also. Once he taught me how to shoot the ball differently than what I was used to (Basketball). And now I am sinking them from long range! And in baseball he helped me with fielding skills and batting skills. He helps me with fielding grounders and catching pop flies. He also pitches whiffle balls so I can practice hitting against pitchers. I sometimes practice pitching with him also. We do a lot of stuff. We even play tennis and racket ball for fun. It is really fun playing sports with my dad. But the best part is beating him.

“Heroes” Expository Prompt

My Mom is a Heroine

My mom is such a great mom. She helps take good care of me when I’m sick. My mom is always caring. Like when I’m sick, she’s always making me chicken soup to make me feel better. I can always eat in bed when I’m sick.

My mom is also a great cook. She can cook all kind of things without using a recipe. For example, she can make a delicious food called chow mein, and she can make all sorts of pies and cake.

My mom is not a mean mom. She is nice, kind, a caring person, and generous. When the china plate fell down on accident, she doesn’t get mad. She gets upset a little bit. The good part is that she doesn’t yell. She said, I’ll buy one more plate. When I was going to the store to buy the china plate with my mom, the man yelled at me for breaking such a beautiful plate. My mom saved me, she said that I did it on accident. I think it was kind of mean and stupid of yelling at me. I’m inosent!

I love my mom very much. She is one of the best moms in this world. She is my heroine.

“Heroes” Expository Prompt

My thoughts about Heros/Heroines!

I would like to talk alittle about heros and heroines and why I think they are not important to have. There o.k to have but you don’t need them for anything.

Now I think its time to tell you why I think heros and heroines are not important. The reason is because I feel that it is better not to have one. If you don’t have one that means that you didn’t get realy badly hurt or you didn’t need any one to save you. I think thats good! Thats my opinion though. Lots of people usually have a hero or heroine but I still think its just because they got saved or something.

Please don’t get me wrong. Its not bad to have one or anything but I thnk the people who dont have one are much better off then with them. I have a hero and he is my brother. It all happened when I was little and I lived in my old apartments. They had a swimming pool and one day when I went swimming and then I fell in the deep end. The problem was that I didn’t know how to swim that well. Then when I was walking around the pool someone pushed me in on accident. Then when my brother saw me he jumped in and got me. Now thats how he be-came my hero.

Now you see how I feel about all this and I hope you understand what I wrote because this really ment a lot to me. Now remember its not bad to have a hero or heroine.

“Heroes” Expository Prompt

My Dad

My dad used to work as a biochemist. He was studying a disease that comes from cows. While he was studying the disease he lost part of his eyesight and his blood pressure went up. Then his boss fired him because he was too much money to keep. My dad's doctor said that if he had been at that job much longer he would have become totally blind.

These days my dad does odd jobs. He delivers a newspaper, does woodworking, and he is applying for a job as a carpenter.

My dad is starting a business that helps people with odd medical problems learn about their problems. My dad will look on the internet and/or in books for information for them.

In his free time my dad works at the library as a volunteer. He is the “Webmaster.” He gives a class, shows people how to get e-mail, and gets people out of jams.

My dad does lots of things. He is my hero.

“Heroes” Expository Prompt

Without heroes/heroines kids of the world wouldn't have anything to go for. Many kids in other countries look up to sports athletes like Michael Jordan, Ken Griffey Jr. and Deion Sanders. Some countries don't have celebrities like we have in the US.

Heroes/heroines can be almost anything on the face of the earth. Some Heroes/Heroines are animals, some are people and some are make-believe characters. They can be animals that have saved a person's life or they can be people who donate money and spend time with needy kids overseas. Heroes/Heroines don't have to be perfect angels. They are just like everyone else except that they have something very special inside of them.

I, myself, look up to sports athletes because I want to be like a lot of them. I know I can't, but it still gives me a goal to go for and *try* to be like them. Sports athletes have an influence on my life. People like Reggie Miller, Cal Ripken Jr., and Troy Aikman have inspired me to work hard everyday and to try your best at everything whether it's at sports or school. I have other heroes/heroines but they are not as popular as sports athletes. One of them is my Mom. Everyone in this world has their own idea of what a hero is.

“Heroes” Expository Prompt

Heroes and Why We Need Them

What is a hero? Is a hero famous? Is a hero perfect? These are some of the questions that come up when we bring up the topic “heroes.”

A hero is someone who does something once or many times that influences someone else to do or not to do something. A hero doesn’t have to be famous, or well known. A hero doesn’t have to have a lot of money and a hero is never perfect. No one is perfect so a hero can just be someone walking down the street and sees a house on fire and runs in to save a kid. Just because someone does a heroic thing once does not make them a nice person.

A hero does not have to have a lot of money. For instance, one of my heroes is Mother Teresa, and she didn’t give money, she gave time and love. She cared for those who felt forgotten and loved those who felt unloved. When Mother Teresa saw something wrong, she did something about it.

Mother Teresa passed away but her soul lived on in others that were touched by her. Mother Teresa was not the only hero. A sports lover could have Micheal Jordan as a hero or a role model. A democrat may have President Clinton as a role model. So I do not believe that heroes can become extinct, because people are doing heroic things everyday and the media is so powerful that if someone does a heroic thing the media will continue looking for something that they could attack that person with. So it may be harder to remain a hero, but I think that there will always be one.

Are celebrities heroes? What is the difference between the two? Is there one? A celebrity is someone who has a career that could make it easy to be well-known and probably has a lot of money but does that make them a hero? NO! Just like any other person who saved her child from under a car does not make her a nice person, having a lot of money does not make you a hero.

A hero does not start out as a well known person but after doing something heroic they probably will be well known. A celebrity could be a hero for someone, again like Michael Jordan. Michael Jordan is a celebrity and probably is a hero for lots of people. So a hero and a celebrity could be the same thing but to be a hero has a different signifacation.

In conclusion now what is your definition of hero? Has your definition changed? If it has I hope you now have a better understanding and that you have a new respect for heroes, and that you are now more understanding for them.

“Heroes” Expository Prompt

Heroes In My Eyes

Alexander and Eric Kristjansson are the best parents a kid could have. They may not be considered “cool”, (they *are* parents, after all), but to me they are heroes.

They have raised me since I was a baby in a good home with food, clothes, care, and love. They taught me manners, they’ve encouraged me, and they’ve given me room to grow mentally and emotionally.

They have comforted me when I’m sad, confused, or lonely. They have given me someone to talk to when I needed to vent, and they’ve played with me when no one else wanted to.

They are heroes because they want my siblings and me to live a normal life, even though they split up. They help us with homework, and with life in general. They care for our feelings, wants, and needs.

Each of my parents are very different, though. For example, my mom is the one I go to when I need to talk, and my dad is the one I go to when I want to play a game of basketball. My mom is the best advice giver. I’d rather take my little brother’s advice before trying my dad’s, but I would never ask my mom if she wanted to play a game of one-on-one.

My parents treat me with fairness, (although at the time it may not seem like it), and they love me. That’s all that really matters to me.

My parents could yell at me, ground me, take away my allowance or send me to my room. But they would still be my heroes and I would still love them, no matter what.

“Heroes” Expository Prompt

Puffy: My Hero

One of my heroes (I have a profuse amount) is Sean “Puffy” Combs, famous rap star and producer.

Puffy has, I guess you could say, paved the way for sampling: taking old songs, rhythms, beats, etc. and making them into new hits.

I look up to Puffy because, for one thing, his best friend, rapper and producer Christopher Wallace a.k.a The Notorious B.I.G. or “Biggy”, for short, was murdered in March of ’97. Though Puffy was deeply burdened he went on to rap stardom.

That’s one thing I like about Puffy, his will to go on during hard times. He could have stayed depressed and not have done anything but instead he went on in his life and didn’t let Biggy’s death hold him down.

Another quality that I like about him is that all of the ladies love him, quite a good quality if I do say so myself.

He’s also a fun but conscientious person, he doesn’t get into trouble with the law, plus he has two children, (one on the way.)

He also, I think, has a lot of charisma, something I wish and hope to have a lot of.

When I grow up I don’t especially want to be a rap star but I do want to be a person much like Puffy.

“Heroes” Expository Prompt

The Man with a Smile on His Face

The warm sand wiped across his face as he saw a whimpering baby wrapped in a musty pale blue blanket. He lifted him up and held him close to his chest. Officer Daniels reached into his pocket and felt around for some food to feed the baby. A packet of Ritz crackers were there, so he gave him some. There was no one in sight, so he gently brought the baby to the Pamona Police Station. After a long year of waiting for the young infant to be claimed Officer Daniels took him under his care.

The young man followed his fathers footsteps and became a worthy officer. Everyday he would come to work with a smile from ear to ear and cheer everyone up. His devotion to his career was so strong that he was known as “Friend of Pamona, Officer Daniels”. Officer Daniels was unexpectedly shot when he pulled over a car on the freeway. The man who shot him was given the first death sentence in California for 10 years. Not only did the policemen mourn for Officer Daniels death but, the whole town was filled with a hush of sadness.

This wonderful man might not have been known by a town or two but, to me he was a hero. He did not find the cure for sickness or save someone from dying, but he loved and respected his job as much as he would his family. To me that is heroic. My opinion may sound odd but, he was such a wonderful man that I believe he is a hero, much different than any other. I’m sure that any officer would love to be like him. Just because my hero is a policeman does not mean I want to be one too. I would like to follow his kindness and devotion to his job. My hero is my hero no matter what anyone thinks. My hero Officer Daniels.

“Heroes” Expository Prompt

The Veterinarian Hero

Every since I was very little, we have taken our pets to Dr. Mike Pheifer. Most of the credit given to doctors goes to people doctors, because they save humans, but animals’ lives are also important. Every day, Dr. Mike saves the lives of many animals, which is why I admire him.

Ever since our first visit, he has been open and friendly with my family, and is always happy to help. I have many animals, we visit often for shots, injuries, or just plain check-ups. Dr. Mike has saved the lives of my animals, well . . . more times than I can remember! Once, I had a rat that suffered from tumors. She was small, and the removal surgery was too much for her. Right after the surgery, her heart stopped. Dr. Mike instantly set to work trying to revive her. When nothing worked, he started rubbing up and down, vigorously on her chest. Then, after a short while, her heart resumed beating! We were ever so grateful!

A while after that, we had a much larger emergency. My oldest cat came home very late one night. It was pitch black , and we could hardly see a thing. Then, when we stroked his head, he cried out in pain! That’s when we saw that one side of his face was dented in! He’d been hit by a car! It was about midnight, so the veterinary hospital was closed, and most people were sleeping. Dr. Mike had given us his home number, so my dad called him. Though Dr. Mike had been asleep, he told my dad to meet him at the veterinary hospital. Although it took time, Dr. Mike saved our cat’s life! He didn’t even charge us for the night our cat stayed at the office.

There were many more times similar to that one, and on every occasion, Dr. Mike was willing to help. If ever one of our pets died at his office, he would send us a sympathetic “sorry” card.

When I was little, at my cats’ check-ups, I would always ask if their heart beat was fast, and if their ears were clean. Every time, he would let me listen to the stethoscope, and look through the instrument that was set briefly in their ear. He was kind to me then, and he’s kind to me now. Maybe now you can understand why Dr. Mike Pheifer is my hero. If you can’t, perhaps you should visit him yourself, at Ingilmore Animal Hospital.

“Heroes” Expository Prompt

My Mom

“Company halt!” yelled the drill master. My mom stopped and went into position. Her dog-tags clinked as she moved.

My mom. I would say she was a true hero. At least I think she is. Her life sort of dazzles me. She told me many stories about how she danced in the Nutcracker in front of the King and Queen when she was seven.

Now, my mom wasn’t born in America. She was born in Denmark. She went to America after she married an American man (my dad). But before she met my dad she had an interesting life. Then again she has an interesting future from that time. Some of these things she make her famous to me. I think that my mom is a true hero from all the things she went through.

My mom was able to live through a lot of things when she was in the Danish Army. You see when my mom joined the army it was a very pregitist time. Most of the men laughed at her because she was a woman. But she showed them! She servived many wilderness tests that most of the men couldn’t do. She did drills better than anyone! My mom even became the first Danish woman to ride a tank! My mom is in the World Book of records! I think that is really cool!

My mom spent four years in the Army then retired. I don’t know if she fought in any war, but she made the serviver list! She also got a ton of medals. I am so proud of my mom. Not a lot of women joined the Army when my mom joined. So in one way my mom is a heroine for all women.

After my mom’s encounter with the Army, my mom had a restless life. Three years after mom had retired she met a man named David. They fell in love and a couple months later they got married. “You may kiss the bride.” Ewww! After the honeymoon my dad had to go Louisiana. He was still in the Marines and he was stationed there. So they moved to the gator state.

Nine months later “Pop!” I came into the world. Really, I came a little early, but I’m glad! Who wants to be born on April 15, tax day! Anyway, two years later my dad was restationed to Massacuttes. But another two years later my mom got a deploma at Harvard. There was a big celebration and I ate all of the cake. Burp! Then finally my dad retired from the Marines. He got a lot of medals too. Soon my dad wanted to move again so we moved to Lynnwood and stayed there. Now we live a happy life. Whew! After all this stuff I would pass out! My mom must be very tired!

Well, now my mom works with a business that helps people make money. Dad helps her too. I’m in the sixth grade doing a writing exam and everything else is okay. My mom used to have a job, but she wanted to be her own boss.

I really think my mom is a hero. She didn’t save the world from aliens. She didn’t stop a bomb. All she did was be herself. She worked hard and had fun. And she still does.

So listen people who think they are heros. Listen up movie stars. This is my mom. My hero. Through all the stuff she went through I think she deserves a gold medal.

My mom. My hero. And I know that she will always be.

“Heroes” Expository Prompt

The champagne bubbles up overflowing the crystal wine flutes. Suddenly, the doors to the limo open unfurling a sea of flashing lights.

* * *

A flash of lightning illuminates the harsh emptiness of the night. In an orphanage children cry mournfully. They are starving.

* * *

A deep plush, red carpet floods your eyes. Smiles, laughter, cheers bombard the senses. A happiness unknown before now thrives within you.

* * *

The mud runs thick beneath you in this stench-filled alley. Rain batters your body. With each step your feet plunge into the thick goo. You tug at your feet to relinquish them from the mud and each time you whisper, “just one more” but you must keep going for the children wait.

* * *

You feel as though your feet are gliding across the ground. You’re now waiting, the two people on stage say, “and now the Oscar for best actor goes to . . .” then an ominous silence flushes through the building. The anxiety within you bubbles and churns, as you almost let out a scream of anticipation that just couldn’t be held in when your name is announced for the world to hear. You jump into the air and throw your hands up. As you stare blindly out at the crowd all you see are their eyes staring back at you with praise and congratulations. Your whole body is numb with happiness.

* * *

The door to home is a bombed-out hole in the wall. All you carry with you are two loaves of bread. Inside you are met with a void of darkness. From a corner the flicker of a candle dimly lights the room. 30 children await food. Now all you feel is sadness.

* * *

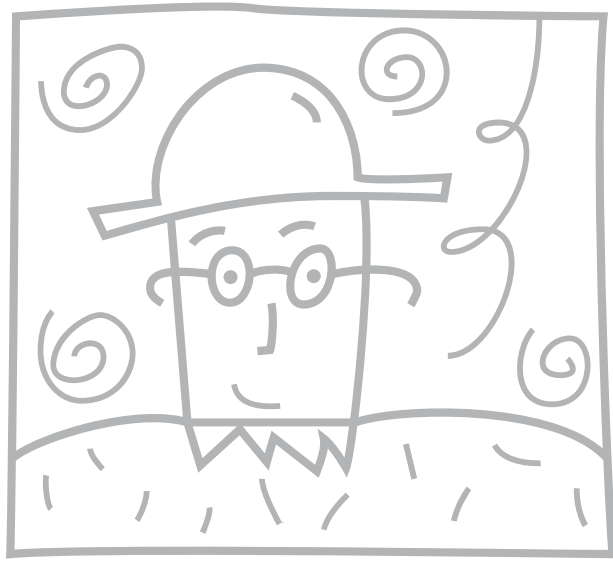
These are two different people in two different worlds. One a celebrity, why? He’s seen around the world, mobbed wherever he goes, his every move is the paparazzi’s life.

The other a hero, why? He is selfless. He chose to walk down a different path in life, a path of hardships, poverty, and hunger.

Someone doesn’t have to be a superhero to be like this. He could be a five-year old giving up his allowance, or a person becoming a mentor, or someone’s grandma taking in a stray dog. These are the everyday heroes.

A celebrity, on the other hand, is famous. Not for some humanitarian act but for acting. Acting is the art of becoming someone you aren’t. Just because you portray a hero doesn’t mean you become one.

An actor acts. A hero helps. The actor becomes famous and the hero does not. And that’s just it: heroes don’t care about the credit they just care.



Prompted Writing

“Kids and Jobs”

“Kids & Jobs” Persuasive Prompt

There's day's you can work, some day's you can't work.

Yes & no, some high school students are to busy w/ school work, family problems w/ deaths & argumentive parents.

I do think teenagers that are responsable to hold a job, education and family problems, she/ or he might have a wonderful life and jobs in the future.

That is a great plan that teens have to work so many hours, cause it gives them time for homework, sports, etc.

It would also be good that parents and there child sat down and came up with there hours and days that they could work.

“Kids & Jobs” Persuasive Prompt

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Should teenagers be aloud to work?

Most bussinusses arr against teens work weather it be responsiblity or insurance. Most teenagers are verry responsible you have to be in the world we live in but most owners don't want to be sued if a underage worker gets hurt on the job. I think if there responsible enough to walk down a street after dark then there responsible enough to work. I also think that if we want a car or nice clothers we have to work for it, correct? Well how are we to do that if all we can do is baby-sit. Shure it makes money but how much? Enough for a pair of pants? We need to pay for car insurance, tabs, gas, clothes, makeup, (if your a girl.) etc... and with the cost of things now-days you can't get anything for \$5.

“Kids & Jobs” Persuasive Prompt

“Teenagers should work”

In my opinion, there should be time limits on after school jobs. I think we should be able to work, but not for too many hours of work. There should be time limits because students need time to spend time with their family, hang out with their friends. Need time to do their homework. Plus there's community service and other after school related activities going on, like sports. Students and family should be the ones to decide if they should work, or how long they work. Teens need to work because it prepares them for the working world in the future. Working teaches responsibility, and teaches job skills. Teenagers need money to buy a car, buy clothes, maybe they have to help pay taxes or bills for the house. Some teens even might have a child and need money to support it. I don't think it would interfere with school work if they choose to work short hours. There's already time limits on how long teen age students work, so there's no reason to complain. Working is a part of life, it's better that we start working at a young age, instead of later, so we learn skills now that we'll need to know for the future, so we learn responsibility.

“Kids & Jobs” Persuasive Prompt

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After-School Jobs?

Apparently, there have been some recent issues concerning after-school jobs for students. I honestly have never heard any of these arguments before, so I don't have too many thoughtful opinions.

Some people have complained that students should not work at all. I have never heard any supporting reasons for why they believe this. My immediate response to this was that I don't really have a subject to write about without some of their ideas. All I need to do is give my opinion and one supporting claim and I win the argument. However, I won't do that.

First of all, and most importantly, I believe that having an after-school job should be the students choice and must be discussed with the parents. This is because it is important that the parent knows what their child is doing and so to make sure the parents support this decision. Others shouldn't be making this choice for them. It doesn't matter what the neighbor next door's opinions are or what the president of the local rotary thinks. They should be worrying about their own issues or about this country. Parents know what is right for their children, no one else does. Students must also decide how many hours they are going to work and where because time may conflict with homework, sports, school or community activities, and sleep.

Students also need money. Gas and college tuition need to be paid off and it helps students to learn how to be thrifty and responsible with their money.

In conclusion, I believe that all students within reason should be allowed the opportunity to have an after-school job.

“Kids & Jobs” Persuasive Prompt

The Sky is the Limit

My sister's name is Michelle. She graduated from Shorewood Highschool in 1994 with a 4.0! My sister has always been one of the smartest in our large family. She joined many clubs, after school activities and sports and still had time for an after school job. Everyone that knew Michelle admired her for being such a good student and having an after school job.

The point I'm trying to get across is that it shouldn't matter your age and or if your in high school. It should all depend on your grades and your ability. Of course if your failing it wouldn't work because you should be spending all your extra time doing make up work so you could raise your grade.

I personally think that most kids who have the time should get an after school job. My reason is to teach us teenagers responsibility. Show us how to handle a job and our daily after school “work” and chores so when we get out into the real world we'll know how to take care of ourselves better.

Remember the old saying “You can't judge a book by it's cover?” Well gives us teens a chance learn what we're really about. We'll prove that we can and will handle after school jobs!!!

“Kids & Jobs” Persuasive Prompt

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Specified Hours

I am pretty neutral on both ideas, but if I had to choose, I would be in favor of limiting the amount of hours that a teenage student could work. My reasons are as follows.

Teenagers at this age feel that everything is about money, which in many cases it is, but they are starting to put a minor, no future job over their future. By doing so, their education is disrupted along with their success. They are not looking at their life in the long run and some parents do not help this by encouraging them to give slack to their studies. Education is the key to all careers and a job at a law firm, I feel, is more enjoyable than flipping burgers. At least more profitable.

Teens feel that getting a job at age sixteen is a right of passage, which is a misconception. I can understand if a student has to get a job to help their family, but unless that is the case, it is not a necessity. Staying to your studies is the key. You will have many opportunities later on in life to have a job.

Students have too much stress in their lives to have room for another responsibility. There is so much riding on their shoulders, along with extra curricular activities and sports, that a job would crumble and overwhelm some teenagers.

Teenagers in this day and age, have so many chances and opportunities, and I feel we need to ask ourselves if we really want to jeopardize that.

“Kids & Jobs” Persuasive Prompt

Teenagers Working

I think that high school students should work as much and as long as they want. They should not set limits on how much a teenager works, that should be left up to them and their parents. A person should know how much they can work and make it through high school, I think that it should not be left up to the public. Teenagers have been working and going to high school, without any time limits, for years. Why should they change it now? It would be unfair.

I think by having high school students work, it is making them stronger. It is preparing them for the real world and making them less dependent on their parents. They would know how it actually feels to work for money instead of it being handed to them. They would also know how bad they want something after buying it with their own money. I think teenagers working is a good idea.

Teenagers can also start to earn their own money for collage. The parents shouldn't have to be the only ones to pay their way through collage. If a student payed most of their way through collage it would make them feel better. It would make them feel good to earn their money for collage and to get into collage. Also, it would make the parents proud to see their child getting into collage and paying most of their way.

Students should also know how much they can work without wearing themselves out. If teenagers didn't work than they would have alot of extra time on their hands. Instead of working they could be doing other things that they should not be doing. They can get themselves into trouble.

I think teenagers should make as much money as they can and want to. I think that there sould not be any limits to how much a teenager works. There are bigger and more important things to worry about in the world. I think that how much a high school student works should not be one of them.

“Kids & Jobs” Persuasive Prompt

“Should Highschoolers have Jobs?”

Gas, new shoes, football games and nights on the town all have the same thing in common, they all cost money. So why do some people think that Highschoolers shouldn't work?

About this time in life, most people share three common thoughts. School, the opposite sex, and the all mighty dollar. Most highschoolers have two options on how to get more money, they can beg their parents, or they can go and get a job. Now begging your parents might work, but don't expect to get more than a twenty, so most people go with the second option and get a job, but this can pose some problems.

When you get your first job, you have to realize something, You won't have this job forever, so you don't want to start slacking off in school, or you could end up with a very long career at Jack in the Box, (I have made a deal with my parents that if my grades go down, then I'll quit my job until I can get them back up). Another problem is that if you start earning over twelve dollars an hour, some people might have serious thoughts on dropping out of highschool and work full time.

But with all the bad that can come with a job at this age, a lot of good can come with it as well. You can get a sense of responsibility, a steady cash flow, and maybe even some skills you can use later in life. And with more money, you'll be more inclined to spend it, whether on your self or on a date, so it might even help your social life.

From personal experience, I can conclude that if someone in highschool feels that they need a job, then it should be their choice.

“Kids & Jobs” Persuasive Prompt

I feel that teenagers should work. I feel this way because students need something to do after school, they get to experience part of the real world, and they learn new skills.

First of all, when a student goes to work they are active and doing something. Instead of wandering the streets they are working. They can't work all the time because they have to go to school and need time for homework but they can still have a part-time job. Working gives the student a sense of responsibility. In return they get paid so then they feel important and want to keep working. Now a days kids need money for clothes, music, and other stuff.

My other reason is that they get to experience part of the real world. When you were little you got allowance for making your bed, or taking out the trash, and other little chores for mom. By working you can really earn the money. This prepares them for when they graduate from highschool, they already have the experience and knowledge of working in the real world. It may be tough at first but it's good for them. Depending on the job they get to meet new people. The real world is a lot different from living with mom and Dad and getting allowance. A part time job can help teenagers progress into adulthood.

The last reason I feel students should work is, working teaches them many skills. A big skill learned in working at a young age is communication. You have to communicate with others to get stuff done. A business takes everyone to be able to work. You can't just think of something in your head and expect it to get done, you have to communicate. Some students are shy and by working they can build up the skill to communicate. Another skill learned is cooperation. You need to work as a team to get the work done. As the saying says, "There is no "I" in team." Teenagers can learn many other skills as well. These skills will make it so much easier when it comes time to find a job in the real world.

In conclusion I feel working is good for the student because it helps them in many ways. They have something to do after school, they get to experience part of the real world, and working teaches them many different skills. All these things can be very useful and by working a student can learn or experience all of them. Students don't need to work every day full time; they just need to work a little afterschool with still enough time for family, friends, and homework. So you see, working is good for teenagers.

“Kids & Jobs” Persuasive Prompt

A working high-schooler.

Does a 16-year-old holding a steady job sound inconcievable to you? It doesn't to me. I am completely behind teenagers working jobs after school. When school started in September, I really felt the crunch of money. I get \$80 dollars a month for my various chores around the house. With that \$80 dollars I had to pay all my school expenses. Included in these expenses were: a \$50 dollar annual, a \$25 dollar A.S.B. card, a \$15 dollar lab fee for Power Tech, an overcoat for Power Tech, and *ahem* a lawnmower engine. On top of all these necessary things, I had my other personal expenses: food, clothes, and entertainment. I ended up doing about 10 hours of baby-sitting. However, the fact remains that I wanted a job.

As luck turned out, I was walking through the mall one day, when I went to go visit my friend at Orange Julius. He gives me free food. He had earlier explained to me that OJ was only hiring 18+ year olds. They had changed their minds since then. Now they were asking me if I would work for them. Plus, when I turned 16 in two months, I would be able to cook food! I picked up an application.

I presented the idea to my mom. After about an hour of thought, she decided that she wouldn't give me consent to work during the school year. Some reason about not having any more free time and crying in the corner. She did say that she was perfectly fine for me to work during breaks from school (X-mas, Spring break, mid-winter break, summer), so she hadn't made the assumption that I was not old enough to handle the job.

I got the idea that my mom was afraid of me working 20 hours a week. That wasn't what I had in mind at all. I figured I'd probably work every other weekend. Even if I only worked from 8 to 4 every other Sunday, that's an extra \$56 dollars in my pocket per month! If I had done that, I might have been able to afford my annual.

Storytime. Sarah is a sophomore desparate for a job. The local bookstore offers her one, but they demand full-weekend work at minimum wage. Sarah's parents advise against it, but she takes it anyway. After two months, she's tired, her grades are dropping, and she hasn't seen her friends in weeks. But at least she got that stereo she wanted. Now if only she had time to listen to it.

Where did Sarah go wrong? When she took the job at the bookstore. I'm not saying the bookstore is a bad place to work; I'm saying it's a bad place for Sarah to work. That job was obviously for someone who had more free time.

So what I'm ultimately getting at is teenagers who want or need jobs need to be careful about the job they choose. Kids who want jobs but don't have time for them (like me) need to recognize this and figure out what to do about it. That doesn't mean that teenagers shouldn't have jobs, it just means that a teenger who wants a job should be able to get one, if they can handle it. That's another reason people are opposed to 16 year-olds with jobs. Most high schoolers that have jobs right now can not handle them.

“Kids & Jobs” Persuasive Prompt

An Education Lasts a Lifetime

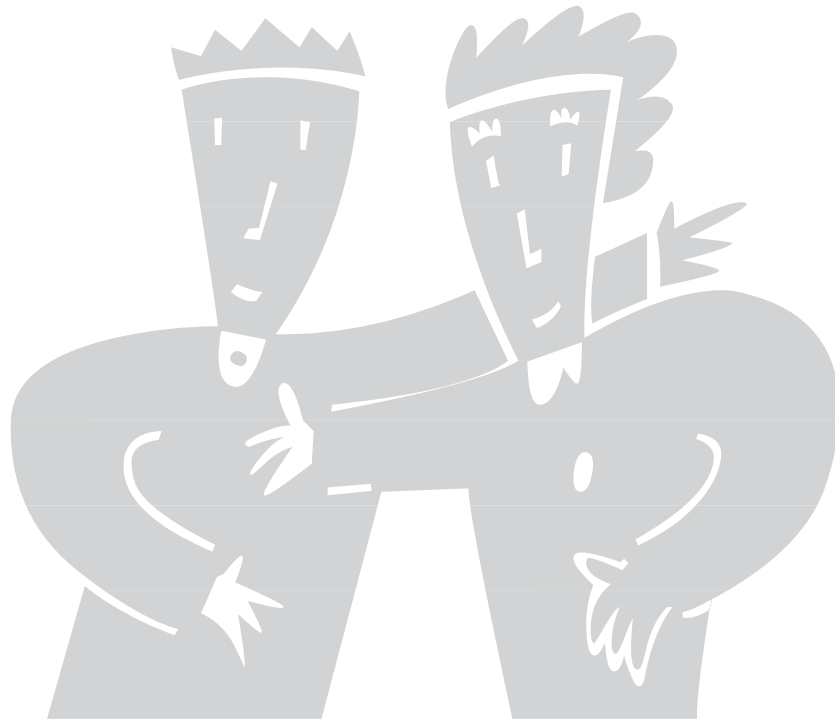
Education is a key element in developing the skills necessary for a successful life. Too often students are more involved earning a paycheck than spending time on their academic studies. Students need to realize that their highschool classes will prepare them for a brighter future.

A highschool student's time is very limited. Homework and extra curricular activities are time consuming and if a student adds a job into this busy schedule, less time is devoted to their academic studies. The effects of this could be receiving lower grades or not taking challenging courses. A job would also limit the amount of time a teenager has for social activities and sports, thereby causing a withdrawal from friends and the highschool community.

The job environment is not always beneficial to the student. In most cases the wages are low and the hours are long. Sometimes employers can be very demanding and schedules are not flexible. The skills being used may not be beneficial in furthering their career, and they might become comfortable with the paycheck and not strive to reach their full potential.

Money is the root of many problems associated with teenagers. A paycheck gives a student the power to purchase many commodities including cars, clothing and electronics. They may also be exposed to drugs and alcohol. Students are being introduced to a new environment and the challenge of managing their money comes into play.

Teenagers already have enough pressures and stress in their lives and they may find it difficult to juggle academics along with their work schedule. High school is a time of growth both mentally and physically. Students should focus their attention on their studies so they can one day achieve their dreams.



Let's work together to
make your teaching
the best it can be.

Please contact me any time!

Even the best workshops and teaching materials can't meet the needs of every teacher all the time.

That's why we need to stay in touch. Send me an e-mail any time you have a question.

*I'll do my best to get back to you quickly with answers, additional teaching materials,
or other resources.*

Please send suggestions, questions, and corrections to:
stevepeha@ttms.org

Learning Patterns

Teach Smarter Not Harder

Imagine a structure 13 years tall, 180 days wide, and five subjects deep. This is a K-12 education. Each cell in this structure represents a single class period in a single subject for a total of 11,700 educational opportunities.

By using *Teaching That Makes Sense® Learning Patterns™* we can reduce this academic load for students, simplify planning and instruction for teachers, and help more kids learn more things in less time and with less teacher effort.

Learning Patterns are cross-curricular tools optimized for successful teaching in any subject or grade. They are designed to be used, re-used, and shared across classrooms without requiring extensive training or preparation.

By analyzing standards documents and the methods of effective teachers, *Teaching That Makes Sense* has identified underlying commonalities in learning targets across the curriculum. These commonalities represent dozens of potential assignments that can be taught and learned through a small set of foundational skills.

Consider exposition. Students consume and create expository information in many ways: they read expository texts, write expository essays, create reports, answer test questions, etc. As varied as expository expression is, it has a simple underlying structure that can be explained by a single *Learning Pattern*.

Some *Learning Patterns* cover skills like narration, exposition, and persuasion. Others help teachers and students with things like assessment, reading comprehension, and memorization. The same patterns can be used across grade levels and subject areas as well, so kids take their learning with them as they grow.

For more information about Learning Patterns click [here](#).



“Learning begins with teaching that makes sense.”

Agile Transformation

Building Collective Capacity for School-Wide Change

We are discovering better ways of improving schools by doing it and by helping others do it. Through this work, we have come to value:

- **People.** *Individuals and interactions* over policy and politics;
- **Achievement.** *Maximum potential* over minimum competence;
- **Courage.** *Fierce collaboration* over comfortable compromise;
- **Agility.** *Responding to change* over following a plan.

The items on the right are important, but we value the items on the left more.

Agile Transformation is grounded in two principles: **(1)** People are more successful when they enjoy their work; and **(2)** Schools are more successful when they support people in developing the autonomy, competence, and relatedness that makes their work more enjoyable. Features of *Agile Transformation* include:

- **Paired Practice.** Nobody works alone. Everyone has a team and a teammate.
- **Rapid Iteration.** Sprint through big problems one small problem at a time.
- **Making Sense.** What do we do? Why do we do it? How do we know it works?
- **“Stand Up” Sessions.** What did you do yesterday? What are you doing today? What do you need to be successful? Agile leaders remove impediments.
- **Successful Failure.** Fail fast, fail smart. No blame games. Apply what you learn as you move closer to your goal with each iteration.
- **Souls and Roles.** Aligning what we do with who we are.
- **“Just in Time” Solutions.** Handle problems as they arise. Respond as needed.



“Learning begins with teaching that makes sense.”

Essential Elements of Agile Schools

The Qualities of Effective Educational Communities

1. **Agile schools work because people choose to make them work.** We believe in freedom of choice, and that making the choice to participate fully in teaching, learning, and leading is the most important choice we can make.
2. **Agile schools love to learn.** We believe that learning is inherently enjoyable and that giving learners a responsible degree of autonomy in their individual pursuit of knowledge and skill makes it even more so. Agile educators are learners, too.
3. **Agile schools take a constructive approach to failure.** We believe failure is a normal part of success. Kids struggle to learn. Teachers struggle to teach. Administrators struggle to lead. We all experience failure on the way to solving new problems. The faster we fail, the more solutions we try. The smarter we fail, the more knowledge we bring to the next iteration. Instead of looking back at problems, Agile schools look forward to solving them.
4. **Agile schools are always getting better.** We believe there's almost always a better way of doing something, and that it's almost always worthwhile trying to figure out what that better way is. Agile schools value progress, and the appropriate measurement thereof, because progress is the true indicator of learning.
5. **Agile schools empower people to empower others.** We believe that individuals—not systems or policies—are the true sources of power in our schools. Our responsibility is to use our power in service of the greater good, and to teach students how to use their power that way, too.
6. **Agile schools achieve extraordinary results.** We believe in transformative learning that goes far beyond incremental improvements in test scores. Adults in Agile schools also strive for extraordinary achievement in their profession as well.



“Learning begins with teaching that makes sense.”

Essential Elements

continued...

7. **Agile schools are based on deeply-held beliefs, clearly-articulated values, and a firmly-rooted sense of commitment.** We believe that the most successful schools are those run by people who know what matters most to them and who possess an unshakable determination to get it.
8. **Agile schools are communities where people make a difference and connect with something greater than themselves.** We believe that the drive to contribute is part of human nature. Our role is to guide people in directing their contribution toward its highest and best use.
9. **Agile schools value ownership, positive attitudes, high expectations, and unwavering optimism.** We believe that making a good life is about making good choices, that the pursuit of happiness is an inalienable right, and that self-mastery is the key to its rightful exercise.
10. **Agile schools embrace the risk inherent in the achievement of great things.** We educate for maximum potential not minimum competence. We believe that all learners have within them extraordinary strengths and untapped resources, and that learning is only limited by our willingness to attempt what has never before been attempted. We welcome change, we innovate, and we seek out challenges that organize and measure the best of our energies and skills.
11. **Agile schools affirm self-knowledge as the most valuable knowledge and self-determination as the most basic right.** We believe that introspection, self-disclosure, and intellectual honesty are essential to personal transformation. We seek to support young people in becoming the adults they want to be.
12. **Agile schools are communities where no one is above the rules, everyone has a voice, freedom is sacred, equity and excellence are not mutually exclusive, and the highest goal of education is contributing to the present and future well-being of individuals who can thrive independently in a modern democracy.** Agile schools value college preparation, career fulfillment, and engaged citizenship, but we value something else even more. Collegiate, career, and civic achievement are important, but they are means to ends, not ends in themselves. Human happiness, meaningful contribution, and sustained well-being of self and community are the ultimate ends to which Agile schools aspire on behalf of the children and families we serve.



“Learning begins with teaching that makes sense.”

TEACHING THAT MAKES SENSE



“Learning begins with teaching that makes sense.”