

Writing Strands 7

Dave Marks

National Writing Institute
624 W. University Dr. #248
Denton, TX 76201-1889

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For information, contact

National Writing Institute
624 W. University Dr. #248
Denton, TX 76201-1889

(800) 688-5375
info@writingstrands.com

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Introduction

This group of exercises is designed for any students who have completed *Writing Strands 6* or for seniors in high school if they are new to Writing Strands. These exercises will walk you through the complicated process of organizing and communicating your thoughts in advanced forms.

Learning to write well is one of the hardest jobs that you have. These exercises will make it easier by showing you the planning and detail of the writing process.

The writing exercises in this level are in three categories: creative, research and report, and expository. The exercises in each of these areas will guide you in the development of the skills you'll need.

Rather than increase the work for your parents, this writing process should make it easier for both you and your parents to meet the demands for more student writing.

These exercises are not presented as the ultimate answer. They're detailed suggestions. If you make your best effort on each exercise, you'll end up with a strong foundation in writing, and your parents will find it easier to have confidence that the challenging task of teaching writing has been accomplished.

How to Make *Writing Strands* Work for You

1. You should have a writing folder containing all of your written work which should be saved for next year. This will give you a place to store and record your progress, and it's a great thing for your parents to keep.
2. Both semesters' work have evaluations by your parents which may be used if your parents have to have a conference with your local school administration. They contain:
 - A. The objectives you have mastered this year.
 - B. A place for your parents to comment on your work and a place to list the things you have yet to learn.
3. Each exercise begins with a suggested time for completion. Of course, all students work at different rates. The suggested daily activities can be combined or extended depending on your performance and your parents' schedules.
4. Many of the exercises suggest that your parents work with you during your schooling period and that they read what you have written. If they do, it will serve two purposes:
 - A. It will give you constant feedback and will allow your parents to catch many writing problems before they appear in your final papers.
 - B. It will greatly cut down on your parents' correcting time outside of your working periods. Most of the paper reading can be done while you're working on language arts, so, even though you'll be writing much more than you previously have been, your parents should be able to help you more while using even less outside time.
5. At the end of each semester's work there is an evaluation form that should list the continuing problems you have:
 - A. The form at the end of the first semester should contain a list of the problems that you should work on during the second semester.
 - B. The year's-end evaluation form should list the problems that you'll be able to solve next year.

Principles

The following principles were adopted by the National Writing Institute before work began on Writing Strands. They were our guides in the initial stages of the design of the exercises.

1. Every person needs to learn to express ideas and feelings through writing.
2. There is no one right way to write anything.
3. The ability to write is not an expression of a body of knowledge that can be learned like a list of vocabulary words.
4. Writing teachers and their students both learn in any effective writing situation.
5. The product of each student's writing efforts must be seen as a success for at least the following reasons:
 - A. A student in a writing experience is not in competition with anyone else.
 - B. There is no perfect model against which any effort can be compared for evaluation, so there is no best way for any student to write.
 - C. Every controlled writing experience will help students improve the ability to express themselves.
6. All student writing efforts are worthy of praise. The most help any writing teacher can give at any point is to show, in a positive way, what is good about a piece and how it might be improved.
7. Any writing lesson assigned that is done independently by a student and doesn't have a teacher's constant feedback in the form of reinforcement and suggestions represents a missed opportunity for the student.
8. All writing at any level is hard work, and every writer should be encouraged to feel the pride of authorship.
9. All authors need to be published. This can be accomplished by having their work read to family members, posted on the bulletin board, printed in "books" or stuck on the front of the refrigerator.

Exercises, Skills, and Objectives

Exercise 1: What Our Feet Do

Skill Area: Creative

1. Understanding that people vary in the ways they move their bodies
2. Realizing that writers understand this and use it in their writing
3. Using this understanding in writing

Exercise 2: If I Were A . . .

Skill Area: Research and Report

1. Understanding that the things we call good and bad (our attitudes) are determined by who we are
2. Accepting that ideas may be looked at in more than one way
3. Understanding that the organization of a report should help the reader understand it

Exercise 3: Describing Characters

Skill Area: Creative

1. Realizing that authors can choose what they describe
2. Understanding that authors make these choices to tell their readers what they want them to know
3. Being able to select what to describe and giving the reader that necessary information

Exercise 4: Conflict

Skill Area: Creative

1. Understanding that conflicts are important and resolvable
2. Creating and resolving conflicts in writing

Exercise 5: Point Of View

Skill Area: Explanatory

1. Knowing the choices an author has in his use of point of view
2. Understanding how these point of view elements work
3. Understanding the structuring of an explanatory exposition
4. Writing an explanatory exposition

Exercise 6: What Makes It What It Is

Skill Area: Creative

1. Creating, for a reader, the character of a place
2. Making a reader feel about a place in a selected way

Exercise 7: Survey

Skill Area: Research and Report

1. Writing unbiased questions
2. Selecting a representative sample of respondents for a survey
3. Taking an oral survey
4. Reporting on the results of a survey

Exercise 8: Argument

Skill Area: Argumentative

1. Establishing a position on a local controversial issue
2. Interviewing local experts on an issue
3. Using quotations from experts to support a position
4. Writing an argumentative exposition supporting a chosen position

Exercise 9: Book Report

Skill Area: Research and Report

1. Understanding that many novels are based on the development of characters
2. Realizing that characters can be analyzed the same way they're created
3. Writing a book report based on character development

Exercise 10: Behavior

Skill Area: Research and Report

1. Observing a situation and taking notes so as to be able to write about it
2. Describing what is seen over a period of days
3. Writing a formal scientific report

Exercise 11: Interview With A Character

Skill Area: Research and Report

1. Understanding that imaginary characters sometimes do what they want to do
2. Writing an interview

Exercise 12: Problems

Skill Strand: Creative

1. Describing a problem by giving that problem to a character
2. Creating character motivation
3. Creating a character with a problem and showing a reader that character working with that problem

Exercise 13: Interactions

Skill Area: Creative

1. Creating an emotional relationship between characters
2. Punctuating dialogue
3. Describing, in a dialogue, characters' major body movements caused by their emotional reactions

Exercise 14: He Did It First

Skill Area: Creative

1. Creating a character to be like someone you know
2. Creating character motivation
3. Learning about how people handle themselves by working at your writing

Strands

Two of the most desired characteristics of any writing program are continuity of instruction from level to level and control of the learning process by the teacher.

Below are the strands, the exercises that present the strands and where they're found in this text.

Skill	Page
Creative	
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Exercise 3. Describing Characters	13
Exercise 4. Conflict	18
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Research/Report	
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Exercise 7. Survey	36
Exercise 9. Book Report	53
Exercise 10. Behavior	56
Explanatory	
Exercise 5. Point Of View	23

Not Rules, More Like Suggestions

In almost everything we do, there are rules (like laws), which we have to live by, and then there are what we call “rules,” which we should follow and agree to follow because doing so makes life nicer for everyone.

This is also true in writing. Look at the rule (law) that says that every sentence must start with a capital letter. We all must follow this rule when we write. A “rule” of writing is that we use an exclamation point only once a year.

The following “rules” are just strong suggestions. You can break them if you want to. However, it might be good to keep in mind that, if you do, your readers will look at your writing the same way that the company at dinner might look at you if you burped at the end of the meal. So, below is a short list of the “rules” of writing:

1. Don't use exclamation points! This makes any writing look amateurish and fuzzy. If you're saying something that's important, the way you say it should be strong enough so that you don't have to tell your reader that it's important by using exclamation points at the end of your sentences.
2. Don't underline the titles of your papers. The only time there should be underlining in one of your titles is when you use the name of an independently published work, such as a book or magazine.
3. Skip a line after the title in any paper you're giving to someone else to read.
4. Never write “The End” at the end of anything you write for a schooling exercise.
5. Don't try writing humor until you've studied it and really know the difference between being funny and being corny. (Those places in this book where I tried to be funny and was corny will give you an example of what I mean.)
6. Don't skip a line between paragraphs.
7. Always leave a margin at the bottom of each page.
8. Check your papers for clichés before you write the final drafts.

Stuff I Learned Last Year about Writing That I Feel Really Good About

- 1. _____

- 2. _____

- 3. _____

- 4. _____

- 5. _____

- 6. _____

- 7. _____

- 8. _____

1. What Our Feet Do

Skill Strand: Creative

It may take you six days to learn that:

1. People vary in the ways they move their bodies
2. Writers understand these differences
3. You can use this understanding when you create characters

Prewriting

Day One

One thing that most people learn as they get older is how to control their body movements. We all had to learn how to do this, and it does take practice to know exactly what the parts of our bodies are doing.

If you were to watch young children, you'd notice that they're always moving some part of their bodies and that this movement has little to do with what they're saying or with what they want to do.

It would be hard for you to find a young child not making random movements with his hands, fingers, arms or legs. This is okay; we all have done this in our process of growing up. Some adults still have difficulty with holding themselves still, but most adults can sit quietly for long periods of time and not show signs of impatience.

In this exercise you'll create two characters: one who will be able to control random body movements and one who, when upset, will have some difficulty controlling what goes on with fingers, feet, arms, and hands.

This exercise has three parts:

1. Improvisation and planning
2. Writing
3. Acting

Part One: Improvisation and Planning

Improvisation is constructing or acting without previous planning. One of your parents might help you do this exercise. Together you'll act out a scene of two people in conversation. One will be an adult who has control of body actions and the other will not have such good control. These two characters will demonstrate their respective (each their own in the order given) abilities to control

their bodies. This means that whichever one of you plays the character who has control of body movements will have to control what her body is doing, and the person playing the character who has little control over nervous energy will have to demonstrate random body movements for that age level.

You and your parent should have to discuss and then decide on a situation for your improvisation. Keep in mind that you're to improvise the actions and speeches of your characters. This means that you and your parent cannot plan exactly what will be said or what will be done in your skit. You can plan the situation the two characters will be in but not what will happen.

You should agree on a situation that will show the difference between the characters' abilities to control their bodies. I suggest situations such as the following:

- A woman talking to her neighbor who doesn't want to let on that there is to be a surprise party this evening for her husband
- A mother and her son waiting to be waited upon in a shoe store
- A young person working on a first job who has to explain to the boss that the cash register is short \$14.50
- A mother asking her son about why the boy won't take out the garbage on his own

Once you and your parent have chosen a situation, you should act it out. Keep in mind that this exercise is about body control. You should have each character speak at least fifteen to twenty times. This will give you ample time to demonstrate their respective body-control abilities.

You do not have to resolve any conflict in this short skit. It does not have to have any specific structure. The intent is to give you experience in creating characters who move their bodies in different ways.

Preparation

(I don't know what else to call it. I thought of "schoolwork, after-session work, homework" and "prep-work," but none of them worked as well as "preparation." So, if this is new to you, you'll just have to suffer the use of this word.) Both of you should practice your parts and your control of your bodies so you'll both be ready to do the skit again and to take further notes. You both could practice different movements—looking for the kinds that are most typical for your age-group/characters.

Day Two

You're to run through the skit again and take notes on what you're doing with your bodies. An easy way to take notes while doing this is to use a tape recorder. As you improvise (in the skit) you can make notes into the recorder and transcribe them later.

Part Two: Writing

Preparation

Write a scenario for the skit and prepare a final draft for day three. Keep in mind that scenarios are always written in present tense and have no dialogue, characterizations or details.

Day Three

You and your parent should study your scenario and, together, write one which you'll use to write the script for a skit. You may use this small bit of a scenario as a model. Notice that the scenario is in present tense. You should use a place you know well.

Scenario for "At Dinner"

Bill is eating dinner with his middle class family in their suburban home. Bill's sister is seated across from him and his father is at the end of the table, on Bill's right, across from Bill's mother.

Bill's father is asking Bill why he hasn't raked the leaves from the front lawn yet. Bill plays with his silverware. The rest of the family sits quietly.

When you've finished the scenario, make a list of the body movements for each character. Unless your parents tell you otherwise, don't write in this book. Use your own paper and leave this book clean for your little brother or sister. Set your paper up to be like the following example.

Body Movements

Character One (teen):

Character Two (adult):

When your scenario and list of body movements are written and before you start writing your skit, you should ask your parent to look over your work.

Preparation

You should start on the introduction to your skit.

This brief model skit may help. I suggest you have a narrative voice which uses **past tense**, **third person**, is **objective**, and is **non-involved**. If these are new terms or you have forgotten, look ahead at Exercise 5, "Point of View."

At Dinner

Bill was eating dinner with his family. Bill's father, a large but soft-spoken man, had asked Bill why the front yard hadn't been raked yet. Bill was running his fork around his plate as if it were a hockey stick and the last pea were a puck.

"There has to be a good reason; you've had plenty of time," Mr. Smith said, looking at his son. Two small pieces of meat made the goal, and Bill was racing toward it with the pea/puck. He could hear the crowd in the stands yelling his name. "Well, what about it, Bill?"

Mr. Smith's hands were lying flat on the tablecloth, one on either side of his plate.

The rest of the family was still, waiting for Bill's answer. Bill's mother was watching her husband, and Janet was staring at her plate, glad she wasn't in this conversation.

"I guess I forgot." Bill faked out the last guard and cut in toward the goal, the puck riding on the tine of his fork.

"Forgot? How could this be, Bill? I've reminded you of this little job three times this week. I'm not sure you're remembering your responsibilities as a member of this family. We all have to work together. Do you remember the times we've talked about that? How each of us has a job to help all of us?" Bill's father had raised his right hand in a questioning gesture. He looked at his wife.

Bill slapped a high shot right past the goalie's shoulder, and the pea hit his father's coffee cup. "Sorry, Dad." Bill reached out and tried to spear the pea, but it rolled away from his fork. His other hand was inching toward his spoon. If he could just trap that Green Guz between the trident and his net, then he might be able to save the planet Oorf from the revenge of the Guz.

"About what?"

"What?" Bill looked up at his father and saw for the first time that his expression was very intense, and Bill knew he had to shape up. He raked the pea toward his plate while he said, "How about I start tomorrow right after I get done with studies?"

Bill's father smiled at his wife and began to eat again. Bill had found a small piece of skin at the edge of his thumb that he wasn't sure he had ever seen before. He reached out for the scalpel and felt his nurse slap it into his palm. The patient was out and it was time to cut.

Days Four and Five

You and your parent should work together on the skit. When you've finished, you might want to make a copy at the library so you won't have to write it twice.

Part Three: Acting**Preparation**

You and your parent may want to memorize and produce the skit for the rest of your family. The skit should take between one and a half and two minutes to "play."

Day Six

Arrange the furniture and invite the family to watch your skit. Don't worry about making mistakes. No one will know if you miss a word or skip a gesture. The important thing is that you have a good time learning that people move their bodies with the ways their minds work.

I recommend you take the next week off from writing and spend the time reading and discussing ideas with your parents.

Progress Report

Name: _____ Date: _____

Assignment 1: What Our Feet Do

Copy your best sentence for the week on the lines below.

Name one mistake you made this week that you can fix and will avoid next week.

Write the sentence that had this mistake in it.

Write the sentence again showing how you fixed this mistake.

Comments:

2. If I Were a...

Skill Strand: Research and Report

It may take you eight days to learn that

1. The things we call good and bad (our attitudes) are determined by who we are
2. Some ideas may be looked at in more than one way
3. The organization of a report should help the reader understand it

Prewriting

Day One

Not all people have the same attitudes. This doesn't mean that if you don't like the same things I do, I think you're bad. People can disagree and still share respect.

The kinds of attitudes about what is good or bad are reasonable and expected because the things we call good and bad are determined by who we are and what experiences we've had. People who have had different experiences should have different feelings. It wouldn't be right, with the experiences I've had, for me to try to impose my attitudes on you because you wouldn't understand or appreciate them.

In this exercise you'll have a chance to look at two attitudes and explain that both attitudes, though they're opposite, are good for the people holding (believing) them.

Most middle class Americans feel very protective about their property. Land they have bought and live on is precious to them, and they like to mark it off as theirs and in many cases put up fences around it. Many people even have arguments about who owns small strips of land that lie between their properties.

A strange situation developed when the settlers came to this land. Many of the tribes of Native Americans living here had attitudes about the land that were not understood by the settlers. They felt that people couldn't own land; it was just there. The land belonged to the world or the Great Spirits, and men couldn't possess it. Men could live on the land and use it, but the land would always be there. When they died, someone else would use it.

The settlers believed that it was valuable to own land. This created problems. Here were people living on land who knew that men couldn't own land, and along came a group of people who wanted to "buy" the land, actually give them wonderful things for it.

At first, many of the Indians thought this was funny—people giving them beautiful knives, beads and mirrors for something that no one could own. This is how what is now Manhattan Island was

“bought” by the Dutch settlers for less than thirty dollars worth of trinkets. The Native Americans thought they had gotten a great bargain.

The people from Europe, of course, felt they had made a wonderful buy. The first trouble began between the Native Americans and the settlers when the settlers wanted the Indians to keep off of the property they had just purchased.

In this exercise you’re going to pretend that you’re a lawyer. What you’ve been hired to do is to explain these different attitudes toward land to members of the Continental Congress, who will have to make treaties with the Native Americans.

You must make the Congressmen understand that there are two real sets of attitudes in conflict. Your job is to explain this so that both sides are treated fairly—so that the Indians are not taken advantage of and the settlers can own the land they have bought. You’re not to come to any decisions for the lawmakers. This is not a court case. You’ve only to explain the two attitudes and how they are in conflict.

In this paper you must explain the history of land use as it’s seen by both the settlers and the Native Americans. The congressmen must understand this before they can understand how the two groups feel.

This will be hard to do. You’ll have to invent the history of the Indians’ use of land and how they feel about selling it. You’ll have to give examples (cases) where the Native Americans dealt with land use before the white men came.

Think about bears using the land, how the bears don’t own the land except where their feet are making prints. And, when they move, their land changes to where their feet make new prints.

I just made this up. But, this is an example of how you can make up material for this report. It would be better if you could research this topic, but that would be hard if you don’t have a library handy. Your parent may want to encourage you to research this in your local library. If you have a historical society in your town, some member should be happy to help you. Or, If you were to follow this outline, it might help you organize your paper:

1. An **introduction** to your report to the lawmakers which could contain:
 - A. Who you are
 - B. What you want to do
 - C. Why you want to do this
 - D. How the information you’ll give them will help them make the decisions they’ll have to make.

2. A **history** of the Native Americans' use of land and their philosophy about land ownership.
 - A. "**Cases,**" which you'll make up, which will serve as examples of how the Native Americans' attitudes control their beliefs and behaviors.
 - B. A **request** from the Native Americans that the Congressmen respect their values.
3. A **history** of the settlers' use of land and their philosophy about land ownership.
 - A. "**Cases,**" which you'll make up, which will serve as examples of how the settlers' attitudes control their beliefs and behaviors.
 - B. A **request** from the Settlers that the Congressmen respect their values.
4. A **conclusion** to your report that explains to the Congressmen how both attitudes concerning land use and ownership are good systems and have worked for the people involved.
 - A. An **appeal** to the Congressmen that they take into consideration the Indians' attitudes.
 - B. An **appeal** to the Congressmen that they take the attitudes of the Settlers into account.
 - C. A **statement of appreciation** for the opportunity to present this report to the Congress.

This organization might be easier to understand with an outline of the parts of this paper: Your paper should be set up to be like the example page below:

(Your first and last name)
 (The date)
 (Skip two spaces)

(The Title Of Your Paper)

(Skip one line)

INTRODUCTION (Don't label the parts of your paper; these labels are just to show you how to structure your paper.)

1. Who you are
2. What you want to do
3. Why you want to do this
4. How this information will help

BODY (Skip no lines)

1. Native Americans' use of land and philosophy
- 2 "Cases," examples of Native Americans' attitudes
3. Request Congressmen respect the Native Americans' belief

(Skip no lines)

1. Settlers' use of land and philosophy
2. "Cases," examples of settlers' attitudes
3. Request Congressmen respect the settlers' beliefs

CONCLUSION (No labels)

1. An appeal for Congress to consider the Native Americans' attitudes
2. An appeal for Congress to consider the settlers' attitudes
3. Appreciation for opportunity to present this report

(Equal margins on all side of each page and page #s on all but page #1)

Writing

Now that you understand what this paper will look like, you should come up with a title and write the introduction. This paper is a report, and its title should let your reader know this. It could look like the example below (of course, you're not to use my example title):

*Report on the Problems of Differing Attitudes Concerning Use and Ownership of Land
Presented to the Continental Congress, 1776*

Your introduction could be structured like the outline below. You should not use second person. In this example, I used just one sentence for each of the points in the introduction. You may use as many as you need or like.

The legal firm of Bean, Bean and (your name) in presenting this report Congress has commissioned. . .

- (1) You are a representative of the Philadelphia law firm of Bean, Bean and ___?
- (2) You are presenting a report that the Congress has commissioned the firm to do on the different attitudes that the contesting groups have regarding land use and ownership.
- (3) Your firm has agreed to do this study because of the serious nature of the problem.
- (4) There have been numerous killings over ownership of land. The firm of Bean, Bean, hopes that their report will help the Congressmen understand both sides in this controversy and the various attitudes held by the contestants.

Day Two

Begin the first body paragraph (the history of the Native Americans' land use and their attitudes concerning land ownership). You should make up a "case" to use as an example. It might be like the example case below:

Honorable Congressmen, an example of how the Native Americans feel about land ownership can best be shown by this strange but touching story about the Native Americans and their land.

There was, on a river not far from here, a small tribe of Native Americans called the Timawut. They had a patch of ground they used for growing maize. A family of beavers moved onto their land and built a dam across their small river. The water rose higher every day. When it was almost to their maize field, one of the nearby settlers asked the Native Americans why they did not tear down the dam and save their food. They replied that the beaver had as much right to the land as they did. It would anger the Great Spirits if they were to destroy the home of the beavers.

The Native Americans moved their maize field to higher ground. The following year there was very little rain. The river all but dried up, but the lake the beavers had made with their dam held enough water so that the Native Americans could water their crops.

The Native Americans and animals have lived together in harmony for thousands of years.

Preparation

You should show your parent your rough draft so far of the first body paragraph. Revise using your parent's suggestions.

Day Three

Finish working on the first body paragraph.

Preparation

You should show your parent your rough draft of your introduction and your first body paragraph. Revise using your parent's suggestions.

Day Four

Write the second body paragraph. This part should be much easier for you to write than the second point. The settlers' attitudes concerning land use and ownership would have been much like ours are today. Make up a case that will show how the settlers' experiences determine how they think about land.

Preparation

Show your draft to your parent. Revise your second body paragraph using your parent's feedback.

Day Five

Ask your parent to read your second rough draft of the introduction and the body section. Revise using your parent's suggestions. Plan your conclusion.

Day Six

Write your conclusion.

Preparation

Show your conclusion to your parent. Revise.

Day Seven

After your parent has had a chance to look over the entire second draft, revise everything one more time.

Preparation

Bring in your finished paper for day eight.

Day Eight

Your parent may want some member of your family to read the report as if it were being read to the Congress in 1776.

I recommend you take the next week off from writing.

Progress Report

Name: _____ Date: _____

Assignment 2: If I Were a...

Copy your best *paragraph* for the week on the lines below.

Name one mistake you made this week that you can fix and will avoid next week.

Write the sentence that had this mistake in it.

Write the sentence again showing how you fixed this mistake.

Comments:

3. Describing Characters

Skill Strand: Creative

It may take you four days to learn that:

1. Authors have choices of what they describe
2. These choices are made to give their readers the information they want them to have
3. You can select what you describe to give your readers the information you want them to have

Prewriting

Day One

Authors of fiction create the worlds their characters live in. Before they begin writing, there are no people exactly like the ones they create, and there are probably no places just like the ones they put their people in.

When authors want to show their readers what characters are like, they first decide what the characters' major characteristics are and then create situations so the readers will see those characteristics.

This means that writers must pick a few things about their characters that they feel are important and let their readers understand them. They then will represent each whole character, and the readers will know the characters from what the writers choose to write about. If this is not clear, it will be in a moment.

One of the rules of writing fiction is that authors don't tell their readers what they want them to know, they show them what they want them to know. If we were to create a character and want to have our reader not like him because he doesn't ever think about other people, we would not tell our reader directly what the character is like. We would not say: *Groton didn't like other people and showed this by the way he acted towards them. He didn't wash and used bad table manners.*

Instead, we would have to show our reader how Groton acts and let our reader come to the conclusion that Groton doesn't like other people. It might read like this short example:

Most of the women were in the kitchen, wiping their hands on dish towels. The men were in the living room watching the ball game. The kids, all twelve of them, were moving from room to room getting in the way.

Dinner was on hold. My Aunt Edna asked Mom if Groton had been told when to come. The older kids were snatching bits of turkey as they walked past the platter.

The talk died as the family began to get tense with waiting. Mom whispered, "I don't know how long I can keep the stuffing hot without overcooking it."

Ripples of excitement came from the front of the house, and I knew that Groton had arrived. I ran to the front window, and there across the street was the rusty pick-up truck I remembered from last year.

Groton pushed his way to the end of the table and put his hands on the back of the large chair usually held for Dad. It looked like he had rubber gloves on. I had never seen his hands so clean.

Mom called the men to the table, and by the time they had shuffled to the dining room, Groton was sitting down and pulling up the sleeves of his flannel shirt, and now everyone could see his dark arms ending in the unnaturally white hands.

There was a shifting of kids away from Groton's end of the table, and I could smell, over the rich turkey and stuffing. . .

In this example I don't tell you that Groton doesn't care what other people think. But, you know this is true by the description of his actions and his family's reaction to him.

Writing

You're to write about a character, but first you should decide what one characteristic would best show that character's personality. Then you'll have to create a place where the reader can watch this character operate.

The four steps to this exercise are:

1. Decide on one characteristic for a character. It could be something like:
 - A) Stingy
 - B) Scared or frightened of life
 - C) Greedy
 - D) Kind
 - E) Empathetic
2. Decide what you'll describe about this character. This can include actions, physical characteristics or both.
3. Put your character in a place. This should be where the characteristic can be observed by your reader.
4. Write a short description (less than 600 words) of an event in which your reader will see your character operate and will understand what kind of a person your character is.

Preparation

Decide on the name of your character, your character's major characteristic, and the place and event about which you'll write. Your preparation (it's hard not to prepare when you work at home, isn't it?) might look like this:

1. Name of character: Janet
2. Major characteristic: Janet is very shy. This characteristic will be shown to my reader by my showing Janet when she will not talk or look at another person.
3. I plan on showing Janet's shyness by describing a time in a Burger King restaurant when Janet and her girlfriend run into two boys they had met at their youth group.

Day Two

Write the first draft of your description. If you didn't get your preparation done for today, be sure and let your parent know so you can get the help you need.

Preparation

Work over your rough draft and then rewrite it. It's always possible, especially for young writers, to cut extra words and clean up rough drafts. See the example at the end of this exercise.

Day Three

Make sure your parent reads your second draft. (Do this.)

Preparation

Write your final rough draft. This means that you've cut out all the parts that don't need to be there, you've changed all of the rough sentences into smooth ones, and you've checked the punctuation and spelling.

Day Four

As soon as your parent has read your final rough draft, write the final copy. By now your parent should have had a chance to read your work three or four times. If this is not the case, you're either not working hard enough or you're not making sure you're getting the help you need. (Correct this situation.)

Example

To show you that everyone's work can be cut and made better, I've included my first and second drafts of the beginning of my description of Groton. Notice how the piece gets shorter, and the cutting of parts of it doesn't hurt it but helps it by making it "cleaner" and more precise.

1st draft

Everyone, all the relatives we could squeeze into our house but Groton, had come. Most of the women were in the kitchen, "helping." The men were in the living room watching the ball game on the television. The kids, all twelve of them, were running and yelling and chasing each other from room to room getting in everyone's way.

The dinner was on "hold." Some of the women were asking if Groton had been told when to come, and the older kids were snitching bits of turkey and even taking some choice bits into the men in the living room.

2nd draft

Everyone but Groton had come. Most of the women were in the kitchen "helping." The men were in the living room watching the ball game on the TV. The kids, all twelve of them, were moving from room to room getting in everyone's way.

The dinner was on "hold." Some of the women were asking if Groton had been told when to come, and the older kids were snitching bits of turkey when they walked past the platter.

3rd draft

Most of the women were in the kitchen, wiping their hands on dish towels. The men were in the living room watching the ball game. The kids, all twelve of them, were moving from room to room getting in the way.

Dinner was on hold. The older kids were snatching bits of turkey as they walked past the platter. My Aunt Edna asked Mom if Groton had been told when to come.

I recommend you take the next week off from writing.

Progress Report

Name: _____ Date: _____

Assignment 3: Describing Characters

Copy your best paragraph for the week on the lines below.

Name one mistake you made this week that you can fix and will avoid next week.

Write the sentence that had this mistake in it.

Write the sentence again showing how you fixed this mistake.

Comments:
