

**A Collection of Activities to
Teach Writing
According to the
Six-Trait Framework
Described in:**

*Creating Young Writings: Using the Six
Traits to Enrich Writing Process in
Primary School Classrooms*

by Vicki Spandel and Barry Lane

by
Caitlin Felsman
Tufts Literacy Corps Writing Coach



Tufts Literacy Corps
America Reads/Counts at Tufts University
Dowling Hall, 419 Boston Avenue
Medford, MA 02155
tuftstlc@gmail.com

Introduction

Congratulations! You are about to start an exciting year helping a student develop their writing skills. It's going to be a team effort, and there will be lots of ups and downs. This book is designed to give you some ideas of how to get started, and where to go if you get stuck. It is meant as a guideline, and not as a strict curriculum to follow word for word. Every student will have different strengths and weaknesses, and so certain activities will work and others will not. Best of luck and have fun!

How to Use this Packet:

The activities are divided into categories of different writing traits: Idea Development, Organization, Voice, Fluency, Word Choice and Convention. There are different levels of activities in each category that reflect the varying stages of young writers. If one trait happens to be the strength of your student you may need to spend less time on it and can begin at a more difficult activity. It is important to pay attention to all of the traits, however, as a balance of them is what creates the strongest writers. For example, a student may have a fantastic imagination, but struggle to get those ideas into an organized story or essay.

We suggest that everyone begin the year with the introductory lessons provided in this packet to pinpoint each student's strengths and weaknesses and get to know their writing style. After that, your choice of lesson plans should be unique. Suggestions are provided for each activity on what to do if something just isn't working. If you keep hitting a wall, though, try taking a look at some of the resources at the end of this packet to find new ideas that may work better.

Table of Contents

	<u>Page</u>
Introductory Lessons:	
How to get to know your Student and their Writing Style	4
Ice Breakers	5
What is Good Writing Anyway?	5
Personal Portfolios	6
Making Your Journal <i>Yours</i>	6
Free Write	7
Who are You?	7
Idea Development	9
My Own Idea List	10
Breaking Down Ideas	10
Sometimes I Feel...	11
What Does that Feel Like?	11
Looking for the Message	12
Asking the Right Questions	13
Snapshots	13
But What if it Went <i>This Way</i> ?	14
The Picture Story Project	14
Taking an Idea to the ER	15
Organization	16
Organization in Everyday Life	17
A Series of Pictures	17
Movie Maker	18
Follow that Recipe	18
Predicting the Future	19
Off to the Races	19
Act It Out	20
Goals and Obstacles	20
Story Webbing	21
Paragraph Construction	22
Voice	23
Finding Voice	24
How Would <i>They</i> Say It?	24
Taking the Right Lead	25
Build a Character	25
What a Character	26
Pen Pals	27
Talking Outfits	27

Voices of the Rainbow	28
How Comical	29
Exciting Facts	29

Page

Fluency	31
Write My Picture	32
Hearing Fluency	32
Welcome to the...	33
The One- Page Novel	34
Slow Motion	34
Binoculars	35
What's in a Simile?	35
Finding Metaphors Within	36
From Words to Pictures	36
One Sentence Stories	37
Word Choice	38
Rocks and Pebbles	39
Wall of Words	39
Scanning the News	40
Exciting Alphabets	40
Mind Mapping	41
The Human Thesaurus	41
Conventions	42
Where Do Conventions Come From?	43
Find the Sentence	43
Charades	44
The Green Pen	44
Wacky Sentences	45

Introductory Lessons: How to get to know your students and their writing style

Activity: Ice Breakers

Age Range: All

Focus: Introductory Lesson

What You'll Need:

- Small pieces of scrap paper
- Pen/pencil
- Hat or small bag

Preparation: On the scrap pieces of paper, write down many different incomplete statements such as:

My favorite food is _____.

If a genie gave me three wishes I would wish for _____.

I have _____ brothers and _____ sisters.

Now Start Playing: Place all the scraps of paper into the hat or the small bag. Take turns with your student picking out a piece and filling in the blank statements. After one person answers the question the other should too so that you *both* get to learn about each other.

Other Suggestions:

- This game is about getting to know your student, so if a topic comes up that really interests you, take the time to have a real conversation about it.
- Try to remember topics of interest that come up. These will be very important in generating ideas for writing in future lessons.

Activity: What is good writing anyway?

Age Range: All

Focus: Introductory Lesson

What You'll Need:

- A big piece of construction paper
- Markers or crayons
- Regular paper
- Pens/pencils

Preparation: Take some time to brainstorm what you personally feel are traits of good writing. Look back at old papers from classes and notice what you worked on and where professors/teachers made comments. Read passages from your favorite novels and write down what it is that makes that so great. Hint: pay attention to examples of the six traits outlined in this packet.

Now Start Playing: Use the plain piece of paper to brainstorm as many thoughts as possible about what both you and your student think is good writing. Don't worry about the initial list being concise or ideas overlapping.

Then narrow down your list and clear list on your construction paper. Once you've finished, decorate it and make it your own. This list will be a big reference throughout the year, so make sure to keep it somewhere safe and accessible.

Other Suggestions:

- If you have the time and creativity, you can turn this activity into your student's own personal writing guideline book. This list can be the first page, and the rest can be filled with examples of the traits. Periodically add examples into the book to demonstrate things you've talked.

Activity: Personal Portfolios

Age Range: All

Focus: Introductory Lesson

What You'll Need:

- Binder or notebook of your choice
- Dividers – these can be blank pieces of paper; you may want to make them different colors for better organization
- Plain paper
- Markers, crayons, etc

Preparation: Pull together art supplies and label the dividers:

- Ideas, lists and outlines – pretty self-explanatory, a place for lists of all kinds like vocab and writing ideas, as well as your outlines for current projects.
- Work in Progress – put everything that you're working on right now in here
- Finished Work – a place for work that is in its final stage after being written, edited and corrected.
- Journal – this is where to keep your students personal journal, look for details in the next activity.

Now Start Playing: Let your student decorate a page for the outside of their portfolio. This should include their name, and their own unique artwork. Together, put the dividers into the notebook and explain to your student what each section will be used for.

Other Suggestions:

- Don't let the organization side get in the way of creative personality. You want your student to feel connected to both their work and their weekly lessons.

Activity: Making your Journal Yours

Age Range: All

Focus: Introductory Lessons

What You'll Need:

- A notebook – This should be provided for you
- Pens/pencils

Preparation: Do some further reading in this packet about where you and your student are going to use their journal. Hint: pay attention to freewrites, places for reflection.

Now Start Playing: To make this journal personal explore it together. The pages are blank right now, but talk about what will go on them, and the rules for the journal. A key point here is that writing in the journal is about getting ideas down on paper and now about following rules. Try to stress that we are always trying use our writing skills no matter where we write, but in the journal there is no such things as mistakes.

Once you have explored, turn to the front cover of the journal. On this page let your student write their very own privacy warning. Confused? It should look something like this:

Attention, this is a PRIVATE Journal. Only _____ are allowed to read it, so step back or else. If you try to read this journal without my permission, a huge hairy monster will swing out of the sky and squish you like a banana...etc

This is a great first opportunity for creative and descriptive writing, so encourage your student to have fun with it.

Other Suggestions:

- If your student is struggling to come up with their own warning, think of some funny examples like the one above. Help them think of people they wouldn't want reading the journal and strange consequences that might result.

Activity: Free Write

Age Range: All

Focus: Get kids writing!

What you'll need:

- Pencil/Pen
- Journal

Preparation: Brainstorm different prompts and subjects to write about. These can be as specific as you like, but its best to start with something general. For an initial free write, you might want to pick a topic that will help you get to know your student better. For example, ask them to write about their best friend, or favorite activity.

Now Start Playing: Give students the subject or prompt and ask them to write whatever comes into their heads. Allow them to write for 3-5 minutes without any interruption. Remember, the point of this activity is not to correct grammar or spelling, only to write as much as possible in the given time. This activity is specifically done in your student's journal so that feel comfortable writing freely and are not worrying about judgments or following rules.

Other Suggestions:

- If they get stuck, encourage them to get as descriptive as possible. If they're talking about a best friend ask them to describe what the friend looks like, how they laugh, what makes them smile, etc.
- Younger students may not be able to produce more than a few sentences. Be aware of your student's abilities and don't demand too much. It will get easier with time and practice.
- Remember to emphasize that this isn't going to be judged or graded. Creativity is a must! If you see major breaking of conventions, like misspelled words or run-on sentences, take note of them as something to talk about later.

Activity: Who Are You?
Age Range: 2nd grade +
Focus: Introductory Lesson

What you'll need:

- Pencils/Pens
- Paper

Preparation: Think about the characteristics that make you YOU. Are you an athlete, or a musician? Are you a son, or a daughter, a brother or a sister? Write down all the different characteristics to show your student.

Now Start Playing: Start by talking with your student about what makes them unique from others. Show them your list of characteristics that define you.

At the top of a piece of paper write the incomplete sentence “I am...” Then have your student write a list of characteristics that define them. It should look something like this:

I am...
A daughter
A friend
A basketball player
A lover of chocolate ice cream
Etc.

Other Suggestions:

- Compare your list with your student's. Do you have things in common?
- Look for characteristics that will be good topics to write about. Write these down on your Idea List for future use.
- These lists naturally lend themselves to poetry. Take this activity further and see how you can help your student transform their list into a poem.

IDEA DEVELOPMENT

Good writing must have a good idea to build on. This trait is all about helping students think of main ideas that they can then develop into detailed, interesting and exciting pieces of writing.

Great ideas are **attention grabbing** and **meaningful**.

Activity: My Own Idea List

Age Range: All

Focus: Idea Development

What You'll Need:

- Paper
- Pen/Pencil

Preparation: On your own, think of things that you personally would like to write about. This can range from creative story ideas, to real life events, to that Psychology paper you haven't started yet.

Now Start Playing: Show your student your list of writing ideas. Explain how you would use it to pick an idea when you're stuck. You can show them that a big idea can be recycled and used many different ways. For example, you might write about soccer in a personal creative piece, saying how much you like it. Then later, you might write an essay about how soccer's history and how to play it. You might use it again to write a wacky story about the hedgehog Jimmy, who dreamed of being a soccer star – get the picture?

Now it's time for your student to make their list. Encourage them to think of tons of possibilities. They won't have to write about them all, these are just ideas.

Other Suggestions:

- Keep this list in the 'Ideas, Lists and Outlines' section of your student's portfolio. Keep up with it throughout the year, checking things off and adding to it as you go.
- Put it to good use! If they're having a tough day at some point, look at the list for freewrites, stories, and everything in between.

Activity: Breaking down Ideas

Age Range: All

Focus: Idea Development

What You'll Need:

- Your Student’s Idea List
- Pen/Pencil
- Paper

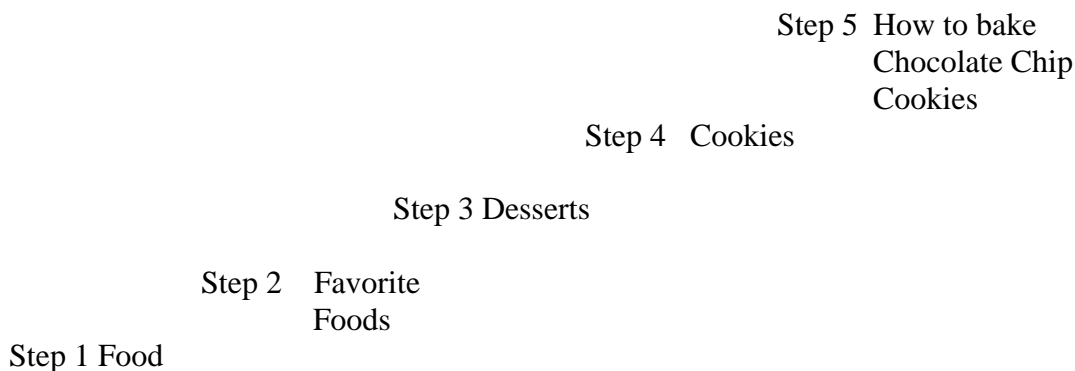
Preparation: Chances are, many of your student’s ideas will be too big to write a simple piece about. It’s hard to use details if you can’t even get the whole topic into a simple outline. This activity will help them break down the ideas into easier subjects to work with. Try it out with one of your own ideas so that you have a good idea of how it works.

Now Start Playing: Start by showing your student your example of a broken down idea. Explain how it will be easier to have detailed, descriptive writing with the more concise topic.

Then choose one of the ideas off your student’s Idea List (try to pick a very broad one). Draw a stair figure, with 5 steps leading up. On the first step write the initial idea. Then for each of the following step write a more specific idea with the most specific being on the 5th step.

Finally, try putting one of your ideas into use. See if it’s easier to get a detailed piece of writing out of an idea on step 5 than an idea from step 1 or 2.

Here’s what it should look like:



Other Suggestions:

- Keep these charts in the Ideas, Lists and Outlines, and update whenever you need to!

Activity: Sometimes I Feel....

Age Range: 2nd Grade +

Focus: Idea Development

What You’ll Need:

- Pens/Pencils
- Paper

Preparation: Brainstorm a list of different emotions

Now Start Playing: The point of this game is to get students to use as much imagery as possible to describe different kinds of emotions. Pick one from your list to start with and ask students to write as much as possible. For an example we’ll do *Furious*

When someone is furious her eyebrows scrunch up, her ears turn red, and her fists clench. Her throat feels tight and it is hard to breath well. Sometimes her nostrils flare like an angry bull in a fight, or she looks like steam will pop from her ears. She

snaps at people when they talk to her, and screams like a baby. She is like a time bomb waiting to explode. Etc.

Other Suggestions:

- Remind students about the 5 senses: sight, touch, smell, hear, and taste. These can all be incorporated into emotions.
- If they're having a lot of trouble, try using pictures of people in books or magazines who are experiencing different emotions.

Activity: What does that feel like?

Age Range: 3rd Grade +

Focus: Idea Development

What You'll Need:

- Paper, pens,
- Something to cover objects and lots of things to touch
- Pieces of cloth
- A Rubber ball
- Marshmallows
- A wooden spoon
- Stuffed animals
- Pinecones
- Anything else you can find!

Preparation: Gather all your materials. Try to think of things with very different textures like soft, smooth, spiky, rough, etc.

Now Start Playing: The point of the game is to have students learn to develop descriptive writing using their sense of touch. Place your collected items in different bags so that they can't be seen. Now ask students to reach their hand in the bag, feel the item and describe it in as much detail. Once you have gone through all the items, have them read you their descriptions and then show them the items.

Other Suggestions:

- Get creative with your items...it'll make it more fun.

Activity: Looking for the Message

Age Range: 3rd +

Focus: Idea Development

What You'll Need:

- Pens/Pencils
- Paper
- Construction paper, post-it notes, card board *depends on your choice, see below

Preparation:

You and your student are going to brainstorm all the ways we give and receive messages in society. Look over the list in the packet, but also think of some of your own. Then choose which way you want to take this activity (read below).

Now Start Playing: Ready, Set, BRAINSTORM! With your student, write down as many ways as you can think of that we send and receive messages in society. For an initial list, see the appendix of this packet.

Once you have your list, have a discussion about what makes a message effective: its clarity. For example, cars know to come to a halt when they see a “STOP” sign. What if the sign said, “think about slowing your movement here” – that would be confusing right? Same thing goes for writing. If you aren’t clear about your idea or message in your writing, the reader won’t be either.

Next choose an activity to demonstrate this. Here are some ideas, but feel free to think of your own:

1. Write a note home to their parents about something they have learned, or would like to do. Make sure they get specific.
2. Write post-it note reminders. The paper is small, so the message has to be clear and concise!
3. Write a set of classroom rules. Remember, the clearer the rules, the more likely people are to follow them.
- 4.

Other Suggestions:

- If you have a visual learner, bring in examples of signs, letters and other messages in society. Or look for messages in songs. Print out the lyrics and listen to the song with your student. See if they can hear a message or if it’s hard to find.

Activity: Asking the Right Questions

Age Range: 3rd +

Focus: Idea Development

What You’ll Need:

- Paper
- Pencil/Paper
-

Preparation: The goal of this activity is to help students develop an idea into an outline. Think up a story in your head – but don’t write it. Then write a single statement that might be in the story. It should be intriguing and raise tons of questions. For example, let’s say I think of a story about a young pig named James who goes on a wild adventure to Spain. My statement might be: *James’s tail wriggled with excitement as he waited for the officer to hand him his passport.* Now if you read this statement to someone without any context they would want to know – Who (and what is James), Where is he going, Why is he going? Etc.

Now Start Playing: Start by explaining to your student how questions can be involved in developing an idea. Then read your statement to your student – remember, don’t give them any context or clues about the story in your head. Ask them to write down as many questions as they can think of about the statement. Then show them how you might use the questions to outline a story or paper. You can explain that not all of the questions have to be used, only the one’s they decide on. In the case of James the Pig, I might decide to answer the question ‘who and what is James’ in the first part of story. And then answer where he is going. I would keep going, answering the questions, until I had outlined a whole story. Go through these same steps with your student.

Next, ask your student to write their own statement completely unique from yours. Together, come up with questions for the statement and make an outline. Now your student can begin writing their story.

Other Suggestions:

- This format can also work for a formal piece of writing like a research project or biography.

Activity: Snapshots

Age Range: 3rd +

Focus: Idea Development

What You'll Need:

- Pencil/Pen
- Paper
-

Preparation: This activity is aimed at helping students develop a simple idea into great descriptive writing. Take time to make a list of about 5-10 simple sentences that lack details. For example:

1. The cat was happy.
2. The girl went home.
3. I was angry.

Take one of your sentences and add details to make it more descriptive and interesting. 'I was angry' might become, 'When my mother said I couldn't go play in the park, I got so angry my ears turned bright red and I yelled like a banshee.' Can you tell which one is more interesting to read?

Now Start Playing: Show your student the example that you have done. Then ask them to do the same with the simple sentences you have written down. Compare the old with the new and talk about how the details have changed the meaning of the sentence. How do the changes help form better pictures in your mind?

Other Suggestions:

- To put this activity into context, look over some of your student's old work in their portfolio. Pick out simple sentences and think of details you might add to them to make them into snapshot images.

Activity: But what if it went *this* way?

Age Range: 2nd +

Focus: Idea Development

What You'll Need:

- Some classic children's stories
- Paper
- Pen/Pencil
-

Preparation: Ever wondered why all those classic stories seem to end 'happily ever after' when life never does? Well, what if they didn't. Another great place to look for ideas is in books that have already been written. Check out some old classics and think about how they might have gone differently. What if Cinderella had told off her evil stepmother and moved out of the house? Or Snow White had decided not to stay with the Seven Dwarfs? Some authors have already taken a look at these ideas, but let your student try it out. Pick out some specific to work off of and bring them in.

Now Start Playing: Explain the concept to your student. If you want, read them a famous example like *The True Story of The Three Little Pigs by A. Wolf*, by John Scieszka. Then ask your student to pick one of the stories you've brought in. Read it together and then brainstorm new endings together.

Then have your student create some kind of outline and begin writing. Remember to include details and descriptions.

Other Suggestions:

- If your student gets really enthusiastic about this project make it a bigger one. Rewrite several stories and make your own Classic Children's Collection.
- Add illustrations of the new scenarios.

Activity: The Picture Story Project

Age Range: 4th Grade +

Focus: Idea Development

What You'll Need:

- Pens/Pencils
- Paper
- Pictures, paintings - must have enough detail that a story can be inferred. I.e. not a flower. It is best if there is a subject performing an action. The more in the picture the more the student has to work with.
- Computer – to type up final copies
-

Preparation: Take some time to think about all the good writing material hidden in a picture. They say 'a picture is worth a thousand word', so how could your student use this idea? Try looking at some pictures and brainstorming what kinds of stories you might develop from them.

Next, find exciting pictures for your student to work with. Remember that the more details in the picture, the more the student will have to work with.

Now Start Playing: First, introduce the project idea – highlight the goal of finding the material for a story in a single picture. Together with your student, look through the different pictures you have brought it. Let them pick a picture that appeals to them. From this they should identify a main character and a basic plot. You can help them along by reminding them that a story needs a beginning, middle and end.

Once they have the backbone of the story, it's time to start developing. Do free writes on the main characters and setting to provide them with useful descriptions for their stories.

Now you can start writing! Start with the beginning and work by section. You can be most helpful to your student by reading through the sections and helping them develop the plot, introduce the characters and of course **USE DESCRIPTIVE LANGUAGE!**

Once the student has a story they are pleased with type it up and even let them add illustrations.

Other Suggestions:

- Try not to let your suggestions take over in the story – remember the student has artistic license.

- The Mysteries of Harris Burdick is a great resource for pictures and is available in the TLC library!

Activity: Taking an Idea to the ER

Age Range: 3rd Grade +

Focus: Idea Development

What You'll Need:

- Pen/Pencil
- Paper
- Some really awful prompts/ideas, the kind you might find in standardized tests

Preparation: Everyone has had to write that story, essay, paper, or whatever that they absolutely hate; the question that doesn't interest them or even makes them want to fall asleep right then and there. Unfortunately, sometimes we don't have a choice and those prompts have to be used. Here's a quick fix to be used in those situations.

Now Start Playing: To doctor up a bad idea or prompt, first write it at the top of a paper. Then fill the rest of the paper up with intriguing questions about that prompt. How can you make it something worth writing about?

Try this out on a few of your boring examples. Remember, students usually get rewarded for thinking outside the box.

Other Suggestions:

- This is a good skill to have prior to standardized testing. See if you can help your student master such a skill.

ORGANIZATION

Books wouldn't be much fun if you read the ending before you had been introduced to the characters. A little organization can go a long way. With this trait, you and your students need to work together to find a style that works for them. There's no wrong way to do it, except not at all!

Find an organization style that is **reliable** and **valuable** for your student.

Activity: Organization in Everyday Life

Age Range: All

Focus: Organization

What You'll Need:

- Paper
- Pen/Pencil

- Examples of organized items such as menu, a phonebook, a calendar, etc.
- Examples of writing – stories, essays, papers

Preparation: Think about all the places that organization exists in society. Try to find some physical examples to show your student. The more prepped you are, the better your brainstorming session will go!

Now Start Playing: Introduce the idea of organization to your student. Start asking them why they think it is (or isn't) important. Then spend some time brainstorming all the different ways organization is seen in everyday life. Show them the examples you have brought. What would they be like if they weren't organized. Talk about the different ways that these things have been organized. Are they in alphabetical or numerical order, or are they categorized?

Then take the discussion further. How do we see this in writing? What if a story went Middle, End, Beginning, instead of the right way?

Here are some examples to work with:

- The Alphabet
- The Grocery Store
- A Calendar
- Newspapers
- Menus
- Etc

Other Suggestions:

- Talk about how you are going to use organization in the future
- Help students think of what sort of system will be helpful to them

Activity: A Series of Pictures

Age Range: All

Focus: Organization

What You'll Need:

- A set of pictures that could tell a story. They don't necessarily have to be related— photocopy some from a storybook, or draw your own.

Preparation: Pull together the set of pictures and make sure they don't have any words attached to them.

Now Start Playing: Review the outline of a normal story with a Beginning, Middle and End. Show your student the different photographs. Ask them to put them in an order and tell you the story they create. The story will be completely dependent on the pattern they choose.

Other Suggestions:

- Ask students to pick a different order for the same pictures. How does the story change?

Activity: Movie Maker

Age Range: 3rd +

Focus: Organization

What You'll Need:

- A book that your student is familiar with
- Paper
- Pen/Pencil.
-

Preparation: The focus of this activity is helping students develop good openings for their writing. A story or essay's content may be fantastic, but if a bad opening line or paragraph keeps it from ever being read, we'll never know. Take some time to think about your favorite movies or books and think of how they begin.

Now Start Playing: Begin by talking with your student about the importance of a good intro. Ask them about their favorite movie and have them describe how it starts. Can they think of what it is that makes people want to keep watching?

Then take out their book. Ask them to pretend it is going to be made into a movie and it is their job to write the opening scene. They should focus on how characters are introduced, where it takes place, if there's dialogue or music, etc.

Now it's time to tie it all together. Explain to your student that a book doesn't have the same visual tools as a movie, but it can achieve all these things with descriptive writing. We can describe what a place looks like, how it smells, etc. And this good opening is a huge part of good writing.

Other Suggestions:

- If you want to tie in an art project, have your student draw what the opening scene will look like.

Activity: Follow that recipe

Age Range: All

Focus: Organization

What You'll Need:

- A cookbook
- Pen/Pencil
- Paper
- Scissors
-

Preparation: If you've ever done any cooking, you know that when you add things or how you mix them is important. If you leave something out, or add it too soon, you may mess up the whole meal! Look through a cookbook (or just at recipes online) and choose a recipe that has several steps but isn't too hard to follow.

Type up the recipe, or write it out, in clear steps. Now cut up the paper so that each step is on it's own. **MAKE SURE THEY AREN'T NIUMBERED!**

Now Start Playing: Take a minute to talk about using order in a cookbook. If they haven't done much cooking, explain how a recipe works starting with list of ingredients that come together and make one delicious thing.

Next, scatter the pieces of the recipe on your desk. Ask your student to put the recipe in order. You can give them helpful hints if they're struggling.

Connect it: Think together about how the ingredients of a recipe are like different aspects of writing that come together to make a story or essay. What would happen if you left one out, or went out of order? Writing an outline wouldn't be the last step, just like editing couldn't be the first!

Other Suggestions:

- This activity will work with most kinds of writing. So if you want to, you can exchange the recipe for a newspaper article, or a story.

Activity: Predicting the Future

Age Range: 3rd +

Focus: Organization

What You'll Need:

- Pen/Paper
- Paper

Preparation: In this activity you want your student to think about what comes after the intro – the meat of the writing. How will it come together?

Take some time and find a really great introduction to a book. It should be relatively short and introduce a character and problem that your student can focus on.

Now Start Playing: Start by reading your student the introduction you have chosen. Then explain that the rest of the story has been lost and it is their job to predict what happens next. Emphasize that the order of events is important. If you want, you can number the points. There is no need for heavy detail; you just want an outline of your student's version of the story.

Other Suggestions:

- If you want to turn this into a piece of writing, have your student take their outline and write in the details making it a real story.

Activity: Off to the Races

Age Range: All

Focus: Organization

What You'll Need:

- Photocopy of page ____ in the appendix
- Crayons/Markers
- Pens/Pencils

Preparation: The goal of this activity is to help students understand how to prioritize information in their writing. Some details are naturally more important than others. We're going to look at this like a horse race – the horse that wins the race is the most important idea in a given piece of writing.

Decide on a piece of writing that you and your student will work on. This can be a story, an essay, anything you like.

Now Start Playing: Introduce the concept of the horserace to your student. Emphasize that this is just one more way to try to organize their thoughts before writing. In many cases, this activity may simply lead to another outline before the real writing begins.

In the "Start" box of the worksheet, fill in the subject of your piece of writing. Then begin filling in the other spaces, making decisions as you go about which details and ideas are more important. After you are finished, decide where you will go from here – another outline or straight to the paper?

Other Suggestions:

- If you have a piece of writing that is in dire need of some reorganization, try this activity with it. Read through and place the main ideas in the boxes.

Activity: Act It Out

Age Range: 3rd +

Focus: Organization

What You'll Need:

- Worksheet from page ___
- Pen/Pencil
- Idea list

Preparation: Because this is an organization activity, you need to take some time to think about your student's style. This may or may not be a good way for them to organize their ideas. If you're not sure, give it a try. It may be a giant success...or it may not be. Don't be discouraged if it doesn't work, there are plenty more strategies to try.

Take some time to look over the worksheet and make sure you understand how it works.

Now Start Playing: With your student, select one of your ideas off the Idea List. Take some time to talk about how a lot of stories, books and movies can be divided up into Acts. This is a concept we see a lot in plays, but it is also present (more subtly) in other kinds of writing.

Then start filling out the worksheet. Have your student begin with a title (or just the topic if you're not ready for title), and then go through describing each Act. Like all outlines, this is not the place for descriptive details, but rather for thoughts that will be expanded on later.

Once all three Acts have been described on the worksheet, go through it together and decide when are the strongest, and which could use some work. Take the time to make any changes that will make the piece of writing stronger.

Now put it to use!

Other Suggestions:

- This can also be used as a way to clean up an old piece of writing. Have your student divide up their work into the three Acts and point out where it needs work.

Activity: Goals and Obstacles

Age Range: All

Focus: Organization

What You'll Need:

- Several stories, movies, etc. that your student is familiar with
- Pen/Pencil
- Paper

Preparation: We are breaking it down to the basics with this activity. What are the two things that drive a story? The main character's goal and the thing preventing that goal from being realized. Take some time to think about this basic concept and how it is evident in books you read (hopefully), movies you see, TV shows you watch, etc...

Now Start Playing: These may be the simplest instructions ever: the goal of your student is to identify the goal and obstacle in each of the stories/movies you have picked out.

Look for the most obvious answers; this activity isn't so much concerned with the inner yearnings of the main character's sidekick.

Other Suggestions:

- If you want to take this further, have a conversation about what would happen if the story were missing either the goal or the obstacle. Why are these so essential?

Activity: Story Webbing

Age Range: 2nd/3rd Grade +

Focus: Organization

What You'll Need:

- Paper
- Pencil/Pen

Preparation: Make an outline resembling this format. *Leave Plenty of space incase things need to be added.

- I. Beginning
 - a)
 - b)
 - c) etc.
- II. Middle
 - a)
 - b)
 - c) etc.
- III. End
 - a)
 - b)
 - c) etc.

Now Start Playing: Remind students that the most basic part of a story is the beginning, middle and end. The beginning introduces the situation, the middle has a conflict, which builds to a climax, and in the end there is a resolution. Begin by deciding on a topic for your story, where it will take place, who the characters are, etc. (note: use Build a Character activity before this). Now help the students fill in the outline, remembering that descriptions and details come later, this is just the basic structure. For example:

- I. Beginning*
 - a) Polly the skunk lives in Black Mountain*
 - b) She loves fishing*
 - c) Another detail*
- II. Middle*
 - a) Polly needs to catch enough fish to feed all her friends for a party*
 - b) Etc. builds to a climax*
- III. End*
 - a) Polly gets all the fish she needs*
 - b) The party is a great success*

Other Suggestions:

- If your child is struggling to write their own outline, talk about it together and get the ideas rolling. You may even choose to have them dictate their ideas to you as you write.

Activity: Paragraph Construction

Age Range: 4 Grade +

Focus: Organization

What you'll need:

- Pen/Pencil
- Paper
- Computer/nice paper to present final copies

Preparation: Write up some prompts such as 'what is your favorite food and why?' Try to think of topics relevant to your student.

Now Start Playing: The basic paragraph structure is a topic sentence, followed by 3 supporting sentences, and finally a conclusion. The topic sentence should give a general answer to the question. With our favorite food prompt it might be, 'My favorite kind of food is chocolate cake'. The supporting sentences give reasons why chocolate cake is your favorite. For example, it might be the gooey frosting, the way it smells when it's baking in the oven, and that it makes your tummy feel full and happy. Then to finish up we need to have a sentence to wrap things up. It is great if the student can make it personal. For example, 'I can't wait for my birthday so that my mother and I can make a big chocolate cake'. And there you have it, a paragraph!

Other Suggestions:

- Remember that these are the basics. The next step is to have variety between the sentences. 'So instead of I like cake because....' We get 'Sometimes the frosting is so gooey that it gets stuck all over my face', etc. More exciting paragraphs to read AND write.
- If your student's really getting it, you might be ready to move onto writing a whole essay about something. An essay follows the same format, but on a larger scale with 5 paragraphs.

VOICE: This trait is what makes writing come alive and turns a pile of words into a powerful message.

A strong voice is **original** and **pays attention to its audience**

Activity: Finding Voice

Age Range: All

Focus: Voice

What You'll Need:

- Different examples of pictures including classical art, comics, picture books, etc.
- Different kinds of writing including poetry, newspaper articles, simple stories, plays, etc.
- Different kinds of music including classical, rock, rap, reggae, etc.

Preparation: Collect the different examples and think about what it is that distinguishes them. How do they have their own mood or tone? What do they make you think of or what do you associate them with? What makes them stand out?

Now Start Playing: Present the different examples to your students, starting with the different pictures. Ask them the same kinds of questions you thought about. Do they see and hear what makes them different? Where are the different styles seen or used? Explain that this is VOICE. This ability to make something unique is key to good writing.

Other Suggestions:

- With your student write your own definition of voice to keep in your portfolio. Write down examples to refer to in the future.

Activity: How would *they* say it?

Age Range: All

Focus: Voice

What You'll Need:

- A list of different people
- A list of different places and situations

Preparation: Write a list of different people you student might interact with on a daily basis. Then make a list of different places your student might go. Think about the different voices you use in your life. Is the way you talk to your friends different from how you would talk to your professors? Do you act differently in the grocery store than you do in your living room?

Now Start Playing: Discuss with your student all the different voices they have inside them. Give them examples from your own life. For example show the difference of how you would say hello to a friend from how you would say it to some one you didn't like very much.

Then go through the list of different people and ask your student to show you the voices they would use to ask simple questions or say hello. Do they notice the changes in their voice? Next try it with your list of places and situations.

Other Suggestions:

- Look at pieces of your students writing and discuss where they could add this idea of voice.

Activity: Taking the Right Lead

Age Range: 3rd +

Focus: Voice

What You'll Need:

- Paper
- Pens/Pencil

Preparation: The one thing that will put any reader to sleep for sure is a bad leading sentence. Whether it's in a textbook, novel or newspaper article, you're not likely to read past the first line if you aren't drawn in. We are all familiar with the suicidal sentence "In this essay I will tell you..." That's no way to start off what could be a fantastic piece of writing.

Take some time to look for boring leads like this, sentences that have no weight or interest. Then write a few of your own. Here's an example of what we're going for:

Let's say I am going to write an essay about my cat Sam.

A bad lead would be

I have a cat named Sam.

A much better one might be

It was the end of wild night at Origins Night Club and my friends and I were ready for our comfy beds. Just as we were about to reach our car, a small cry came out from an old grungy dumpster. There was something in there that needed our help....

Which one makes you want to hear all about my cat Sam?

Now Start Playing: Choose two leads that you will read your student – should be boring, and the other intriguing. Read your student both examples and ask them to pick which story or essay they would want to hear the rest of. Now go over the concept of good leads. How do they make these kinds of transformations? Using personal anecdotes, funny ideas, and mysterious scenarios.

Give your students some of the boring leads you have either found or written. Help them transform them into new and improved openers that do justice to the writing that will follow.

Other Suggestions:

- It's important to constantly show your student examples of *good* writing too. Pick out some really great leads to read them during this activity.

Activity: Build A Character**Age Range: 2nd Grade +****Focus: Voice****What You'll Need:**

- Blank Paper
- Crayons, Pencils, Markers, etc.
- Other art supplies like colored paper, glue, scissors *optional

Preparation: Make a list of characteristics such as Hair Color, Eye Color, Favorite Food, Family Members, Age, etc. These will help your student develop an exciting character.

Now Start Playing: Ask your student(s) to imagine a character. It can be human, animal, alien, or whatever they think of. Now let them draw the character on a blank piece of paper, encouraging them to pay attention to detail. Next to the picture, have the student write a description using categories from your list. For example, next to the characters head might be:

- Eye Color: Purple
- Hair Color: Orange
- Scared of: Fire and sea monsters
- Favorite Food: Pepperoni Pizza

Let them use all the art supplies to create the characters.

Other Suggestions:

- These characters should later be used in story writing, so the more detailed they are the easier it will be to use them. Get as many characteristics down as possible.
- Use creative art supplies that can help the character literally jump off the page like googly eyes, or pieces of fabric.

Activity: What a Character**Age Range: 3rd +****Focus: Voice****What You'll Need:**

- Paper
- Pencil/Pen

Preparation: If you have any experience with drama this activity may sound familiar. The goal is to help students understand how different characters in a story require different 'voices'. For example, an old lady wouldn't order a cup of coffee at Starbucks the same way that a young man in graduate school would. If we were going to write their dialogue, we would use completely different words.

Take some time to look for examples of this in books. Do certain characters speak with an accent or have specific mannerisms? Now pick out 3 characters from books or movies. If you can, try to make them ones your student is familiar with, and/or bring in pictures of them.

Now Start Playing: Take the time to have discussion about voice with your student. It may help to come up with your own definition together, or have them describe what it is to you (a good reason to make sure you are clear on the definition yourself!).

Then, in their journal, have your student write monologues for each of the three characters you have chosen. Encourage them to express emotions, describe their actions and use words that would be appropriate to the character.

Other Suggestions:

- To make this more structured, pick a topic for each of the monologues to be on. For example, maybe Harry Potter is giving a monologue about how much he hates homework.

Activity: Pen Pals

Age Range: 3rd Grade +

Focus: Voice

What You'll Need:

- Paper
- Pen/Pencil
- Envelopes and Stamps
- Student Contact (see explanation below)

Preparation: Though email has recently made letter writing appear “out of style”, it’s still a great communication skill worth learning. Pen pals are a great way for students to both work on their writing and get to know a new and interesting person.

This activity will take a little bit of research and coordination on your part. If you have contacts from your old schools that’s a great place to start. Otherwise, do your research on the Internet, and send out some emails to find a good contact. Make sure you have an adult on the other end keeping up with your pen pal’s progress.

Now Start Playing: This may seem like a no-brainer, but start by making sure your student understands how letters work. Begin at the beginning – date on top, Dear So-and-so, all the way to Sincerely (or whatever ending you find most appropriate).

Then have a talk about what a first letter to the new pen pal might be. Think about your student’s background, topics they like in school, their family life, and their hobbies. Don’t forget to include some questions for the pen pal to answer. They don’t have to be long, but they should contain some interesting information and questions to pass back and forth.

Then help your student address and stamp the envelope. Show them where to put a return address. Then send it off and wait for a good reply!

Other Suggestions:

- If you have the energy, try to find a student pen pal through an international school. They may be more difficult to organize, but the difference in background will make the activity more intriguing for your student

Activity: Talking Outfits**Age Range: 2nd grade +****Focus: Voice****What You'll Need:**

- Clipping of people in different outfits from magazines, newspapers, etc.
- Pen/Pencil
- Paper

Preparation: Let's say your cousin's getting married. You want to look good at the ceremony so what do you wear? Probably not a bathing suit (unless it's a beach wedding) and probably not your favorite pair of jeans and a Tufts sweatshirt.

Clothing is a great medium for expression. It says a lot about personality, where someone's going or where they've been, and even what part of society they fit into.

Look through some magazines and newspapers and cut out several different examples of people in outfits. Try to get a good mix of clothes and their owners so that they lend themselves to unique descriptions.

Now Start Playing: Start your lesson with the easiest example: what are you and your student wearing right now? Talk about why you're wearing that instead of say, a tuxedo/ball gown. What does their outfit say about them?

Then pull out your clippings. Go through each one and have your student write a description of the person using clues from their outfit. What does it say about them? Can you tell what they're interested in, how they would talk, where they're going? How old are they? Etc.

Other Suggestions:

- If you think your student needs more of a challenge, extend the activity by then having them write a monologue for the person in the clipping. For example, what would a woman in a big fur coat be thinking or saying?

Activity: Voices of the Rainbow**Age Range: All****Focus: Voice****What You'll Need:**

- A box of crayons, markers or pencils of different colors
- Pen/Pencil
- Paper

Preparation: Examples of voice occur all over the place. In different cultures, different colors are associated with different emotions and personalities. We often make these associations without thinking about them at all. For instance, what's are some emotions that we connect to the color red? How about passion, love, anger, etc. How about the color blue? Maybe sadness or serenity?

Take some time to think of some more examples. Then collect some different examples of colors (try a box of crayons or colored paper).

Now Start Playing: Start by explaining the idea of colors having voice. Have a general conversation with your student about how colors can represent different emotions and feelings.

Then go through your examples of color individually. For each one try these three activities:

- 1) Think of an emotion associated with the color.
- 2) Use the color in a descriptive sentence about a person.
- 3) Use the color in a descriptive sentence about a place.

Here's an example with the color Green:

- 1) *Envy*
- 2) *When Jillian got a shiny new bike for her birthday, her little brother was green with envy.*
- 3) *The rainstorm left the valley green and full of life.*
- 4)

Other Suggestions:

- Giving colors voice is a great start to a poem. Help your student extend their brainstorming a little further and turn it into a cool poem!

Activity: How Comical

Age Range: 3rd Grade +

Focus: Voice

What You'll Need:

- A comic strip (try a newspaper or look online)
- Pen/Pencil
- Paper

Preparation: For a lot of kids, and even some adults, the highlight of the Sunday newspaper is the comic page. Cartoons are a great example of how voice can be scene both in dialogue and pictures. Caption bubbles make the number of words in a comic strip to a minimum, but the clues to how a character is feeling is still there.

Pick out a comic strip that you feel illustrates this well. Think about what it is that gives each character its personality. Pay particular attention to the way emotions are expressed in comics.

Now Start Playing: Chances are your student will be familiar with comics, but make sure to provide some background on the strip you have chosen. Begin by simply reading the strip. Have your student write down their initial reactions to each character. For example, if you were reading 'Peanuts', an initial reaction might be: "Lucy is grumpy and mean, etc".

Now read the comic strip again, this time looking for specific things about the drawings and dialogue bubbles that define each character. Make a list of the different character's emotions and personalities are shown. Make sure your student understand that these lists are examples of voice coming off the page!

Other Suggestions:

- Try using different examples of comic strips to see how different artists show the same emotions with their characters.
- Take it further by contrasting comic strips with other pieces of art like paintings or sculpture. How do these artists show voice differently than in the comic strips?

Activity: Exciting Facts

Age Range: 3rd Grade +

Focus: Voice

What You'll Need:

- Short list of facts about an animal or place
- Pen/Pencil
- Paper

Preparation: How many times have you had to read boring textbooks, and papers that give you a bland list of facts? It's a wonder, with all the exciting and wonderful words in the dictionary that writers haven't gotten better at presenting the facts in a more interesting fashion.

Decide on an animal or place that you think your student might be interested in. Find a short list of facts about it on the internet or from a book.

Now Start Playing:

Talk with your students about the books they read in class or reports they may have written. They probably will know what you mean by 'boring facts'. Then talk to them about using details and voice to make the facts jump of the page and interest the reader.

Now present your student with the list of facts. Help them go through each one and transform it into an exciting sentence that would interest a reader.

Other Suggestions:

- Take this activity further by having them transform the fact sentences into the voice of specific characters. For example, how would the Wicked Witch present the facts? Or a clown?

FLUENCY: This trait is all about making great ideas flow easily and skillfully from the mind to the page.

Using lots of **variety** in your structure to make the reader's job more fun.

Activity: Write my Picture

Age Range: All

Focus: Fluency

What You'll Need:

- Plain Paper
- Markers or Crayons
- Pens/Pencils
-

Preparation: The point of this activity is to have students make a connection between visual images and their own written descriptions. Take some time to look at art books, or even images online. Try to write a few of your own descriptions of the images, pointing out details in the picture.

Now Start Playing: Ask your student to think of a specific moment from his or her own life or a book that they know. Then have them draw this moment in as much detail as possible. Encourage them to use different colors – this will come in handy in the descriptions.

Once they have finished their picture have your student write a caption for the picture. Their goal is to point out the obvious, telling the viewer exactly what's going on in the picture. Work on the people or places right down to the tiniest detail of their eye color or emotions.

For example:

If I drew the scene from Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs, when the Dwarfs have just met Snow White, I might have a picture of a long table of them all sitting together with everyone smiling and laughing together. In my caption I would write:

The seven dwarfs have just met the fair Snow White, who has run away from home. She has red lips and skin as white as snow. Grumpy is sitting at the head of the table. He has a big nose and a nasty frown because...etc.

Other Suggestions:

- The point of this activity is NOT to distinguish the talented artists. No matter how simple the image, the student's main focus should be on their written descriptions of it.
- If your student is struggling, try starting with someone else's picture. Take an image from a popular kids book and have them write a description. Or, show them an example of yours.
- Remember to tie this activity back into the goals of the lesson. Help your student notice why all the details are important. What would be missing if didn't write the grumpy has a frown on his face?

Activity: Hearing Fluency**Age Range: All****Focus: Fluency****What You'll Need:**

- A Book on Tape (available at the Boston Public Library)
- Tape Player
- Pen/Pencil
- Paper

Preparation: The goal of this activity is to help students hear how good writing flows. It's easiest to hear this when you hear it out loud, and who better to hear it from than the professionals?

Check out some books on tape from your library and find a story that will be accessible to your student. It should be something that will grab their attention, and that has sufficient description and detail for their writing/reading level.

Now Start Playing: Play the tape for your student (if it's long just choose an excerpt) and ask them to listen for both details of the story and how it all fits together. When you've finished listening, take some time to brainstorm together about what made the story easy (or hard) to listen to. Did the detailed writing form pictures in their head? Can they even remember some of the sentences because of the way they flowed?

Now explain that it is this kind of feeling we are trying to achieve in all writing: streams of sentences that not only get the point across but do it in an enjoyable or interesting way.

Other Suggestions:

- If you have the tools to do it, try recording your student reading aloud examples of their own and other people's writing. Play back the recording and listen for places where the flow is present and also where it isn't. What can your student work on?

Activity: Welcome to the...**Age Range: All****Focus: Fluency****What You'll Need:**

- A list of locations (a simple or specific as you like)
- A copy of the worksheet on page ___
- Pen/Pencil
- Paper

Preparation: Take some time to think about all the ways the human body receives information. There are five senses, and often we experience all of them somehow at a given location.

Your student is going to take one of the locations on your list and apply all senses to it. Look over the worksheet before you start.

Now Start Playing:

Take some time to review the 5 senses. Then have your student choose one of the locations from your list. Have them fill out the worksheet. The goal is that students will

learn how to use this skill without even thinking. Try some contrasting locations and see what kind of results come out.

Here is an example:

Come to the Beach

*See the little crabs scurry
Hear the seagulls squawking
Touch the soft, squishy sand
Smell the stinky piles of seaweed
Taste the salty air*

(Got a good picture of my beach?)

Other Suggestions:

- This can be applied to a section of writing your student is working on. Pick out the setting or location and ask the same sensory questions to get a fantastic and poetic description.

Activity: The One-Page Novel

Age Range: All

Focus: Fluency

What You'll Need:

- **Pen/Pencil**
- **Paper**

Preparation: Make sure that your student's list of ideas has plenty of options to choose from. No other real prep needed.

Now Start Playing: This activity is the opposite of "Slow Motion". In this case we want to tell an entire novel in one page. That means leaving out a lot of details, and instead focusing on developing an idea quickly.

Have your student pick one an idea of their list. Then ask them to write the entire story. Here's the trick. They have one piece of paper, and they have to get from start to finish, beginning, middle and end! There should be an emphasis on making the stories fun.

Other Suggestions:

- If your student creates a really fantastic story, it is great to come back to the one-page novel and develop it into a longer piece of writing by adding in details.

Activity: Slow Motion

Age Range: 3rd Grade +

Focus: Fluency

What You'll Need:

- Pen/Pencil
- Journal
- List from page ____

Preparation: In movies and on TV, directors use slow motion to emphasize the importance of a particular moment. We're going to do the same. Your student is going to "press" the slow motion button on a single moment in their life to bring out as many details

Now Start Playing: Bring in the list of moments and ask your student to choose one. Now have them open their journal and write everything anything about that moment in their life as if someone had pressed a slow motion button. See if they can fill up a whole page just about that one moment. There's no need to provide tons of background or consequences, just focus on the action and emotion surrounding that single moment.

Other Suggestions:

- This is a great warmup for the rest of the lesson!
- Think of other places to use this in stories and other kinds of writing.

Activity: Binoculars

Age Range: 3rd grade +

Focus: Fluency

What You'll Need:

- **Piece of writing belonging to your student**
- **Pen/Pencil**
- **Paper**

Preparation: You have most likely seen a 'blurry description' before. They lack important details and descriptions, and aren't too interesting to read. Now it's time to work on that.

Adding the idea of binoculars to a piece of writing will dig out all these details that are missing. By 'turning the knob' on the binoculars, we ask questions to clarify the image and find out about what's really happening in the blurry description.

Look through some of your students work and find some of these places where the binoculars are definitely needed.

Now Start Playing: Explain the concept to your student. Good writing means making sure your reader has a clear idea of what's going on and wants to know more. Without any details, a story quickly loses its appeal.

Pick one of the sentences or paragraphs you have chosen to work on. Ask you student to 'turn the knob' and come up with some questions that will clarify the situation. Have your student and answer the questions and then find a way to include these new details into the piece of writing. Remember not to over do it though!

Here's an example:

Blurry Description – I went to the park with my mom and it was hot outside.

Now Turn the knob:

What did you see? What did it smell like? Were there lots of other people? Was the playground too hot to play on? Did you bring a snack? Etc...

Other Suggestions:

- Bring your binoculars along in all kinds of writing. You don't have to make it a separate activity. It can be a gentle reminder whenever you're working.

Activity: What's in a simile?**Age Range: 3rd grade +****Focus: Fluency****What You'll Need:**

- A collection of objects, food items, etc (see below)
- A list of emotions, seasons, etc.
- Pen/Pencil
- Paper

Preparation: First make sure you know what simile is. Then think of a good description that will work for you student. It doesn't need to be complicated

Pull together a random assortment of objects and food items. These are going to be used in our simile game to be compared to the emotions, seasons and other things you have provided on your list. You don't need a ton of stuff, but be creative.

Now Start Playing: Go over the definition of a simile and make sure your student understands the placement of "like" and "as". Now it's time to get creative with your list and objects.

First have your student pick a word off the list. Then have them look through the objects and decide on something to compare it with. Now it's time to write the filler words, and voila you've got yourself a simile.

Here's an example -

From the list I choose 'hope' and I choose a soda can from the object pile. My simile is *Hope is like a cold soda on a hot day. It offers refreshment even in the most uncomfortable situations.*

Other Suggestions:

- Remember, these are meant to be fun and don't need to be the most beautiful, poetic creations your student has even produced. However, the more options they have to work with, the more successful you will be!

Activity: Finding Metaphors Within**Age Range: 3rd Grade +****Focus: Fluency****What You'll Need:**

- A good definition of metaphor
- Pen/Pencil
- Paper

Preparation: Take some time to write your student-friendly definition of metaphors. I am going to recommend that you do this activity yourself before you teach it, but if you choose not to, that's also ok.

Now Start Playing: Start by introducing your definition of metaphors. Talk about where and how they are used, as well as how they contribute to a piece of writing. Now make a personal connection.

Your student (and hopefully you too) is going to write Metaphors for you Soul in the form of a poem. The only rules are that you have to express yourself and use metaphors.

Take the prompt – My Soul Is... and fill in from there with as many metaphors about yourself as you like.

Other Suggestions:

- If your student gets stuck, help them think of good subjects for metaphors like nature, objects, animals, etc.
- Put your definition of metaphor and some examples in the Ideas, Lists and Outlines section of your student's portfolio to refer back to.

Activity: From Words to Pictures

Age Range: 3rd +

Focus: Fluency *a great second step to 'Write my Picture'

What You'll Need:

- Paper
- Pencils/Pen
- Markers or Crayons
- Children's Books
-

Preparation: Take some time to look through the children's books and find some pictures that lend themselves to vivid descriptions. Pick a couple of them and write out very detailed descriptions, much like the captions from 'Write my Picture'. Remember, the more details, the easier it will be for your student!

Now Start Playing: Give your student a blank piece of paper and some markers or crayons. Explain that you are going to read them a description of a picture from a story (you can tell them what story it's from). Then ask them to draw whatever they hear. You can read them the description as many times as they need.

After they have finished drawing, look over their picture together and reread the description. Together, notice what they picked up on, and what they missed. Then talk together about how detailed descriptions in writing help the reader form pictures like this in their head.

Other Suggestions:

- In your discussion, you might want to bring up books that don't include pictures. Why is descriptive writing important in these places? How can they help the reader?
- To take it further, look over some of your students work with them. Are there places that they could have been more descriptive? What can they work on for next time?

Activity: One Sentence Stories

Age Range: 3rd grade +

Focus: Fluency

What you'll need: Your imagination...

Preparation: Brainstorm some easy topics that will be the base of the stories. For example, "A day at the Beach", or "In the jungle".

Now Start Playing: The point of the game is to create a complete story as a group (or couple if there's just two if you). The trick is, each person is only allowed to say one sentence at a time. Before you start playing, remind students that a story must have a beginning, middle and end. Decide on a topic from your brainstorm list and then start the story. Remember, one sentence per person at a time! The story is finished when you've got a conclusive ending.

Here's an Example:

Person 1: There once was a small pig named Penelope who lived on a big green farm. Person 2: She loved to roll around in the squishy mud by the barn. Person 1: The mud was brown and sticky, so Penelope was always dirty...etc.

Other Suggestions:

- Encourage students to be as creative as possible. They can invent names for their characters, use lots of descriptive language, and even let the impossible happen. The wackier the stories are, the more fun the game is. The only rules are having a beginning middle and end.
- If doing one sentence at a time isn't enough of a challenge, try one word at a time. This will take a lot more concentration, so make sure you've got the original version down first.

WORD CHOICE: Writers have a wealth of resources to work with, just check out the dictionary and thesaurus! A strong writer puts these tools to work to create the clearest meanings possible.

Word choice is about being unforgettable and exact in your meaning.

Activity: Rocks and Pebbles

Age Range: 3rd +

Focus: Word Choice

What You'll Need:

- A list of vague words such as *Nice, Big, Happy, Sad*
- A list of specific words related to your vague words such as *Marvelous, Enormous, Ecstatic, Depressed*
- Construction Paper
- A Glue Stick
- Scissors

Preparation: In this activity, we are looking at the weight of a given word. In writing, describing something with words that have precise meanings gives it more weight. For example, we may be unsure if someone says their mother is nice, if she is cheerful always or just sometimes. But if they say she is delightful, we get a different impression of her personality. When you are making your two lists, think about giving your student these options in their writing.

Next, take your 2 sheets of construction paper and title them: rock, and pebble. Type, or write out, the words on each list. Cut them into individual pieces so that they no longer belong to a specific list.

Now Start Playing: Begin by talking with your student about word choice and how words can be vague or specific in their meaning. Then go through the words one by one, having your student choose if it is pebble (vague) word or a rock (specific, weighty) word. As they pick them, glue them onto the two sheets of construction paper. Make sure it is your student that is deciding what kind of word it is and ask them to explain their choices.

Other Suggestions:

- Keep this in the Lists section of your student’s portfolio to refer back to in future writing.

Activity: Wall of Words

Age Range: All

Focus: Word Choice

What You’ll Need:

- Construction Paper
- Markers, crayons, etc
- Glue
- Thesaurus

Preparation: The goal of this activity is to give students more words to work with in their writing. When building your word walls, you want to start with a word with a broad meaning such as Good, and add more exciting ones like fantastic, wonderful, marvelous, etc. Use the thesaurus to come up with lists like this. Write down the new words, and use each one in a sentence so that students are clear on where to use it.

Now Start Playing: First introduce the broad word to your student. Write this word at the top of the big piece of construction paper. Then begin introducing the new words, writing each one down on a smaller piece of construction paper to be glued to the bigger one. The sentences should be placed in the student’s portfolio to be referred to in future writing.

Keep the word wall in your student’s portfolio. They will be an invaluable tool in future writing.

Other Suggestions:

- If your student is a visual learner, incorporate pictures from magazines or draw your own.
- To take this activity further, ask your student to write descriptions of how it feels to be _____ (fill in the blank with one of your words from the wall).
- <http://thesaurus.reference.com> is a great resource!

Activity: Scanning the News**Age Range: 3rd Grade +****Focus: Word Choice****What You'll Need:**

- A newspaper
- A dictionary
- Pen/Pencil
- Paper

Preparation: Few of us regularly take the time to look up all those cool or strange words we come across while reading the morning paper. In those pages, though, is a gold mine for young writers. Words they've never heard before may be lurking in the articles. Get your hands on a paper and get ready to start scanning with your student.

Now Start Playing: Tell your student that you're going to go on a hunt for new cool words to use in their writing. Pick a section of the paper to start with and go through the articles, not for content, but for really great words. When they find one, have your student circle it and then copy it onto a list. Then help them write down a definition, using your dictionary if you have to. Keep these lists of words inside your student's folder to use in the future.

Other Suggestions:

- Not finding enough in the newspaper? Try magazines, advertisements and other clippings.

Activity: Exciting Alphabets**Age Range: All****Focus: Word Choice****What You'll Need:**

- Crayons/Markers
- Paper
- Pen/Pencil

Preparation: We all remember the phrase "A is for Apple", but the truth is A is the first letter of many words that are more interesting than a piece of fruit. Use the alphabet to help your student think of new words to put into their writing.

Now Start Playing: Explain to your student that for every letter of the alphabet, they are going to brainstorm a different word that begins with that letter. Pick a theme for your first list. For example you might start with verbs, so "A is for amble, B is for bumble, C is for clamber, etc".

Let your student decorate their alphabet lists and then keep them in their folder to use later. Try out several different kinds.

Other Suggestions: If they get stuck on a certain letter, get creative or go to the dictionary!

Activity: Mind Mapping
Age Range: All
Focus: Word Choice

What You'll Need:

- Paper
- Pen/Pencil
- A list of emotion words with broad meanings (like Happy or Sad)
- Worksheet from page ____ (several copies if possible)
- Thesaurus (optional)

Preparation: A word like 'happy' can have a lot of meaning depending on the context it is paired with. The goal of this activity is to help students choose better words to describe these different contexts and make their writing stronger. If you have time, look up some of the words from your list in a thesaurus so that you can give your student suggestions when they are making their map.

Now Start Playing: As always, start by explaining the goal of the activity to your student. Then choose a word to place in the middle bubble of your map off of the list. In the second layer of bubbles, write specific synonyms for the center word. Then, finally, in the third layer of bubbles, think of personal experiences and examples that demonstrate this specific emotion. Repeat this with as many words as you have time for.

Other Suggestions:

- Make sure to hold on to these maps in your student's portfolio. They can be very useful in the editing process of writing.

Activity: The Human Thesaurus
Age Range: 3rd Grade +
Focus: Word Choice

What You'll Need:

- Pens/Pencils
- Paper

Preparation: Refer to ____

Now Start Playing: Take a word from your list and have the student come up with as many related words as possible. For example the word "said" would lead to words like

- exclaimed
- yelled
- whispered
- explained
- croaked

and so on and so forth

Other Suggestions:

- Keep these lists handy when writing stories or other works. Then when the common word comes up, you can check the list for a more exciting or exotic one.

CONVENTIONS: There are some rules we all must follow in writing. These help keep our creations clear to the reader. Writing conventions aren't unbreakable, but you have to know the rules before you can break them!

Being **accurate** makes sure the right message is **conveyed**.

Activity: Where Do Conventions Come From?

Age Range: All

Focus: Conventions

What You'll Need:

- A list of activities found in daily life
- Paper
- Pen/Pencil

Preparation: Take some time to think about conventions found in our society. Why do we drive on a certain side of the road, or follow traffic rules? What's the point of being well behaved at the dinner table, or following rules in the classroom?

Next think about how this works in writing. What if we didn't spell things correctly, use periods, or even write left to right? Try writing a paragraph using as few conventions as possible. Misspell words, write backwards, forget punctuation, etc. Save this to show and discuss with your student.

Now Start Playing: Start by doing a couple of freewrites (don't introduce the topic!). Give you student one activity from your list at a time and ask them to think of as many rules that exist for that activity as possible. For example, if the activity was Eating Breakfast, they might come up with rules like eat with a spoon and fork, wipe your mouth with your napkin, pour the milk in the bowl, etc.

After they have written 3 or 4 freewrites in this style have a conversation about what the world would be like if people didn't follow these rules. Can they see the significance of rules?

Then show them your unconventional paragraph. Go through it together and talk about the mistakes in it, and why it is important to follow certain conventions in writing. Emphasize that breaking the rules is important sometimes, but not ok all the time.

Other Suggestions:

- With your student, think about the conventions of other cultures. How are these differences related to the different conventions found in formal and creative writing

Activity: Find the Sentence

Age Range: 2nd – 3rd Grade

Focus: Conventions

What You'll Need: Pencil/Pen, Note Cards

Preparation: On each note card write either a complete sentence (with a subject and verb), or an incomplete sentence. Try to have a good balance of both.

Now Start Playing: Before you start the game, remind students what sentence needs to have. You can use this example: The red dog vs. the red dog barked. Spread out all the note cards on a table, written side down. Ask the student(s) to pick one at a time and decide if it's a sentence or not.

Other Suggestions:

- If the student is struggling give more examples of good sentences. You can go through the sentence together and have them find the verb and subject.
- If they need more of a challenge, make the sentences longer. It's harder to distinguish The big shiny red crayon on the floor vs. The red crayon was broken.

Activity: Charades

Age Range: 3rd +

Focus: Conventions

What you'll need: Small pieces of paper. bag or hat to pick out of

Preparation: This activity can help students distinguish between the different parts of speech while having fun. It's great for kids who like to move around or act. Start by preparing lists of nouns, adjectives and verbs.

Now take these words and write each on a small piece of paper. Put all the pieces in a bag or hat that the student(s) can pick out of.

Now start playing: Let students take turns picking a piece of paper from the bag/hat. Tell them not to show the paper to anyone else, but they must decide and announce which part of speech the word is. Then ask them to 'act out' the word. For example, for 'furious' a student might squint their eyes, clench their fists and show their teeth. It is everyone else's job to guess the word. Take turns picking words and guessing.

Other suggestions:

- Some students might need to work on certain parts of speech more such as the difference between a verb and an adjective. You may chose to only include 2 parts of speech to help this.
- Be as creative as possible! For example, instead of the word 'mad' use 'furious'. Check a thesaurus for more exciting examples.
- Make up fun hand signals for the parts of speech that students can use instead of saying them out-loud. For example two spread fingers make a V that could represent 'Verb'

Activity: The Green Pen

Age Range: All

Focus: Conventions

What You'll Need:

- A Green pen (not a marker or crayon)

- A piece of your student’s writing

Preparation: Though it may sound strange, having a different color pen is very important for this activity. A lot of students struggle with the idea of going back and making corrections to their writing. It can be seen as a punishment or a big emphasis on their mistakes. We want to emphasize editing as just part of the process. Particularly with you writers, don’t try to tackle all the mistakes at once. Pick a couple skills that you want to emphasize at a time with the Green Pen. For example, you could start with pointing out spelling errors and run-on sentences.

Now Start Playing: Introduce the Green Pen (or whatever color you have chosen) and the concept of editing. This Pen has the power to make writing stronger. Talk with your student about the specific skills the Pen is going to work on for this activity. Then go through your student’s piece of writing together. Try not to take over, even if the mistakes are obvious to you. Chances are the lesson will stay with your student quicker if they are finding their own errors and making their own corrections. If they skip something, talk it through.

Other Suggestions:

- When you’re done, make the necessary corrections and put together a nice final copy for your student’s portfolio.
- As their concept of conventions gets stronger, you can begin adding more skills to the Green Pen.

Activity: Wacky Sentences

Age Range: All

Focus: Conventions

What you’ll need:

- Pen/Pencil
- Note cards
-

Preparation: On each note card, write a subject, verb, noun, adjective or adverb. Also make cards that says “the”, “to the”, “from the”, etc.

Now Start Playing: Have your student help you choose a subject, verb and noun for the basic part of your sentence. For example, you might choose, ‘The’, ‘dog’, ‘walked’, ‘to the’ and ‘store’. Put this in line on a table with space to add more cards. Now you have, ‘The’ ‘Dog’_ ‘Walked’ __ ‘to the’ __ ‘Store’.

Then let your student choose cards to modify the basic sentence. See how many different sentences they can make up.

Other Suggestions:

- If the student(s) needs more of a challenge you can use less cards in the basic sentence and give them more control. Just make sure they understand that a sentence has to have a subject and a verb.
- Be creative with the words on the card.