

Preparing Students for Writing On Demand

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“I’m supposed to write an essay on what is meant by ‘The pen is mightier than the sword’. First, I need to go to Google and find out what a pen is.”

This document was adapted from the Plymouth Writing Project. Their work was influenced from the National Writing Project. Much of the lesson plan work came directly from their work adapted to fit our own work and the purpose of On Demand Writing in our district.

Writing On-Demand

Creation Process

Our group was comprised of several teachers from most of our middle and high schools. Their task was to take the criteria for a quality writing prompts and create a prompt for each instructional window. We utilized the Opposing Viewpoints database from our district library resources as the primary basis for text selection.

What we did together:

- Teacher teams from our Middle and High Schools selected passages that reflected real world issues, relevance and topics that would engage our students. Passages were chosen from the opposing viewpoints database as much as possible to maintain source credibility and reliability.
- We utilized WISE EYES Prompting for Meaningful Student Writing by Mary Ann Smith and Sherry Swain as a criteria to creating the writing prompts
 - o Real world context age appropriate context
 - o Alignment to what the writing type calls for
 - o Clear language, direction and purpose
 - o Audience clear in prompt
- We formed a committee of teachers and teacher leaders to perform a quality check of the writing prompts during the summer. During this time we:
 - o Practiced taking the tests ourselves and debriefed the prompts.
 - o We analyzed each prompt to make sure the language was concise and clear and aligned to the above criteria.
 - o We read each passage and debated difficulty level and the grade reaching towards the higher complexity.
 - o Revised prompts to ensure consistency.

Writing On-Demand Overview

Beliefs about Writing:

1. Process writing and writing on demand are not contradictory and both serve viable purposes.
2. A solid process-based writing curriculum and a systematic on demand writing environment will improve student writing.
3. Both types of writing serve real world authentic purposes.

Outcome of Writing On-Demand

By utilizing common On-Demand Writing prompts at each grade level, students will engage in authentic on demand writing experiences and as a result teachers will analyze student work and have real data on how well students are progressing with their writing.

Purpose of Writing On-Demand

- Serve as a common assessment in site based and district level PLCs.
- Provide data on how well students can write on demand.
- Prepare students for authentic on demand writing while in school and after.
- Increase the ways that students can write.
- Increase the type of data used to analyze student growth.

Key Terms

Writing On-Demand

A writing situation where students are asked to produce quality writing in response to an assigned topic and text in one timed, session.

Writing Prompt

An assigned writing task that may include a question to address, a problem to solve, and a reading passage to process.

Rhetorical Analysis

The skill of interpreting the language of writing prompts in order to assess what specific tasks are being sought in a response.

Scoring Keys

These are guidelines by which teachers use to assess student performance on writing prompts.

Constructed Response

A written response to a writing prompt that is often expected to be well-developed and formatted based on the standard.

Writing Types for prompts:

- Write arguments to support claims in an analysis of substantive topics or texts, using valid reasoning and relevant and sufficient evidence
- Write narratives to develop real or imagined experiences or events using effective technique, well-chosen details, and well-structured event sequences.
- Write informative/explanatory texts to examine and convey complex ideas and information clearly and accurately through the effective selection, organization, and analysis of content

Empowering Students for the Challenges of Writing on Demand

Student skills for utilization

Unpacking the prompt

- rhetorical analysis—context, audience, purpose, role, topic
- generating prompts from text
- generating questions from prompts
- interpreting prompt language (explain, justify, evaluate, list, define, discuss, “well developed essay”
- Annotation

Context analysis: using what they give us

- planning for use of time
- using available writing aids—scoring keys, planning blocks, etc.
- understanding the skills/format required
- specialized expectations/instructions
- demystifying the writing environment
- writing process adapted to situation

What are they looking for here?: What is valued by scorers

- self and peer practice with scoring
- examining scored examples of writing
- sentence variety
- openings/closings
- specificity/word choice
- focus and length
- when to follow/break rules

Packing the toolbox for prompt day: associated skills

- fluency
- planning and organizing
- what to prioritize
- the fine art of BS
- managing anxiety
- How to get unstuck

Just plain old good writing: qualities and expectations

- set up your reader
- using examples
- develop and set up an essay
- depth/ shallow
- orienting the reader
- answer has a life separate from the question
- understanding the genre
- transitions
- practice with assigned topics
- finessing the prompt

Resources for prompts and passages:

Note: Some of the language in these resources may not match the language we utilize in KCK. For example, many of the resources make reference to persuasive when we have an emphasis on argumentative. This will continue to grow as we become more informed.

[ACT Example Writing Prompts:](#)

[SAT Example Prompts](#)

[On Demand Writing: Applying the Strategies of Impromptu Speaking to Impromptu Writing](#)

[501 Writing Prompts](#)

[Middle School Prompts](#)

[High School Prompts](#)

[More High School Prompts](#)

[Writing Situations and prompts](#)

[Argument Writing Prompts](#)

[Argument and Position Prompts and Essays](#)

[Narrative Writing Prompts](#)

[Write Source Examples of Student Writing in various genres](#)

[Common Core Examples of Student Writing in various genres](#)

Sample Lesson Plans to Modify and Utilize

Marking up the Text Annotation

Grades: 6-12

Estimated: Time Frame of Lesson: 30 minutes

Materials Needed:

- A sample prompt containing a reading passages
- Projector or Elmo for modeling annotation

Outline of Lesson:

1. Hand out a sample of a reading passage that requires student to read and discuss a passage to respond to the prompt. Also, project the prompt and passage on the board at the front of the room.
2. Read the prompt aloud. As a whole class identify and underline the words or phrases that address what they might want to focus on when reading the passage. For example, the prompt may be asking students to solve a problem, create a plan, or describe a situation.
3. Read the prompt aloud together. Teachers may want to ask advanced students to read the passage silently. As they read the passage they should keep in mind the words they underlined in the prompt.
4. Ask students to read the passage a second time, this time silently if they did not read silently the first time. During this reading, ask students to underline words, phrases or small passages that address the task in the prompt. For example, if the prompt asks students to identify solutions to a problem and how they resolve it, they should only underline the solutions that accomplish this goal.
5. After they have underlined particular words/phrases ask them to write notes in the margins for at least 3 of their examples. In the notes they should state how the example helps answer the prompt. They do not and should not use complete sentences.
6. Request volunteers to go to the front of the room and underline at least one word or section they underlined. More than one student can come to the front of the room and underline one of their words/sections. They should also include the notes they wrote about their examples.
7. As a class discuss how each of the underlined sections responds to the task in the prompt. Some students may debate certain examples. Were some examples stronger than others?
8. Ask students to focus on the notes students included on the board. What kind of notes students included. What kind of information was included in the notes? How long or detailed were the notes?

Note: As a follow up lesson students could then write a paragraph discussing one of the examples they underlined and including information from their notes.

Name of lesson: Listen to the verbs
Grade(s): 6-12
Skill(s) addressed: Rhetorical analysis
Time frame of lesson: 20-45 minutes

Materials needed:

- White board or chart paper
- 3-4 prompts on projector or elmo
- 1-2 prompts for each assigned group

Outline of lesson:

1. Begin by conducting a brainstorming session with students creating a list of writing verbs. Examples might include: explain, convince, tell, etc.
2. Once you've got a good list, switch the topic to a brainstorming of writing genres. Examples might include: expository, argument, narrative, etc.
3. Ask students to categorize the verbs they generated according to which genre it correlates with. For example, convince=argue.
4. Put a writing prompt on the projector. Ask the students to identify the verbs. They ask them what genre the verb calls for. Practice with 2-3 prompts as a whole class.
5. Break students up into groups of 2-3.
6. Assign each group one or two writing prompts and ask them to discern what genre the prompt is calling for.
7. Groups report out to the class. Conduct a discussion with the class about the power of verbs in rhetorical analysis as well as in their own writing.

Optional ideas

- For prompt ideas, use former state test prompts or other prompts from reliable sources for authenticity.

Name of Lesson: Breaking the Code

Grades: 6-12

Skills Addressed: Interpreting test language; identifying typical rhetorical structures used in prompts

Time Frame of Lesson: 50 minutes

Materials Needed:

- Test Writing Prompts
- Paper and pencils

Outline of Lesson:

1. Give students a sheet with an example of a writing prompt. Tell students to underline the five words they believe are most important in the prompt.
2. Share student choices of the five most important words. Why did the students select these choices? Do they notice any commonalities among these choices?
3. Go over important terms that appear on many writing prompts. These terms could include compare, identify, explain, describe, convince and evaluate.
4. As the class develop a definition for each word in the context of a writing prompt. What are the characteristics for each approach? For example, what types of information would a person include if they are comparing two ideas?
5. Next ask students to cross out any words or sentences they think are "fluff" in the question. What information isn't really necessary? Discuss the students' choices.
6. Discuss why these words and sentences might be included in the prompt.
7. Hand students a list of 3 or 4 other prompts.
8. Tell students to list any of the Important Terms they found in the question including those previously mentioned.
9. Select one of the terms students underlined. As a class brainstorm how they approach this particular task.
10. Repeat the process with another prompt from the sheet. This time ask student to take notes on how they might tackle the task.
11. Share strategies students recorded.

Name of lesson: Putting ourselves in a prompt-developer's shoes

Grade(s): 6-12

Skill(s) addressed: Generating prompts from texts

Time frame of lesson: 20-45 minutes

Materials needed:

- Copies of several short texts

Outline of lesson:

1. Break students into small groups of 3-4
2. Randomly assign each group a piece of shorter text. These can thematically relate to current classroom content.
3. Each group is to carefully read the text and collaborate to develop a potential writing prompt for that text. (It may be helpful to review elements of prompts or prompt formatting before this lesson.)
4. Groups report out to the class their ideas for prompts based on their texts and explain the process they went through to develop the prompts.
5. Lead the class in a discussion about the various modes of prompts that will help to demystify the process for them.

Optional ideas

- All groups could examine the same short text and develop prompts to illustrate how many possible topics for writing can be developed from a single text.
- Once prompts are developed, groups could exchange prompts with another group. Then, with a peer group's prompt, develop a plan for how they would write to that prompt.
- Instead of short texts, each group could be assigned a photograph, illustration, piece of art, advertisement, diagram, etc.

Examples of short texts

- Newspaper and magazine articles
- Articles from KCKPS Library Databases

Name of lesson: Context Analysis

Grade(s): 3-12

Skill(s) addressed: Assessing what is being asked of them in the on demand environment

Time frame of lesson: 20 minutes?

Materials needed: Context analysis questions in the form of a handout for students in language appropriate to the students you teach.

Five Key Context Analysis Questions

1. What is my time limit? (Plan to use one quarter of your time for planning.)
2. What kinds of writing aids are available to me? Is there a scoring key? A writing checklist or a list of dos and don'ts?
3. What are the targeted skills? What particular thinking or writing skills does this test require? What standards are being assessed? Is this a test of argument writing? narrative? description?
4. What kind of format is expected? Does the prompt lead me to believe that the examiners expect a five-paragraph essay? Is another format, such as a letter or a story required?
5. What specialized expectations are implicit in this particular writing task? For example, are length or audience specified?

Outline of lesson:

1. Provide students with the above list adapted for your students.
2. After you have explained each item, have students practice analyzing test prompts using the questions. They should work through the answers to the questions individually, then discuss their answers with a partner before you review the answers with the entire class. Ask students follow up questions such as how did they decide, for example that a five paragraph essay seemed to be called for. Ask them to extend their understandings by explaining, for example, how they might use the rubric provided with the prompt to guide their response.

The aim of this activity is to make analysis of the context a part of how students approach a test prompt, so the activity should be repeated until this analysis becomes automatic.

Optional ideas:

- Have students design prompts for each other and answer the questions about each other's prompts.

Name of lesson: Planning Your Essay

Grade(s): 3-12

Skill(s) addressed: Practice efficient and effective planning of essays

Time frame of lesson: 20 minutes

Materials needed:

- Writing prompts similar to the kinds of prompts students are likely to encounter on the actual test.

Outline of lesson:

1. Explain to students that they should spend about one quarter of their test time in planning and that we will be practicing how to plan an essay. Give students the actual amount of time they would have to plan their essay.
2. Ask them to underline key words in the prompt and to pay attention to their thought process as they plan. They should come up with a basic outline or set of notes which they could use to write their essay.
3. When you call time, ask students to put their pens or pencils down and to share with a partner exactly how they approached the prompt. Which words did they think were important in the prompt? How did they decide what they would write about? How did they think about organizing their essays?
4. Ask the pairs to share with the entire class what they found most effective or helpful in the planning process. Depending on the difficulty of the prompt, some students may not have been successful in finding a way into the prompt. Have students who were more successful share what helped them to connect with the prompt and organize their thinking.
5. Make a list of successful strategies on the board or on chart paper.
6. Add to the list as you repeat this activity with different prompts. Practice the different types of prompts that students are likely to encounter on the exam.

Optional ideas:

- I have found that this strategy is especially helpful for working with those prompts, which require a response to a reading selection.

Name of lesson: Prewriting in a nutshell

Grade(s): 5-12

Skill(s) addressed: planning to use allocated time

Time frame of lesson: Varies according to grade level

Materials needed:

- Handout on suggested time allocation
- A variety of grade appropriate writing prompts—each student needs two different prompts, but students within the same classroom can have similar prompts
- Chart paper or white board

Outline of lesson:

1. Review suggested time breakdown for on-demand writing with students.
2. Give each student two different writing prompts. Everyone practice the planning stage with a brand new prompt. This should be done twice with two different prompts to give variety to the experience. The time given for this should be strictly $\frac{1}{4}$ of the total allocated time given for the writing section of the grade-level test the students are preparing for. For example, in a one-hour timed test, students should be given 15 minutes to plan for each of their prompts.
3. When time has elapsed, ask students to write a reflection of the process they went through to plan their writing. Ask them to think about what pre-writing strategies they used, how many times they read the prompt, what they found effective/ineffective, etc.
4. Debrief and chart the students' experiences. Focus discussion on what skills they needed to accomplish the task. Lead students to the realization that on a writing test, they still need to go through a truncated version of the entire writing process.

Name of Lesson: Using Scoring Keys

Grades: 6-12

Skills Addressed: Recognizing and understanding elements of a successful response to a writing prompt

Using scoring keys to evaluate student writing

Time frame: 45 minutes

Materials:

- Copies of scoring key used to evaluate a specific writing prompt
- Samples of actual student responses to the writing prompt (with scores)
- Copies of writing prompt

Outline of Lesson:

1. Distribute copies of a past writing prompt and the scoring key used to grade the prompt.
2. Read the scoring key together. Ask students to circle any words in the rubric they found unclear.
3. As a class decode these terms.
4. Distribute one student sample of a response to the writing prompt. Read the sample together, particularly if the handwriting on the student sample is difficult to read.
5. Ask students to use the scoring key to evaluate the student's writing and provide a score.
6. Starting at the lowest score, ask students to raise their hands if they gave this student that score.
7. Ask a student from each group to defend the reasoning behind the score.
8. Tell the students the actual score that piece of writing received. Discuss if the scorer and the class agreed. Why does the class think the writing received that score?
9. Provide the students with a second scoring key and writing prompt and a second student sample.
10. Ask students to form small groups of 3-4 students. They must score the piece and come to an agreement on the score.
11. The group should write a paragraph explaining the reasoning behind the score.
12. Ask students to share the score their group agreed upon.
13. Tell students the actual score and use the scoring key to discuss why this sample received this score.
14. Reflect upon scoring the sample as a group. What were some of the obstacles students encountered when evaluating this piece of writing with peers?

Name of lesson: Using rubrics with students
Grade(s): 3-12
Skill(s) addressed: Self and peer practice with rubrics
Time frame of lesson: 20-30 minutes

Rationale:

Students can become adept at using rubrics when they spend enough time using them. Students who have internalized a detailed scoring key will have an enhanced understanding of the complexities of writing.

Lesson Outline:

Goal:

- To help students develop a holistic understanding of the scoring key through a whole class scoring session.

Talking Points:

- We understand scoring keys when we use them to score actual writing.
- It is possible to see the connection between rubrics and the way a piece of writing combines elements of good writing when essays are scored holistically in a whole group setting that allows for discussion of and reflection on scoring.
- Scoring writing is best done with others.

Activities:

1. Make an overhead transparency of the provided rubric and show it to the class, highlighting the six main categories.
2. Hand out a sample essay for students to read and score. It would be best to use a sample that addresses a prompt you have given.
3. Have students score the sample paper using the rubric. Encourage them to write a well reasoned justification for their score using the language of the rubric. For younger students, have them point out orally what they notice works or doesn't work. Repeat points back using the language of the rubric thus showing them how to connect their thinking to the rubric.

Name of lesson: Context Analysis

Grade(s): 3-12

Skill(s) addressed: Assessing what is being asked of them in the test environment

Time frame of lesson: 20 minutes?

Materials needed: Context analysis questions in the form of a handout for students in language appropriate to the students you teach.

Five Key Context Analysis Questions

6. What is my time limit? (Plan to use one quarter of your time for planning.)
7. What kinds of writing aids are available to me? Is there a scoring key, a writing checklist, a list of dos and don'ts?
8. What are the targeted skills? What particular thinking or writing skills does this test require? What standards are being assessed? Is this a test of argument writing? narrative? description?
9. What kind of format is expected? Does the prompt lead me to believe that the examiners expect a five-paragraph essay? Is another format, such as a letter or a story required?
10. What specialized expectations are implicit in this particular writing task? For example, are length or audience specified?

Outline of lesson:

3. Provide students with the above list adapted for your students.
4. After you have explained each item, have students practice analyzing test prompts using the questions. They should work through the answers to the questions individually, then discuss their answers with a partner before you review the answers with the entire class. Ask students follow up questions such as how did they decide, for example that a five paragraph essay seemed to be called for. Ask them to extend their understandings by explaining, for example, how they might use the rubric provided with the prompt to guide their response.

The aim of this activity is to make analysis of the context a part of how students approach a test prompt, so the activity should be repeated until this analysis becomes automatic.

Optional ideas:

- Have students design prompts for each other and answer the questions about each other's prompts.

Name of lesson: What are they looking for?

Grade(s): 5-12

Skill(s) addressed: Reading essays from the perspective of a scorer

Time frame of lesson: 50 minutes (This may have to be done over several days)

Materials needed:

- A writing prompt (preferably one the students are familiar with from having used it in other activities)
- A range of student responses to the prompt
- Scoring Key to accompany the prompt.
- Poster paper

Outline of lesson:

1. If the students are not familiar with the prompt, you might use it first in an activity such as planning or rhetorical analysis so that they become familiar with it. Otherwise, you might take a few minutes to just read it over and process what it is asking for.
2. Distribute a packet of samples (no more than four) which can be identified individually (Sample essay A, B, C etc.) and the scoring key and ask the students to rate the samples according to the rubric.
3. Using poster paper, post the numbers 1 through 6 (or whatever is dictated by the rubric) around the edges of the classroom. When students have finished rating the essays, ask them to look at Sample essay A and to go to the poster board which represents the score they gave the essay. When students have distributed themselves, you can look at where they have clustered and how closely they rated the essays.
4. Ask the students at each number to talk to each other about why they rated the essay the way they did. What did they see in the essay that corresponded to what they saw in the scoring key?
5. Have each group report out. If you have the "official score" you can share that with the students. How close did the student rating come to the official one?
6. Repeat for the other essays.
7. When you have finished, look at the essays in relation to their official scores. Apart from what is on the scoring key, what do you notice about the essays that give us clues as to what the readers are looking for when they score these essays?

Other considerations:

It is useful to focus not only on what the scorers value, but what the students believe is good writing or makes an essay good. Disagreement with the "official" score should not be seen as error. Assessment of writing involves complex, human judgment and students should be encouraged to explain their choices. In my experience, they often come up with convincing evidence to support their judgments.

Name of lesson: Looking at the sample essays

Skill(s) addressed: Reading essays from the perspective of a scorer

Time frame of lesson: 50 minutes (This may have to be done over several days)

Materials needed:

- A range of student responses to the Scoring Key to accompany the prompt. (These would come from your class or possibly from the resources above.)
- Poster paper

Outline of lesson:

1. This is especially useful with a prompt students have had a chance to attempt. So you might want to have them try out one of the prompts for which you have example scored samples.
2. Beginning with the lowest scored essay in the packet, and referring to the rubric provided, place each sample on the overhead projector. Have students tell what they notice about the sample. Refer back to the rubric after the students have explained what they noticed about the sample.
3. Repeat for each sample all of the way to the highest scored sample.
4. On poster paper, have students brainstorm what they noticed about the highest scored essays. Responses like "They were longer," although not encouraged by the test manufacturer, should be encouraged.
5. Debrief the activity and summarize what you noticed that students who were most successful did on the essays.
6. This activity can be extended by having students score their own samples and reflect on why they scored them as they did.
7. In order to get the full benefit of the activity, it may be necessary to try it more than once so students have the opportunity to apply what they have learned.

Other considerations:

As we noted in our discussion of the previous activity, it is useful to focus not only on what the scorers value, but what the students believe is good writing or makes an essay good. Disagreement with the "official" score should not be seen as error. Assessment of writing involves complex, human judgment and students should be encouraged to explain their choices. In our experience, they often come up with convincing evidence to support their judgments.

Name of lesson: Approaching Your Essay

Grade(s): 8-12

Skill(s) addressed: Understanding how to approach the writing of an essay and the level of formality required.

Time frame of lesson: 20 minutes

Materials needed:

Writing prompts similar to the kinds of prompts students are likely to encounter on the actual test.

Outline of lesson:

Explain to students that they should assume that the reader of their essay is intelligent, but uninformed about the subject they plan to address in their essay. The essay should stand alone in that the reader should not need to read the prompt in order to understand the essay. The writer needs to orient the reader as to the question the essay is addressing. Any works referred to in the essay should be fully introduced.

One way to begin to practice this very simply is to have students write opening paragraphs to essays in which they orient the reader to what they are discussing. They can experiment with different ways of doing this and list these on a chart as they discover them. They can obviously just restate the question as part of their response. They can also explain and create context and establish the importance of the topic. The analogy between short answers and speeches might help students to understand this distinction. If they are unfamiliar with speeches, they might understand sermons, or news reports on television. Contrast a conversation about a news report with the actual report. It can help to think of the question as something that is being whispered off-stage that the audience will not hear.

If students have difficulty with this, it can help to have them externalize a reader's questions. Read their response sentence by sentence to a partner, pausing after each sentence for their partner to pose a question. Ideally, the next sentence should answer the question, but even if this does not happen, the exercise should help students to think of audience in more concrete ways.

Name of Lesson: Weak, Wimpy Words

Grade: 6-12

Skills Addressed: Identifying and utilizing specific language in a piece of writing

Time Frame of the Lesson: 30-40 minutes

Materials Needed:

- Paper
- Writing Utensil

Outline of the Lesson:

1. Ask students to compile a list of Weak, Wimpy words together. These are words that do not reflect a specific emotion or quality including good, bad, nice cool. A variety of people may envision different images when they read these words in a piece of writing.
2. Choose some examples from the Weak, Wimpy Words list and write them on the board. Underneath have student volunteers go to the board and write specific words, descriptive phrases and/or sentences that provide a more specific interpretation of those weak terms.
3. Have students take out a draft or piece of writing they have written earlier in the year. Ask the students to go through a section of the piece, circling all words that appear on the Weak, Wimpy Words list.
4. Ask students to then rewrite the passage replacing the weak words with more specific words, phrases or sentences.
5. Ask some students to share their first and second drafts of their passage. As a class, discuss how these changes impacted the effect of the piece as a whole.

Name of Lesson: Finding Focus

Grade: 7-12

Skills Addressed: Identifying the components of a paragraph; organizing and focusing ideas within a paragraph

Time Frame of Lesson: 30-40 minutes

Materials:

- Highlighters/Computer
- Paper and writing utensil

Outline of Lesson:

1. Review the components of an effective paragraph (topic sentence, supporting sentences, transition).
2. Provide students a question concerning a text they are reading in class. The question could be a question from an old state assessment.
3. Provide students with highlighters. If the class has access to computers, students can type their responses and then highlight parts of their text within Microsoft Word.
4. Allow students 10 minutes to write a response to the prompt.
5. At the end of this time period, ask students to identify the main idea of the paragraph. What does most of the paragraph seem to be about?
6. Ask students to search for sentences or sections of their response that don't relate to the main idea they have identified. If they find one, they should highlight that sentence.
7. Discuss with students the problems they encountered while responding to the prompt, particularly problems they encountered while trying to focus/organize the response. Why might they have encountered these obstacles?
8. Ask students to read through the sentences that remain. Does the remainder of the paragraph provide enough information to thoroughly discuss the main idea? If the student does not have 5-7 sentences remaining he/she knows further elaboration is required.
9. Rewrite the paragraph, deleting the highlighted sentences and expanding on the ideas left behind.
10. Students should repeat steps 6 and 7. Ask students to consider if they had to highlight more or less sentences this time. Why might that be?
11. Reflect on the experience with students. In what ways did the activity help them observe their methods of organization? How could they use this strategy while taking a test?

Name of Lesson: From Kernels to Popcorn

Grades: 9-12

Skills Addressed: Identifying a variety of sentence structure; identifying the impact of using particular sentence structures in a piece of writing.

Time Frame: 40-50 minutes

Materials Needed:

- Altered passage from a piece of literature
- Sentence Variations Sheet
- Paper and writing Utensil
- Overhead projector

Outline of Lesson:

1. Review various sentence types with students. See enclosed handout at the bottom.
2. Hand the students a passage from a short story, novel etc. However, before giving the students the passage, break the sentences in the passage down into basic sentence kernels. A sentence kernel is the simplest form of the sentence. This means students need to break down compound and complex sentence into their component parts.
3. Tell the students their task is to rewrite the passage by combining some of the sentences. The teacher could require students to use a particular number of sentences structures in the revised version.
4. After students have worked on combining sentences, read some aloud. Ask the students to discuss the reasons behind their choices. What impact do certain types of sentences have on the sound of the sentences and the meaning of the sentences?
5. Finally, show students the original version. Closely examine at least a few sentences in the passage and discuss the impact of that sentence type on the piece of writing. How does it reflect the idea in the passage or the idea being conveyed?

Name of lesson: Ready, set, write!

Grade(s): 3-12

Skill(s) addressed: Writing speed/fluency

Time frame of lesson: Initially, 10-15 minutes, then 5-10 minutes three times a week

Materials needed:

- Large bulletin board paper and marker
- Chart of students names or ID numbers

Outline of lesson:

1. After a typical short in-class writing assignment, ask students to count the number of words they produced.
2. Introduce students to the research that “students who can produce more words per minute actually write better than those who operate at a lower WPM rate” (Gere et.al.). Ask them to speculate why that might be true and discuss the merits and flaws of fluency. Explain that be that as it may, in a testing situation, they will need to produce text quickly. They are going to practice by keeping track of how many words they are able to produce in a free write, with the aim of increasing their fluency.
3. Three times a week, ask students to free write for 5-10 minutes. The amount of time should be consistent each time.
4. At the end of the quick write, ask students to count their number of words they produced. Students need to record their numbers. For privacy, a chart with pseudonyms or student ID numbers could be used.
5. Create a line chart to track the class average and display prominently in the classroom. Each student could graph their own progress. The class data could be used for math lessons (computing averages, mode, standard deviation, etc) .
6. Periodically review the progress with students and encourage reflection on their individual progress.

Optional ideas

- If you already have a quick write or free write practice in place, this component is easily added.

Name of lesson: Talk your way in

Grade(s): 3-12

Skill(s) addressed: Using dialogue and conversation strategies to write about assigned topics.

Time frame of lesson: 2 hours or two class periods

Materials needed:

- 4 index cards for each student
- Chart paper or white board

Outline of lesson:

Session 1

1. Students write three specific topics on separate index cards that represent topics that they would be able to expertly write about.
2. In groups of two, students randomly select one of their partners' topics.
3. Taking turns, each student talks about the unfamiliar topic. The partner's role is to ask questions and coach, not to supply "answers". 2-3 of the generated topics should be discussed by each person.
4. Debrief the strategies they used. Focus on how they were able to accomplish the task. For example, did they use knowledge from a movie, a friend's experience, etc.

Session 2

1. Review strategies learned from previous session. Discuss how the same techniques could be applied to writing-on demand situations.
2. Same activity as previous session, but done independently to emulate test-taking situations.
 - A. Partner writes a prompt-style topic that is highly specialized on an index card.
 - B. Each person writes to their partner's prompt.
3. Personal reflections on what was learned. Free write: "What have you learned from this activity? How could this technique be used on a writing test?"
4. Group sharing of ideas and discussion on applying strategies.

Optional Ideas

- For younger students, the teacher could pre-select topics that are less challenging to practice with before moving on to peer created topics.
- For higher level students in content-driven courses, the teacher could require the generated prompts to be applicable to the content. For example, in AP English, the prompts could all pertain to specific literary devices or a particular literary work.

Name of lesson: And then... and then... and then...

Grade(s): 3-12

Skill(s) addressed: using transitional phrases

Time frame of lesson: 45 minutes

Materials needed:

- Sentence strips or construction paper with the events of a story written on them. (1 event per piece)
- Blank sentence strips or construction paper with markers
- Handout (modified to grade level) on using transitional words

Outline of lesson:

1. Scatter the elements of story around the room. Each student selects one piece of the story.
2. Students work cooperatively to put the events of the story in order. There may be multiple "answers". Read the story aloud as a class.
3. Discuss with students that stories (or essays) that use the greatest number of words and phrases that create transitions between sentences typically receive higher scores than those that use only a few. Share the handout with them and review.
4. For each pair of sentences, assign two students to create an appropriate transition and write it on the blank paper you have provided.
5. When every pair has inserted their transitional phrase, re-read the entire story by having students read their section plus the new transitions.
6. Ask students to make observations about the difference between the original story and the newer version. Lead the students in a discussion about when using transitional phrases is appropriate and about using a variety of methods.

Optional ideas:

- Use excerpts or entire essays written by students.
- For older students, each section of the "story" could be an element of an essay, such as the introduction, body paragraphs, citation of examples, etc.
- Make the story a response to a recent writing prompt, then practice scoring the writing using the rubric for the assignment.

Helpful Handouts

Unpacking the Prompt

Directions: Carefully examine the prompt. Discern as much of the following information as you can, filling in the chart as you go.

Central Idea	Role	Audience	Purpose	Strategies

Central Idea: What is the central idea or topic called for?

Additional thoughts: do I have choices to make with regard to this idea or topic? Will I need to focus the idea or topic in order to write a good essay? What arguments can I make for this idea? What do I know about this topic?

Role: What is my role as a writer in achieving this purpose?

Additional thoughts: have I been assigned a specific role, like applicant or representative? If I have not been assigned a specific role, what does the prompt or assignment tell me about the level of expertise I should demonstrate, the stance I should assume, or the approach I should take?

Audience: Who is the intended audience?

Additional thoughts: if named specifically, what do I know about this particular audience? If the audience is implied or not identified, what can I infer about it? In either event, how might the expectations of this audience affect my choices as a writer?

Purpose: What is the purpose or mode for the writing task?

Additional thoughts: is the purpose stated or must it be inferred? What is this writing supposed to accomplish (besides fulfilling the demands of the prompt or assignment)? What does the goal of this writing suggest about the mode (narration, exposition, description, argument, etc.) or combination of modes that I should consider in responding?

Strategies: What strategies will be most effective?

Additional thoughts: what does the purpose or mode suggest about possible strategies? Of the strategies I am comfortable using—like examples, definitions, analysis, classification, cause and effect, compare and contrast—which will be most effective here? Are there any strategies, such as number of examples or type of support that are specified as required?

Sentence Variation Techniques

Begin with the subject.

Dad was a man with a mission that day.

Begin with an article and the subject.

The car was old and rusty, but my father was determined to get it running.

Begin with an adjective and the subject.

Little wrinkles of worry riddled my anxious forehead as I headed out the door.

Begin with an adverb before the subject.

Abruptly, it began to rain.

Begin with a prepositional phrase used as an adverb.

In the sky, clouds began to form.

Begin with a present participial phrase.

Coming down in buckets, the rain soon saturated the ground.

Begin with a past participial phrase.

Soaked with water, John sloshed through the mud.

Begin with an absolute phrase (or more than one).

His long journey ended, his weary feet aching, his bones icy with the cold, John entered the warm, cozy house.

Begin with an infinitive as the subject.

To relax with a cup of hot tea was Mary's only desire.

Begin with a gerund or gerund phrase as the subject.

Reading a good book is the best thing to do on a cold, rainy day.

Begin with an adverbial clause.

While the roast is cooking, my mother slices the tomatoes for the salad.

Postpone the subject.

There are in all this darkness a few rays of light.

Begin with a noun clause.

That his rocket would never get off the ground was an unbearable thought for the young scientist.

Begin with a verb.

Rise the sun did on that awful day.

Begin with a conjunction.

But how could this be?

Begin with the object of the verb.

That job, no one wanted.

Begin with an interjection.

Aha--I caught you red-handed.

Begin with a transitional word.

In fact, there were no oranges left.

Begin with a predicate adjective.

Fierce was the storm that night.

Begin with a subordinate clause:

Although the day was fair and cloudless, he took no pleasure in it.

Begin with two or more prepositional phrases:

In the castle of the monster with the hideous face, a beautiful princess languished.

Create a balanced sentence in which the phrases or clauses balance each other by virtue of their likeness of structure:

The monster lurked within the stony citadel; the monster screeched behind the castle walls.

Write a periodic sentence in which the sentence base (independent clause) comes last.

Surrounded by angry villagers, poked and prodded with sharp pitchforks, frightened by the sharp orders of the guards, weakened by hunger and thirst, the terrified monster cowered in the town square.

Write an antithetical sentence that contains two statements which are balanced, but opposite.

Great works of art show humankind at its greatest, not at its happiest; they illuminate moments of decision, not moments of ease.

Write a sentence in inverted order so that the predicate comes before the subject.

In the early winter comes the snow.

Write a sentence in which normally unassociated ideas, words, or phrases are placed next to one another (juxtaposed), thus creating an effect of surprise and wit.

The little children skipping on the lawn: a field of butterflies dancing in the wind.

Write a sentence ending with three parallel elements: words, phrases, or clauses that have the same structure.

He loved swimming, dancing, and running. (gerunds)

He loved to swim, to dance, and to run. (infinitive phrases)

He loved the stentorian roar of the crowd, the tangy smell of the hot dogs, the sharp crack of the bat. (noun phrases)

He loved baseball because it was slow, because it was rhythmic, because it was played on sunny summer days and misty rainy days and cold, wintery spring mornings. (adverb clauses and adverb phrases)

Write a sentence in which repetition plays a role.

The slow summer days, the silent summer days, the secret summer days slipped by one by one.

Ask a rhetorical question.

And if our students are to become better writers, can they continue to practice the same simple sentence structures as in the past?

Write a sentence using anadiplosis, the repetition of the last word of one clause at the beginning of the following clause.

The town fire chief, who was in charge of the Fourth of July celebration, was famous for his astonishing fireworks; these fireworks, richly colored and brilliant, burst repeatedly in the night sky like fiery rockets exploding in a rain of twinkling, incandescent, glittering sparkles.

Write a sentence using anaphora, the repetition of the same word or group of words at the beginning of successive clauses.

We will pursue him into the mountains; we will pursue him into the desert; we will pursue him down valleys and into canyons; we will pursue him to the ends of the earth.

Write a sentence using asyndeton, the deliberate omission of conjunctions in a series of related clauses.

I saw the mountain; I climbed the mountain; I conquered the mountain.

Write a sentence using chiasmus in which the arrangement of ideas in the second clause is a reversal of the first.

Am I a philosopher dreaming I'm a butterfly, or a butterfly dreaming I'm a philosopher?

Write a sentence using ellipsis, the deliberate omission of a word or words which are readily implied by the context.

The valley was cold, because it seldom saw the sun, damp, because [it was] surrounded by mist; [it was] silent, for no birds made their nests there or sang in the twilight.

My dreams had no end that night; my delight [had]no limit.

Write a sentence using epanalepsis, the repetition at the end of a clause of the word that occurred at the beginning of the clause.

Dinner was over, but no one had dined; the argument had taken away everyone's appetite.

Write a sentence using epistrophe, the repetition of the same word or group of words at the ends of successive clauses.

Unfortunately, it would have been easy to love her; it was much harder to know, for honor's sake, that he could not love what he so wished to love.

Write a sentence using polysyndeton, the deliberate use of many conjunctions for special emphasis – to highlight quantity or mass of detail or to create a flowing, continuous sentence pattern.

The meal was amazing – my mother had cooked turkey and dressing and green peas and fruit salad and mashed potatoes smothered with gravy and toasty white rolls with honey and pumpkin pie and hot pecan pie swirled with whipped cream, and no matter how much we ate, the table seemed just as loaded as when we began eating.