



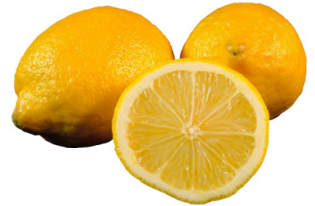
# secondary edition

## Volume 1, Number 1

Brought to you by the  
Buddy System Project, 2005

## Writing is like lemons

by Amy Schultz



You might just think writing is like broccoli. Actually, if you think about it, writing is just like lemons. It may make you pucker to think about it, but as you add enough of the right ingredients, writing is very refreshing. Just as Vitamin C is crucial for good health, writing is crucial for a good life. It's time for parents and teachers to work together to add writing to our students' diets.

Lemons come in very handy in realizing your future aspirations. My annual lemonade stand put me through college. With the new SAT test, you'll need writing skills to get into college. The writing section is one third of the total score and includes a 25-minute essay that is not solely graded on grammar, but also on ideas and critical thinking, supporting evidence, organization, focus, use of language, and sentence structure. A sour reminder of reality.

Have you ever made lemonade? Add the lemon juice, water, and sugar. Taste. Add a lot more sugar. Taste. Add more water. Taste. Add more lemon juice. Taste. Add more sugar...it's quite a process. As I tasted and tested my lemonade, I understood what needed to come next. The National Commission on Writing suggests that, "Writing is not simply a way for students to demonstrate what they know. It is a way to help them understand what they know. At its best, writing is learning." The Commission suggests that writing be used across the curriculum as a way for students to internalize what they are learning at the moment.

My grandmother taught me about the many practical uses of lemons. Cut a lemon in half, add salt and use it to clean a copper-bottomed pot. Lemon juice clears up acne. Sprinkle juice of one lemon over fruit salad to prevent browning. I could go on. Writing is necessary to succeed at basic life tasks or to perform well in your career of choice. From shopping lists, love letters, thank you notes, and emails, to performance reports, resumes, and grant proposals, writing is an essential form of communication.

Sucking lemons makes me cry. Many therapists suggest journaling as a way to process reactions to life. Writing is therapeutic for people of all ages to express emotions that may be hard to understand or speak about.

Writing is good for us. So, everyone, let's quit making sour faces about writing.

Pucker up and try it.



### Inside this Edition...

Feature - "Writing is Like Lemons" .....	1
Instructional Advice -	
"Exercising Balanced Writing Assignments" .....	2
"Assigning Effective Writing Prompts" .....	3
Cartoons with Class .....	3
Celebrate Writers! .....	4
Frakshurd Frases .....	4
Literature Links .....	3
Ready, Set, Write (expository prompts) .....	2
Technology & Writing .....	4
Write at Home! .....	3
Web Clips .....	4
Writing Calendar .....	4
Writing Research: "Why Improve Instruction" .....	2

*Write Connections* is a publication of the Corporation for Educational Technology and is distributed at no charge to Indiana educators. Sign up for free email delivery of this newsletter in PDF format at

<http://thewritingsite.org>

## Introducing Write Connections

Welcome to the *Write Connections*. In an effort to extend awareness of the importance of writing skills and to share ideas for writing instruction and assessment, the *Buddy System Project* is publishing a series of three newsletters during this school year. Each issue will be published in three editions, customized respectively for primary, intermediate and secondary educators. The newsletters include tips and techniques for writing instruction, feature articles to inspire thinking about the issues surrounding writing instruction and assessment, key findings from the latest writing research and a healthy dose of writing fun.

Sign up today at <http://thewritingsite.org> to have your next newsletter come to you automatically via email. Buddy's *The Writing Site* offers additional articles and resources galore for all grade levels. At the site's core is an interactive tutorial that will help build confidence in scoring student writing against the ISTEP+ rubrics.

Anything is possible when you have the *Write Connections*.

~Nancy Miller, Editor



*The difference between fiction and reality? Fiction has to make sense.*

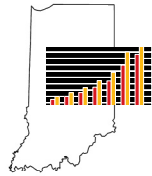
~Tom Clancy

## Why Do We Need to Improve Writing Instruction in Indiana?

Poor writing skill among students is certainly not a reality only in Indiana. The *National Assessment for Educational Progress* (NAEP) writing test shows that only 27% of 4<sup>th</sup> grade students nationwide are at or above "Proficient" in writing. Indiana came close to that national average at 26% Proficient. These numbers were a slight improvement over the results from the previous NAEP writing test given at that grade in 1998. More alarming, however, is the fact that Indiana slips off the national average at grade 8. Indiana remains at 26% Proficient in Grade 8 compared to a national average of 30% proficient.

This means that while Indiana's average 4<sup>th</sup> grade scale scores were higher than those in 21 other states, at grade 8 our average scores were higher than only eleven other states. Since the measurement of writing skills (including grammar and spelling) now comprise fully one-third of the SAT test score, we need to examine, eliminate or enhance our instructional practices at all grades working toward significant improvement in writing skills for all students.

For more details regarding NAEP scores refer to the source: <http://nces.ed.gov/nationsreportcard/writing/>



## Exercising Balanced Writing Assignments

- The experts agree – exercise is beneficial and necessary to maintain good health. Most people are faced with the challenge of carving out even 30 minutes a day for exercise. Each athlete must make a decision – cardio or strength training?
- The experts agree – writing is beneficial and necessary to a good education. Most teachers are faced with the challenge of carving out even 30 minutes a day for writing. Each professional must make a decision – prompted or free choice writing?

The answer to both dilemmas is YES. Do both. Cardio AND strength training work together to improve health. Prompted AND free choice writing work together to improve writing skills.

Best writing comes when students know and care about a topic. Giving students choices in their daily writing will produce more elaborate, passionate results. A child who enjoys putting pencil to paper will be more likely to engage in future writing assignments. Just as strength training produces immediate effects and encourages athletes to keep exercising, allowing students free choice increases their desire to write and boosts fluency muscles.

Although prompted writing reduces your students' engagement with the topic, it remains a necessary component in balanced writing instruction. Prompted writing is an indispensable skill in real life, the same as cardio is crucial to our heart health. The majority of writing we do as adults in the workforce, is writing on-demand rather than to a topic of our choosing. By including prompted writing in your instruction, you are preparing students for statewide assessments of their writing skills. You will be training them how to recognize what the "reader" wants and how to show off their writing skills, despite a potential lack of knowledge (or interest) about a topic.

Bringing writing prompts into play across the curriculum will also give your students opportunities to show off what they DO know about a topic. Ask students to accurately and skillfully convey what they have learned about a specific subject and you'll prepare them for college and beyond.

Train your students to be skillful writers through a balanced workout approach. Motivate and inspire a life-long love of writing, by allowing them to freely choose their own writing topics. Use writing prompts to regularly exercise their skills and to practice performing on demand. You'll be building strong writers – no sweat!

Some content adapted from: Freeman, Marcia. *Building A Writing Community: A Practical Guide*. Maupin House, c1995.

Ready, set,  
write!



### Expository Prompts



1. Think of two different types of transportation, such as a scooter and in-line skates, a sled and skis, a canoe and a sailboat, a subway and a bus, or a

train and and airplane. Compare and contrast the two. Consider issues such as speed, comfort, enjoyment, and expense.



2. Cut and paste examples from your other journal entries showing unique or distinctive aspects of your writing style, and then comment on them, making specific reference to details.

Practice, practice, practice!

Not so confident about your skills in scoring student writing against the ISTEP+ rubrics? The Writing Site features an interactive scoring tutorial with "instant feedback." It is also a great tool to use with students in teaching them to assess writing performance.

Practice holistic scoring at...  
<http://thewritingsite.org>



## Assigning Effective Writing Prompts

After your students have become confident in their writing skills, introduce them to the practice of writing to prompts. Writing to prompts gives your students opportunities to express their existing knowledge in content areas, to reflect on newly acquired knowledge, or to practice for upcoming writing assessments. To effectively assign or develop writing prompts, keep your goals in sight.

**Goal:** Assess student writing skills or prepare students for statewide assessment

- Instruct your students how to read a prompt, discovering what it requests.
- Take away the apprehension by framing the assessment as a time to show off their writing skills.
- Encourage your students to be detectives, searching for “clues” to what the reader wants.
- Practice reading prompts as a class and decode it together. Teach the vocabulary and elements of common prompts:
  - Narrative prompts – when, story, happened, time, events, occasion...
  - Expository prompts – select, choose and tell why, directions, explain, plan...
  - Persuasive prompts – convince, persuade, agree with, ask, support, opinion...

**Goal:** Encourage ongoing thinking and processing as a part of student learning across the curriculum

- Use quick-write prompts after instruction to promote reflection or organize thinking:
  - What is something important you learned today?
  - What do you think are the 3 most important points?
  - What would you like to know more about?
  - What do you enjoy/not enjoy about this topic?
  - What do you not understand?

**Goal:** Assess newly acquired knowledge in content areas

- Assign prompts which spark students’ imaginations.
- Give students choices between two comparable prompts or freedom of expression within a prompt.
- Use the S.O.A.P acronym to create prompts with a “variety of purposes and audiences.”
  - Subject – Who or what the piece is about
  - Occasion – The writing situation
  - Audience – The intended audience
  - Purpose – To express, inform or persuade

When **assigning** any prompt, beware of the following:

- Expecting prior knowledge about specific subject matter
- Requiring students to write about sensitive issues including religion and loss
- Assuming all students have had the same experiences
- Writing a prompt longer than two or three sentences
- Giving too many suggestions or not enough

When **designing** your own prompts, write a prompt that is:

- Specific and immediately relevant
- Interesting to students
- Related to all students’ experiences
- Clear in purpose, expectations and criteria
- Written using age-appropriate vocabulary

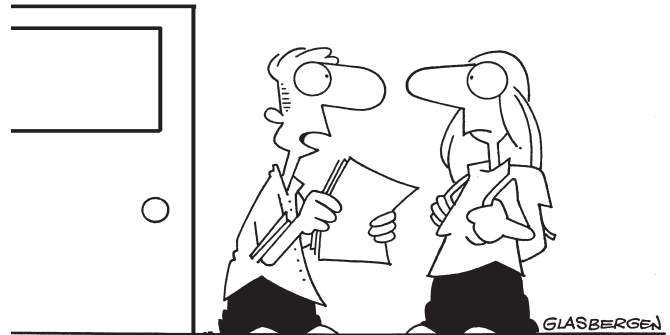
Sources:

Albertson, Bonnie. *Delaware Writing Project*, 1999 <<http://www.nwrel.org/eval/writing/DEPrompts.pdf>>

6 + 1 Trait® Writing - Trait Prompts, Northwest Regional Educational Laboratory, <<http://www.nwrel.org/assessment/prompts.php?odelay=2&d=1&prompt=>>

cartoons with class

© 1998 Randy Glasbergen. www.glasbergen.com



**“I used a \$3,000 computer, a \$1200 laser printer and a \$300 word-processing program—and I still got a D on my term paper!”**

write at home!

Enlist the help of your students’ parents to encourage and practice writing skills. Promote this “at home” activity.

### Read with Me Book Review

Choose a book of interest to both student and parent. Take turns reading aloud to each other discussing the book after each chapter.

Parent and student should then write his/her own book review, including information about the plot, setting, characters, or theme. Support opinions with evidence from the text.

For an added twist, redesign the book’s cover to include what each reader sees as the most important messages and features of the book.

Source: <http://www.writingproject.org/cs/nwpp/print/nwpr/807>



Literature Links

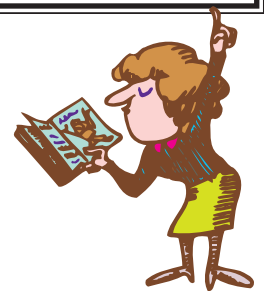
Great “Teen Reads” can stimulate great teen writing. Connect books to movies with this choice book.

*The Sisterhood of the Traveling Pants* by Ann Brashares

Love, loyalty, and loss – four best friends face all three with the help of a magical pair of jeans. During their first summer apart, Tibby, Lena, Bridget, and Carmen use the pants to fulfill their wishes and connect their lives. The first book in the series, *Sisterhood* introduces us to strong teen characters, and follows them through the good and bad times. Ask students to compare the characters and actions in the book to those portrayed in the major motion picture.

Related books and links at:

<http://www.randomhouse.com/teens/sisterhoodcentral/>





# Frakeshurd rases

Straight from the pencils of our young writers we found the following interestingly spelled words and funny phrases:

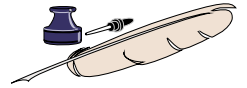
“germinate” (to become a naturalized German)

“Madman Curie discovered radium”

“I hoped you enjoyed reading my S.A.”

“...like being admitted to an Ivory League school”

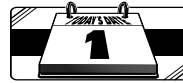
## Celebrate Writers!



The following authors have birthdays in November and December.

- Samuel Langhorne Clemens, wrote under the pen name of Mark Twain. His books about coming of age, *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn* and *Tom Sawyer* have long been favorites of schools and teens. He was born on November 30, 1835.
- Kahlil Gibran, Lebanese-American philosophical essayist, novelist, mystical poet, and artist was born on December 6, 1883.
- James Thurber was born on December 8, 1894. An American writer and cartoonist, one of his best-known characters was Walter Mitty.

Celebrate these author’s birthdays by reading a passage aloud to your class from your favorites of the authors’ books.



## writing calendar

### November 16 National “Fast Food” Day

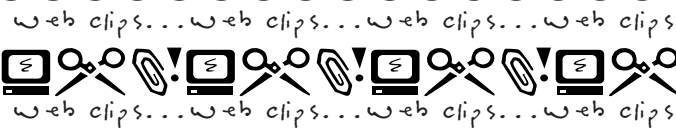
With movies such as Morgan Spurlock’s *Supersize Me* and lawsuits galor against fast food chains for making people overweight, has the general public been a victim of the fast food giants or are we our own worst enemies in this regard? Decide your position then write a persuasive argument to debate with classmates.

### December 1 Rosa Parks Day

Rosa Parks took a stand on civil rights by not giving up her seat on a bus. What belief do you have that you would be willing to defend using public protest, if necessary? Explain why this is so important to you and explain to what lengths you would go to defend your position.

Find more *Writing Calendar* activity ideas by visiting. . .

<http://thewritingsite.org/wc/cal/second4.asp>



### Read\*Write\*Think

<http://www.readwritethink.org/lessons/>

Sponsored by the *International Reading Association*, *International Society of Technology Educators* and *Marco Polo*, this site features hundreds of teaching ideas and lesson plans on all aspects of literacy for grades K-12.

### Just Journalism

[http://www.highschooljournalism.org/Teachers/Lesson\\_Plans/Archive.cfm](http://www.highschooljournalism.org/Teachers/Lesson_Plans/Archive.cfm)

Sponsored by the *American Society of Newspaper Editors*. Teachers from across the nation have contributed lesson plans to address journalism writing issues.

### PBS Lesson Plans on Writing

<http://www.pbs.org/teachersource/>

Lesson plans for every grade and topic. A search will yield a list of lessons that include annotations and special markers if there are related video products available



## Technology & Writing



## Where do you get your “inspiration” for writing?

Writing can be an exciting, dynamic, and visually stimulating process! Even “non-inspired” writers can become enthused with the aid of concept mapping. *Inspiration*™ software is designed to allow students to build graphic organizers, which represent concepts and the relationships between them. As a visual learning tool, *Inspiration* strengthens critical thinking, comprehension, and writing skills across the curriculum. When linked to Indiana writing standards, *Inspiration* can be used to energize the learning process, individualize classroom instruction, track student performance, and achieve specified writing objectives.

Diagrams can be instantly transformed into an outline with a click of the mouse. Writers can quickly rearrange and prioritize ideas, resulting in well organized, succinct, and clear reports or papers. Hyperlinks, which directly connect to Internet resources or other desktop applications, are easily developed. Likewise, it is really easy to move work produced in *Inspiration* to be to either *Microsoft Word*™ or *AppleWorks* applications to continue the writing process. The product comes complete with hundreds of clip art images and graphic shapes, but you can import others or even digital photo images for use in your diagrams. Whether used to plan writing or to present student research, *Inspiration* is an affordable and versatile classroom technology tool for students in intermediate grades and higher. Get more information or download a 30-day free trial version at <http://www.inspiration.com>.

*Remember: Sign up to receive future copies of this newsletter at <http://www.thewritingsite.org/list/form.asp>*