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To the Teacher

These writing-starter exercises are designed to be used for practice in paragraph writing and in simple expository writing. They were written for the middle school and junior high school grades, but they may be used in upper elementary grades or senior high school classes if you find that they are suitable for your particular students.

Students write best if they write from their own experiences, and these paragraphs provide that opportunity. Each page has a paragraph on a subject with which most middle school students will be familiar.

Students also write well if they are first guided through a very structured exercise. Here, they are given a beginning. They must provide a continuation and an ending. Later, they can begin as well as complete their own paragraphs and short compositions.

The first paragraph on each page is four or five sentences long. Then the opening sentence of the second paragraph is given. The first word of the second sentence is also given. Students are to continue writing from this first word of the second sentence and complete the paragraph. They should have a total of five sentences in the second paragraph when they are done. (This total includes the first printed sentence.)

There is nothing magic about the numbers of sentences used in the exercises. These numbers are used because they seem to yield exercises short enough not to intimidate the unpracticed writer, but long enough to allow for some substance.

It would be best to reproduce a page for each student and allow him or her to write directly on the reproduced copy. This form of presentation should help students go right into writing a continuation that "flows" from what they are given.

No slackers or shortcuts allowed! Do not accept a paper to which the student has added only a sentence or two. Five full sentences in the second paragraph, including the one given, are required.

The first time you use these exercises, you may want to read the two completed samples to the class. Show them that by the time they get to the final sentence, the ideas have also come to a conclusion. This necessity for a concluding thought is illustrated in the samples given. You can complete others yourself as samples, if that would be useful. You may want to post several samples on the bulletin board and allow students to look at them as they are working on their own papers.

Use these exercises wherever and whenever they fit into your own writing lessons.

Variations

1. Give copies of the *same* page to all members of the class. After they write, have a number of students read their papers aloud. Point out the variety of responses created by different authors.
2. Give copies of *different* pages to all members of the class. After they write, have a number of students read their papers aloud. Discuss each paper in terms of logical continuation and ending, as well as clarity of writing.
3. Have copies of *different* pages available to students to use for "extra credit" when they are finished with other class assignments. Students may select the ones they want to do from your stack of reproduced copies. (These exercises are a good length for moments that need to be filled; they also can be done on an individual basis, and there is a wide choice of topics.)
4. Use these exercises as class "openers." They can be done in just a few minutes, so they can be used as an opening exercise in a class period to focus student attention and to get them quiet and working. You could then collect the exercises and assign written grades.

Grading Tip

Students should write frequently, which means that English teachers are often buried in grading and paperwork. Let students know that one of every three (or five, or any number) of these exercises will be read word for word and assigned a grade. Decide whether you or the student will select the exercise(s) to be graded, according to what suits your classes best.

The result, we hope, will be a maximum amount of student writing with a reasonable amount of teacher reading and grading.

37. To Stay or Not to Stay?

Janice was often asked to stay home in the evening when her parents worked late. Her grandmother lived with the family and might need Janice's help. Janice was glad to help but wanted time with her friends, too. She loved her grandmother, but she didn't want to feel "tied down."

One evening when Janice and her grandmother were home alone, Janice got a phone call inviting her to a party just down the block. She . . .



51. Lucky Omar

Omar burst into class one morning, excited and laughing. Since he was usually rather quiet, the class was surprised. Omar announced that his father had won several million dollars in the state lottery two days earlier! The class thought he was playing a trick on them and started to tease him about his story.

Omar said he could prove it to the class and pulled a newspaper out of his notebook. He . . .

