

Setting Up a Writing Center

As you set up your classroom, there are many things you can do to facilitate writing and writing activities. Use the suggestions below to enrich the writing environment of your classroom.

Writing in the World

Set aside a bulletin board in your classroom to display a variety of writing. You can display newspaper and magazine articles, brochures, letters, reviews, and essays that are persuasive, narrative, and expository in nature. Discussing these different types of writing can reinforce the lessons you are teaching. These writing samples can also provide writing and discussion topics.

Resources and Materials

Reserve a table or countertop in your classroom for writing resources and materials. This collection can include newspapers, magazines, reports, essays, encyclopedias, and a computer with Internet access (used under the supervision of the teacher).

A dictionary and thesaurus are excellent resources for students working to improve their writing. Set up assignments in which students must use a dictionary to determine a definition. Create an assignment in which students need a thesaurus to select new words in order to enhance their writing.

Progress and Assessment

Portfolios are a great way to document the students' growth and achievement in the writing process. Portfolios can easily be made by writing students' names on individual manila or pocket folders and placing writing samples inside. Assemble portfolios at the beginning of the school year so that you can gather many samples over time. Keep the portfolios accessible for both the teacher and students. Do not store them in students' desks, as they can easily be lost. Acknowledge progress and praise student work regularly.

Assessment is critical in this unit. Assessment needs to take place at various stages of writing. Rubrics have been included in the assessment section of this book (pages 19–20). Completed rubrics can also be inserted in the student portfolios to show progress. Writing samples are also included (pages 22–24) to use as guides for different levels of writing. The rubrics and samples can help you determine the stage and level of each student. It also can be helpful to the student to self-grade and conference with the teacher when needed.

Setting Up a Writing Center *(cont.)*

There are many activities and exercises you can incorporate into your writing center. These activities can be done independently or in small groups.

Daily Writing Exercises

Keep a list of issues and current events available at the writing center. Each day, allow time for students to write about one of these topics. These daily writing activities provide practice and experience, and do not need to be graded. This writing can be completed individually, with a partner, in a small group, or as a class.

Journals

Journal writing is an easy way to get students to write daily. It also allows them to write about familiar and favorite subjects—themselves! Journals are easy and inexpensive to make. Simply staple writing pages inside two pieces of construction paper or buy a small notebook for each student. Provide a journal topic daily and post it in the writing center. You might also ask students for suggestions for the topic of the day. Students love to be in charge.

Word Walls

Designate an area of your wall space as a “word wall.” This is a vital tool for students. It can help them get over the speed bumps of spelling and writing specific words. Word walls can be hung around the room on large sheets of laminated construction paper. You can also set up another word wall to hold theme-specific words to increase students’ vocabulary on subjects you are studying. Add new words to the wall every day. Allow students to add new words, too.

Writing Collection

Bring in a variety of writing samples for students to see. They can be posted on a bulletin board or collected in a tub or box. This collection can include letters, newspaper articles, postcards, notes, business letters, recipes, printed e-mails, business reports, calendars, brochures, menus, receipts, and more. Discuss the different types of writing. Ask students to locate as many different samples of writing as possible.

Student Dictionaries

Make a dictionary for each student. Encourage students to record new words in it. Invite students to look up these words in a dictionary and record the definitions in their own dictionaries.

Graphic Organizer: Problem/Solution

Problem:

Who: _____

What: _____

Why: _____

Proposed Solutions:

1. _____

2. _____

3. _____

Other Possible Solutions:

Proposed End Results:

Sample Essay #2

Simply Fun

Entertainment usually is connected to spending money. Going to the movies, bowling, playing miniature golf, and visiting arcades all cost money. You might go on a trip with your family and stay in a hotel, or visit an amusement park. Imagine you and your family are visiting relatives in their cabin in the woods. There is electric light, but no television, no stereo, and no video games. There is a pad of plain paper, a box of crayons, and scissors. Your four-year-old cousin is bored and you are given the job of entertaining him.

Question:

How do you think you can have fun without money, TV, or video games?

Directions:

Think of how you can entertain your cousin and have fun while doing it. Use your imagination to come up with activities that you will both enjoy. You can go outside, but you are in the woods—so no rollerblading or skate boarding!

Simply Fun

Taking my four-year-old cousin to my grandmother's house was very challenging. She lives in a cabin and doesn't have television, video games, or even a computer! My cousin is nice but often gets bored and can become really difficult.

When we woke up in the morning I decided to take my cousin outside for a nature walk. We walked for a long time and played the "I Spy" game. It was fun and then we made our way back to the cabin.

My grandmother fed us lunch and then we helped her make cookies. She let us cut and decorate them however we wanted to. I made funny faces on mine with colored frosting and decorations. My cousin made his with lots of frosting and sprinkles. We were so proud of our cookies.

Later that day we decided to make our grandmother a card for letting us stay with her. We decorated the card with crayons, and then we went outside and collected some flowers and leaves. Our card was so special that it almost made grandma cry.

Going to my grandma's and keeping my cousin entertained was not as hard as I thought. In fact, it was really fun! I can't wait until we go back again!

Online School

Your school district has decided to go entirely online. You will take your classes at home, on your computer, with one teacher able to teach your entire grade level at one time. You will be able to ask questions using your keyboard, and the teacher will be able to answer immediately. Anybody without a computer will be able to borrow one from the district for the school year. You will do your homework online and will have to send it to your teacher before the next school day. All communication will be done online, and each teacher will have an e-mail address if you or your parents want to discuss something. All textbooks will be online, so losing or damaging books will not be a problem. The school district will be able to save a large sum of money on buildings and equipment.



Question:

Would you like to attend an online school?



Directions:

Think about what an online school would mean for you. Imagine doing all your schoolwork at home. How would your relationships with teachers and friends be affected? Explain why you like this idea or not. Be specific and give examples.

Phobias

A phobia is an intense fear of a specific object, situation, or activity. Often, the name of the phobia contains the name of the fear itself. For example, aerophobia is the fear of flying; aquaphobia is the fear of water; zoophobia is the fear of animals; and phobophobia is the fear of phobias!

Many people have fears, but a phobia is a fear that affects how a person lives. People who do not like to travel by airplane may do it anyway. But a person with aerophobia will find another way to travel, no matter how inconvenient it might be.



Question:

What affect might a phobia have on a person's life?



Directions:

Think about your fears. Are any of them phobias? If so, explain how the phobia affects the way you live. If not, give an example of something you are afraid of and how you keep that fear from becoming a phobia.

Name in Print

Every year encyclopedias add new entries based on things that have happened during that year. They may be entries for new inventions, people who have made news, places of interest, or newsworthy events.

Imagine a year in the future when you have become an entry in that year's encyclopedia. Something big must have happened to earn your name in print!



Question:

Why are you in the encyclopedia?



Directions:

Think about your plans for the future and why they might lead to you becoming a newsworthy person. Write about your future accomplishments, giving details about how you are going to make your plans a reality.