

# 5 Tips for Helping Kids to Write

When they're stuck...

plus tips to hone their skills!

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## ***"Mom, I don't know what to write!"***

Have you ever heard that in your homeschool? Today I have five ways you can help kids when they are feeling stuck with their writing.

We've been using a **writing workshop** for a couple of years now. Sometimes the kids are highly motivated and have lots of ideas about what to write. Other times, they are stuck and don't know what to write. I find this especially true if we have had a break from our regular writing routine.

This was the case for DD a week or so ago. She just finished her research paper and was at loose ends, not knowing just what to write. (I'll tell you just what I did further down in this post!)

I wanted to share some of the strategies I use when the kids are feeling stuck.

I have a number of resources I turn to when they don't know quite what to write:

### **Tip 1: Give them different writing genre options**

1. Sometimes I pull out a list of all the **writing genre options**. I remind them that they are not limited to writing stories. They can

- write a letter,
- create a comic book,
- write a Wikipedia entry about an animal, famous person, event, battle etc.,
- create a travel brochure,
- write jokes and riddles (a favorite of my kids at the moment)
- You can print this out – see page 13 below.

Types of Writing 

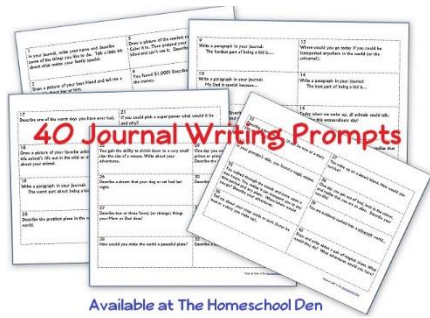
Fiction	Non-Fiction
Adventure	Biography
Fantasy	Letter, email
Realistic Fiction	Journal/Diary
Science Fiction	Memoir, Autobiography
Myth	Guidebook
Fable	Review (movie, book, etc.)
Mystery	Persuasive writing
Historical Novel	Travel Brochure
Comic Book	Speech
Crime Novel	Procedural Writing (How to...)
Graphic Novel	Recipes
Thriller	Magazine Article
Folktales	Drama
Poetry	Play
Dystopia	Paranormal

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### **Tip 2: Let them browse through different writing prompts**

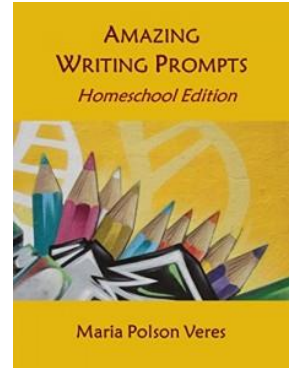
2. At times, I have given the kids **writing prompts**. I see this as just another tool for getting their creative juices flowing. I don't actually "assign" them anything, I just let them browse through the prompts and choose what resonates with them.



I have a [FREE set of 40 Journal Writing Prompts](#) that my girls really enjoyed. These are free over at this post:

I also highly recommend the [Amazing Writing Prompts - Homeschool Edition](#).

(affiliate link) This e-book was written by a fellow homeschool Mom. I purchased it a couple of weeks ago and my daughter \*LOVES\* these prompts at the moment!! She's doing several a day.

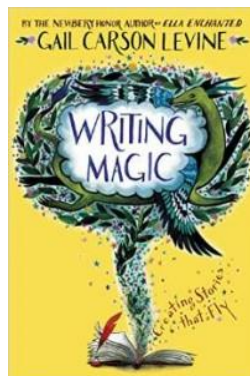


A year or so ago, DD's “go to” writing resource, [Unjournaling: Daily Writing Exercises That Are Not Personal, Not Introspective, Not Boring!](#) (affiliate link).

### Tip 3: Have the kids read about writing!

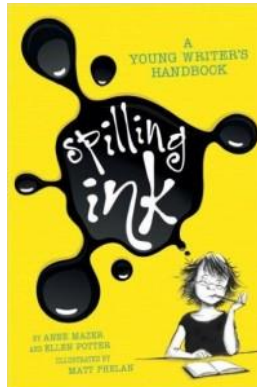
3. Sometimes I have had the kids read books about writing. My older two have both read:

- [Writing Magic: Creating Stories that Fly](#) (affiliate link)-- My daughter loved Gail Carson Levine's novels (such as [Ella Enchanted](#)- affiliate link) and was excited to read this book. Ms. Levine shows how you can get terrific ideas for stories, invent great beginnings and endings, write sparkling dialogue, develop memorable characters—and much, much more. She advises you about what to do when you feel stuck—and how to use helpful criticism. Best of all, she offers writing exercises that will set your imagination on fire.



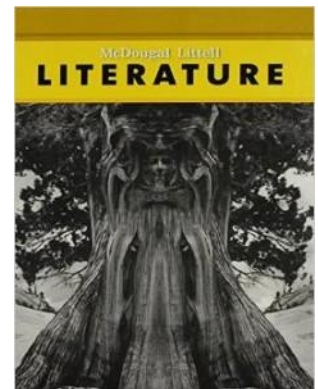
- [Spilling Ink: A Young Writer's Handbook](#) — (affiliate link) This is another guidebook for young writers. The authors mix inspirational anecdotes with

practical guidance on how to find a voice, develop characters and plot, make revisions, and overcome writer's block. Fun writing prompts will help young writers jump-start their own projects



- Last year, I had my older two read from Literature books, These books that have **reading selection from all genres** and **touch on different literary devices and techniques**. DD read through 4 giant Lit books last year! LD read one book and half of another. And ED (my youngest) read half of her Lit book. We would read for just 10-minutes a day (at the beginning of our writing workshop), but the kids enjoyed the selections so much they would read at other times throughout the day too!

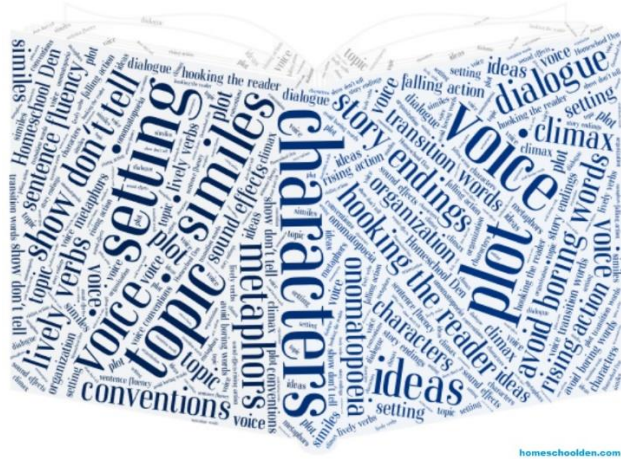
DD started with: [McDougal Littell Literature Yellow Level](#) (*affiliate link*) and LD read [McDougal Littell Literature \(green – Gr. 8\)](#) (*affiliate link*) before moving on to the next level.



## Tip 4: Writing Mini-Lessons

4. **Writing Mini-Lessons** can help the kids really hone their skills on a particular writing skill or technique.

**What is a writing mini-lesson?** I find a short book (usually children's literature, but a short story or a passage from a book would work as well) and **read it aloud**. Then I highlight a writing skill or technique from that book.



**What kinds of Mini-Lessons are there?** Well, the possibilities are endless, but here are a handful of lessons we might cover (choose one to focus on).

- Finding a topic to write about
- Creating Writer's Notebooks (for gathering ideas, memories, life events for future stories)
- Focus the story (Don't have the story idea too broad and big)
- Favorite Leads — How to Open the Story
- Hooking the reader
- Great beginnings can start with a picture, dialogue, action, question, interesting fact
- Developing suspense or anticipation in writing
- Lively, vivid verbs
- Show, Don't Tell — Don't write "he was scared..." instead write, "His eyes bulged. His breath caught. His hand went to his mouth to stop him from screaming."
- Clarity in writing
- What do feelings look like? Angry — red in the face, clenched hands (etc.)
- Avoid boring, overused words (said, went)
- Similes, Metaphors or Onomatopoeia

All this would take 10 or maybe 15 minutes. Sometimes I have given the kids actual writing assignments based on the skill we've highlighted... though normally I tell them this is optional and that if they have their own writing project, they can simply work on that!!

Once we all grab our writing journals, I'll suggest they keep the lesson in mind as they do their own writing.

I will link to many of the Writing Mini-Lessons we've done in the past at the bottom of this post!



## Tip 5: Have a Consistent, Regular Writing Routine!

5. Even though this is the last tip, this I think is the most important! Have a consistent, regular **writing routine**. Here are what some famous authors have said about their writing routines:

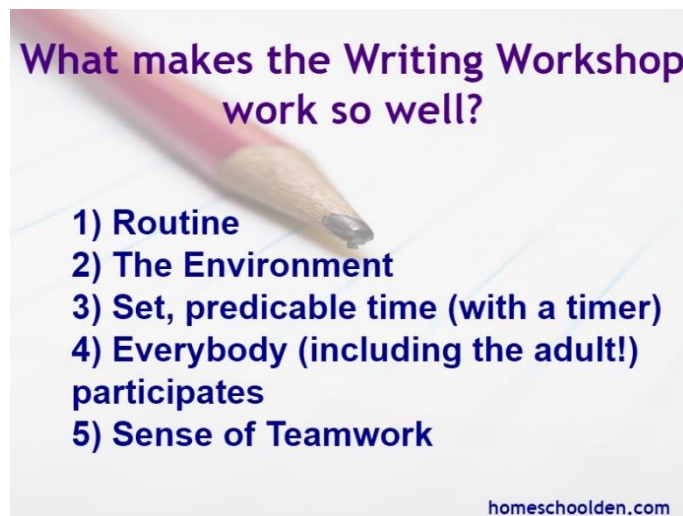
**E.B. White:** “A writer who waits for ideal conditions under which to work will die without putting a word on paper.”

**Haruki Murakami:** “The repetition itself becomes the important thing.”

**Ernest Hemingway:** “I write every morning.”

**Khaled Housseni:** “You have to write whether you feel like it or not.”

Writers have come up with routines that works for them. Mark Twain, George Orwell, Edith Wharton, Woody Allen and Marcel Proust all wrote while lying down in bed or lounging on a sofa. On the other hands, Hemingway, Charles Dickens, Virginia Woolf, Lewis Carroll, and Philip Roth all wrote while standing up!



We have come up with a writing routine that works for our family. You could try this and tweak it to work for your family.

- Have the kids **gather their materials** for Writing Workshop (or whatever you choose to call it)... journal, date stamp, pencil/s, books, etc.
- Do a 10-minute **mini-lesson** or their reading (about writing).
- Set the timer for 10 minutes and **write in silence**. (We started with 10 minutes and built up slowly from there.) We now write for 25 minutes, but we built up our writing time slowly.
- Make the **rules** about writing time very, very clear.
  - No talking
  - No asking about spelling
  - No moving about

- No asking how much time is on the timer!
- Or whatever works for your family!!
- **Write with the kids!** It's important that we adults model writing. They can see the struggles and triumphs we have as we go through the same writing process! Since I also use this time to write, I make it clear that this is my time to be creative as well. :)
- Allow time at the end for everyone to **share**. This has been quite a powerful part of our writing workshop. Over the past couple of years, we have all had days when we've been moved emotionally but what we've written.

## **Bonus Tip! Writing Curriculum**

Most homeschool families I know use a writing curriculum that they have purchased. The most popular writing curriculum (at least from what I've heard), is IEW - Institute for Excellence in Writing. We haven't used it ourselves, but several of my closest homeschool friends have used it with great success.

I also know several families who have used Cover Story for middle school. We have been using that this semester. We don't use it daily (because we still have our Writing Workshop 2 or 3 times a week), but the kids are enjoying the quirky humor and engaging video lessons.

At the moment we are taking a break from Cover Story because my older two are doing research papers. My son has been really engaged by his topic -- WWI. My youngest has been doing projects on the ancient world.

Anyway, all that is to say that I have found that **lots of different methods and approaches have worked for writing time**. Don't be afraid to change it up!

### **Some of the different writing projects we've used have included**

- portfolio projects
- poster/research projects
- poetry unit
- research papers
- creative writing (like our Scary Stories around Halloween)
- but most of the time we have a daily writing workshop

That about wraps up our Writing Tips for today! I hope you've gotten something helpful from this post!

See you again soon here or over at our [Homeschool Den Facebook Page](#). Don't forget to [Subscribe to our Homeschool Den Newsletter](#)! Be sure to check out what's available in [Our Store](#)! ~Liesl

*Disclosure: Please note that some of the links in this pdf are affiliate links, and at no additional cost to you, I will earn a commission if you decide to make a purchase.*

**Do you want to learn more about starting your own Homeschool Writing Workshop? Here are some related posts:**

- [Creating a Homeschool Writing Workshop – Post #1 — How/Why we needed a change in our writing program](#)
- [Creating a Homeschool Writing Workshop – Post #2: Creating a Writing Workshop Area and Materials to Have on Hand](#)
- [Creating a Writing Workshop Post #3: This post is about Mini-Lessons during writing time, mentor texts and includes reviews of 8 or 9 writing books that you might find helpful.](#)
- [Writing Resource Pack: This is a post about the 30-page pack](#) I made for our writing workshop. Reference pages on the 6 +1 Writing Traits, Mini-Lessons, the types of writing, creating a powerful beginning, techniques for ending a story/paper, and so forth. (These writing resources are free to download.)



- [Writing Workshop: Dr. Seuss Style:](#) The kids and I had fun writing in the style of Dr. Seuss!
- [Biography Research Paper Resource Pack](#)



- [Wonderful Free Writing Resource for Young Writers](#)





- [Practical Pointers for Working with a Reluctant Writer \(or any Writer\)](#)
- [Writing Activity to Spark Kids' Imagination!](#)
- [40 Journal Writing Prompts \(Free Printable\)](#)
- [Animal Portfolio Project:](#) writing, art and geography activities that go with any animals... With many activities to choose from. Writing activities include both fiction and non-fiction suggestions such as
  - Write a speech or a letter to the president on why your animal needs protection in the wild.
  - Menu: Create a humorous menu at a restaurant where your animals would like to eat.
- [WWII Portfolio Project](#)



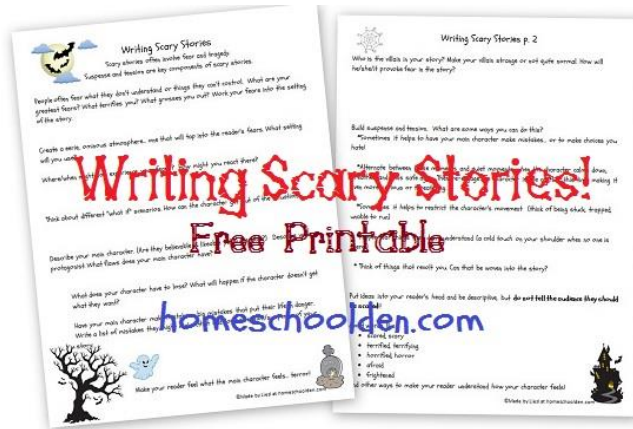
- [Writing Workshop: What We're Doing for Writing This Fall](#)
- [Writing Workshop Rules!](#) Why the Writing Workshop continues to work so well in our homeschool.

### Mini-Lessons to Use in a Writing Workshop:

1. [What makes a good book or story?](#)
2. [Make your story come alive with details and description.](#)
3. [Creating Interesting Characters](#)
4. [Story Openings: Set the mood or feeling of your story](#)
5. [Gathering story ideas from your own life](#)
6. [Alliteration and more](#)
7. [MiniLesson – Describing in Detail – Adding Details Exercise - Fun Activity!](#) (Don't miss this one, the kids LOVED this activity!!)
8. [Writing Workshop: Conflict in Literature \(Man vs. Man, Man vs. Self, etc\)](#)
9. [Writing Workshop Mini-Lesson: Rules for Writing and the Story Writing Process](#) — Have your kids read *the Plot Chicken*? We started our Writing Workshop this year off with this book. What a great buk, buk!! In fact, I liked it so much that I created a chicken writing rules printable to go along with the book!

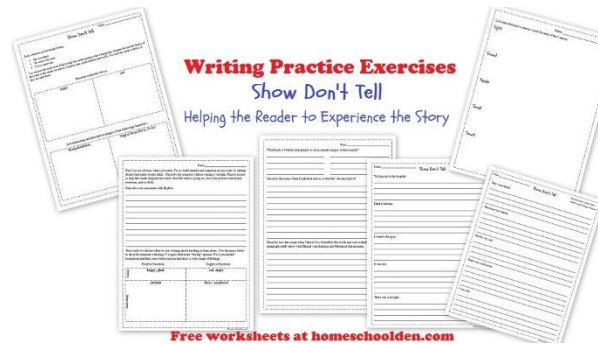


## 10. [Writing Scary Stories – Writing Workshop Mini-Lesson](#)

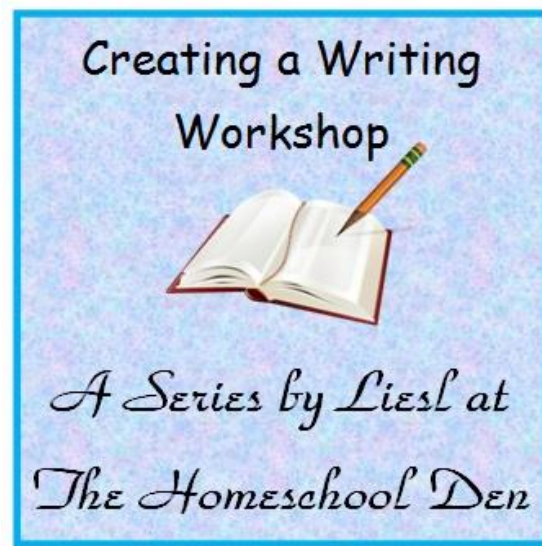


## 11. [Writing Workshop: Depth and Complexity Icons](#)

## 12. [Writing: Show Don't Tell Practice Worksheets \(Free Packet\)](#)



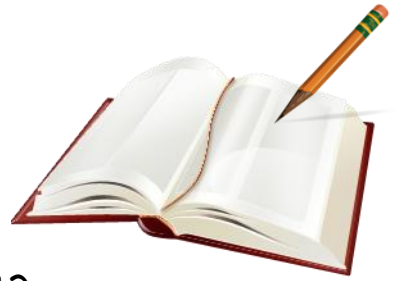
This is a 30-page resource pack  
I made for our homeschool  
writing workshop.



This packet goes along with the series I wrote over on my blog.  
Creating a Writing Workshop



# Writing



What do you like to read? What kind of book is it?

What type of writing do you typically choose to do?

What are some of the different types of writing you've encountered?

# Types of Writing



Fiction	Non-Fiction
Adventure	Biography
Fantasy	Letter, email
Realistic Fiction	Journal/Diary
Science Fiction	Memoir, Autobiography
Myth	Guidebook
Fable	Review (movie, book, etc.)
Mystery	Persuasive writing
Historical Novel	Travel Brochure
Comic Book	Speech
Crime Novel	Procedural Writing (How to...)
Graphic Novel	Recipes
Thriller	Magazine Article
Folktales	Drama
Poetry	Play
Dystopia	Paranormal





# Writing - Now What?!

Feeling stuck today? See if this list helps an idea come to mind...

- ✧ Pull out your writing notebook. Look over your writing treasure box -- the memories, experiences, opinions, story ideas that you've jotted down. You have your own personal areas of expertise; draw on those.
- ✧ Read a book and see if that reminds you of something or gives you a story idea.
- ✧ Look at your list of the types of writing. Try writing in a different genre (write a science fiction story, a fable, a play, a comic strip).
- ✧ Write a letter to Grandma and Grandpa or to your friend. (Use the correct letter format.)
- ✧ Free write (whatever comes to mind, even if it's nonsense)
- ✧ Create a brochure.
- ✧ Create a poster.
- ✧ Research and animal, creature, event, place you're interested in.
- ✧ Come up with lists.
- ✧ Take a story you've written already - revise it and publish it.

- ✧ Go to the story starter notebook and look through the writing prompts. See if anything sounds like a fun topic.
- ✧ Cut out pictures that you find inspiring to write about and glue them in your writing journal.
- ✧ Throw the Story Cubes and see if you can write a story based on the pictures you roll.
- ✧ Write a poem or a haiku.
- ✧ Create an animal information card.
- ✧ Write a biography -- an article about someone famous.
- ✧ Create an advertisement for a food or toy. Create a funny or catchy phrase.
- ✧ Write a persuasive piece... take a topic and try to convince your reader that you are right.
- ✧ Write a blog entry.
- ✧ Write directions for a game.
- ✧ Write a manual or handbook.
- ✧ Create a recipe.
- ✧ Write something from someone else's perspective. (Write a story written from a kitty's perspective or from a snake's perspective, for example.)

# When you Begin Writing

Create an opening that grabs the reader's attention. Make sure your audience wants to read more!



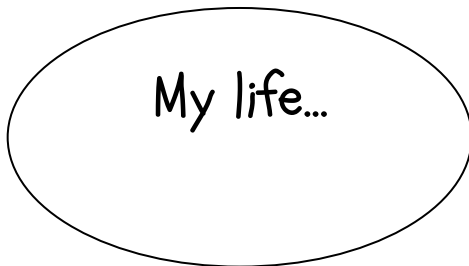
## Different techniques for opening a story:

- ❖ Begin with a picture or unusual image. (Describe)
- ❖ Start with dialogue (Think of *Charlotte's Web*.)
- ❖ Action
- ❖ A thought or feeling
- ❖ Start with a question
- ❖ Have an interesting fact
- ❖ Use a sound effect (onomatopoeia)
- ❖ Flashback to an earlier time
- ❖ A strong persuasive statement
- ❖ Set up the action of a story in just a few short sentences.
- ❖ Mislead the reader by setting up certain expectations and then surprising them!
- ❖ A shocking statement.
- ❖ A humorous statement.

Also, remember a story starts as close to the main event as possible.

Start with a small topic, idea or event...

This topic is too big:

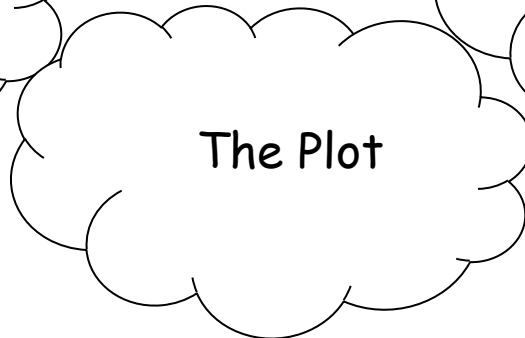
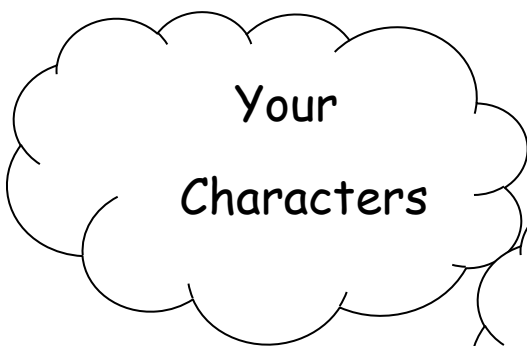


This sounds intriguing:



Make sure you have a manageable topic!

One last thing to think about as you begin writing...



# Characters

Think about your Main Character:

What is his/her/its name?

What does he/she/it look like? What does he wear? What does she carry?  
Does it have any special belongings?

How old is he/she/it?

Is it feeling well?

What does he eat? Is she on a special diet?

How does it move? fast? slow?

Is it a happy, sad, funny character?

Where does he/she/it live?

Think about other things you'd want to know about him/her/it and include those details.

Descriptive details make your character more interesting.



# Setting

Think about the time and place of your story:

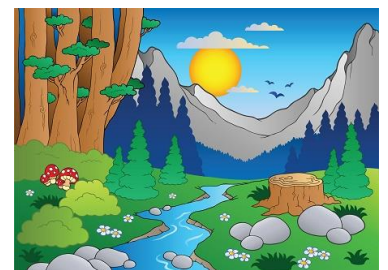
Use your imagination and move around in your setting.

What does your setting look like? What time of day is it? What season is it?

What colors do you see?

Do you smell anything? Are there flowers? Is there something that smells bad?

Is it cold/hot? humid? dry? raining? snowing?

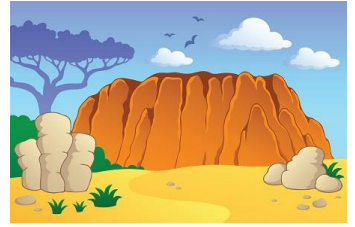




Is it dark? a bright sunny day? breezy? stuffy (like in an attic?)

Do you hear any noises? Are they loud or soft? creepy? beautiful?

Pretend you are touching things in your setting? How do they feel? Are things smooth, rough, wet, slimy, dry, course?



Remember to think about all five senses when you're writing: What do you see? hear? smell? taste? feel?

# Plot

Stir things up in your story -- create conflict, problems and intrigue that makes your reader want to keep reading. Think about the action and adventure in your story. Make the problems puzzling so your reader wants (needs!) to know how they are solved! Problems pack a story full of adventure.

\*getting lost, solving a mystery, overcoming a conflict with friends, running into trouble, losing something precious, being injured and/or helpless...

\*What would add adventure or mystery to the story?

\*Create action in your story.

\*Think about your character's emotions (how a character is feeling. Show the character's emotions (stomping if she's angry, jumping in the air if she's happy...). Show how the character's emotion changes over time.

# Writing



As you've seen there are lots of types of writing. Let's take a closer look at how some authors have set up their stories.

Our first step is going to look at some of the books we have around the room. (Pick a few and decide on...)

Genre:

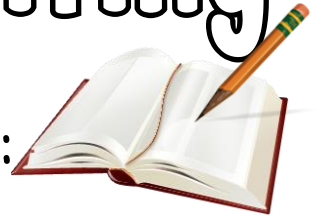
Purpose:

How did the author begin the story? Did it grab your attention?

Who is the audience?

# Mini Lessons on Writing

## Various Writing Topics to Cover This Year:



- Finding a topic
- Coming up with story ideas
- writer's notebooks (for gathering ideas)
- Limit the topic
- Focus the story (Don't have the story idea too broad and big)
- Favorite Leads -- Opening the Story
- Hooking the reader
- Great beginnings can start with a picture, dialogue, action, question, interesting fact
- Lively, vivid verbs
- Clarity in writing
- Dazzling details -- Add details to one of these sentences to make it more engaging: The room was messy. The storm was huge. The food was good. It was a spooky room.
- Show, Don't Tell -- Don't write he was scared... instead say, "His eyes bulged. His breath caught. He started dancing and hopping around on one foot."
- Avoid boring, overused words (said, went)
- Elaborative Detail - describe things using the various senses
- What do feelings look like? Angry -- red in the face, clenched hands (etc.)
- Developing suspense or anticipation in writing
- Story structure - main event
- Get inside the character's head
- Sharpen the picture
  - candy —→ the green M&Ms
  - dog —→ a brown and white St. Bernard

- Metaphors
- Similes
- onomatopoeia
- Dialogue
- Story Endings
- Transition words



## Character/Problem/Solution Narrative

This is a story about \_\_\_\_\_.  
main character's name

The problem was that \_\_\_\_\_  
describe the problem

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The problem was solved when \_\_\_\_\_  
tell how the main character solved the problem

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## Personal Experience Narrative

This is a story that describes \_\_\_\_\_.  
an experience or place

First, \_\_\_\_\_  
a main idea

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Next, \_\_\_\_\_  
another main idea

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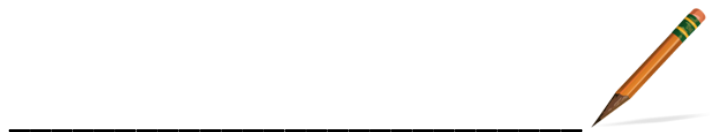
Next, \_\_\_\_\_  
another main idea

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## Expository Piece

This is a story gives information about \_\_\_\_\_  
the topic

Including, \_\_\_\_\_  
a main idea

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another main idea

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---

---

and, \_\_\_\_\_  
a main idea

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# Six Writing Traits +1






Now that we've looked at some different types of writing, we're going to look at some of the traits that make for good writing.

 <b>Ideas</b>	<p>Good writing begins with good ideas and a knowledge of the topic. A good idea is clear, interesting and original. Have a clear point, message, theme or story line backed by carefully chosen details and supportive information.</p>
 <b>Organization</b>	<p>Good writing is organized in a way that helps the reader understand the information and follow what the writer is saying. Logical order/sequence. Story has a beginning, middle and end.</p>
 <b>Word Choice</b>	<p>Good writers choose their words carefully. They use vivid details that help the reader see what you are talking about. The language, phrasing and words help get your point across.</p>
 <b>Voice</b>	<p>Good writers let their personality shine through. Connect with the reader; have a sense of your audience. You want your writing to sound like you. Write honestly and from the heart.</p>
 <b>Sentence Fluency</b>	<p>Good writers make their writing flow by using complete and varied sentences. You want your writing to flow and be easy to follow. Rhythm and flow of the writing.</p>
<p>, " " . ! '</p> <b>Conventions</b>	<p>Good writers follow the rules or conventions of writing -- using proper punctuation, capital letters, spelling, grammar and so forth.</p>
 <b>Presentation</b>	<p>Good writers publish their best pieces and make it look appealing. Pay attention to the form and layout of the text. You may want to do this with a few of your best pieces of writing.</p>

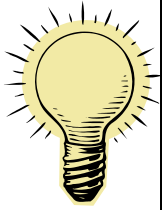
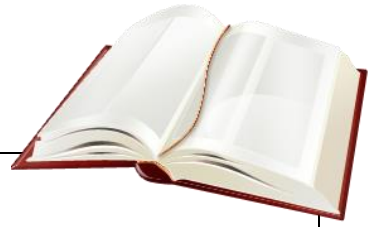
# Six Writing Traits +1



Now that we've looked at some different types of writing, we're going to look at some of the traits that make for good writing. Add your own tips below:

 Ideas	
 Organization	
 Word Choice	
 Voice	
 Sentence Fluency	
, " " . ! ' Conventions	
 Presentation	

# Six Writing Traits +1



Ideas



Organization



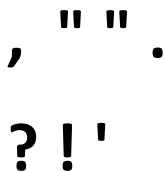
Word Choice



Voice



Sentence Fluency



Conventions



Presentation



Dazzling  
Details

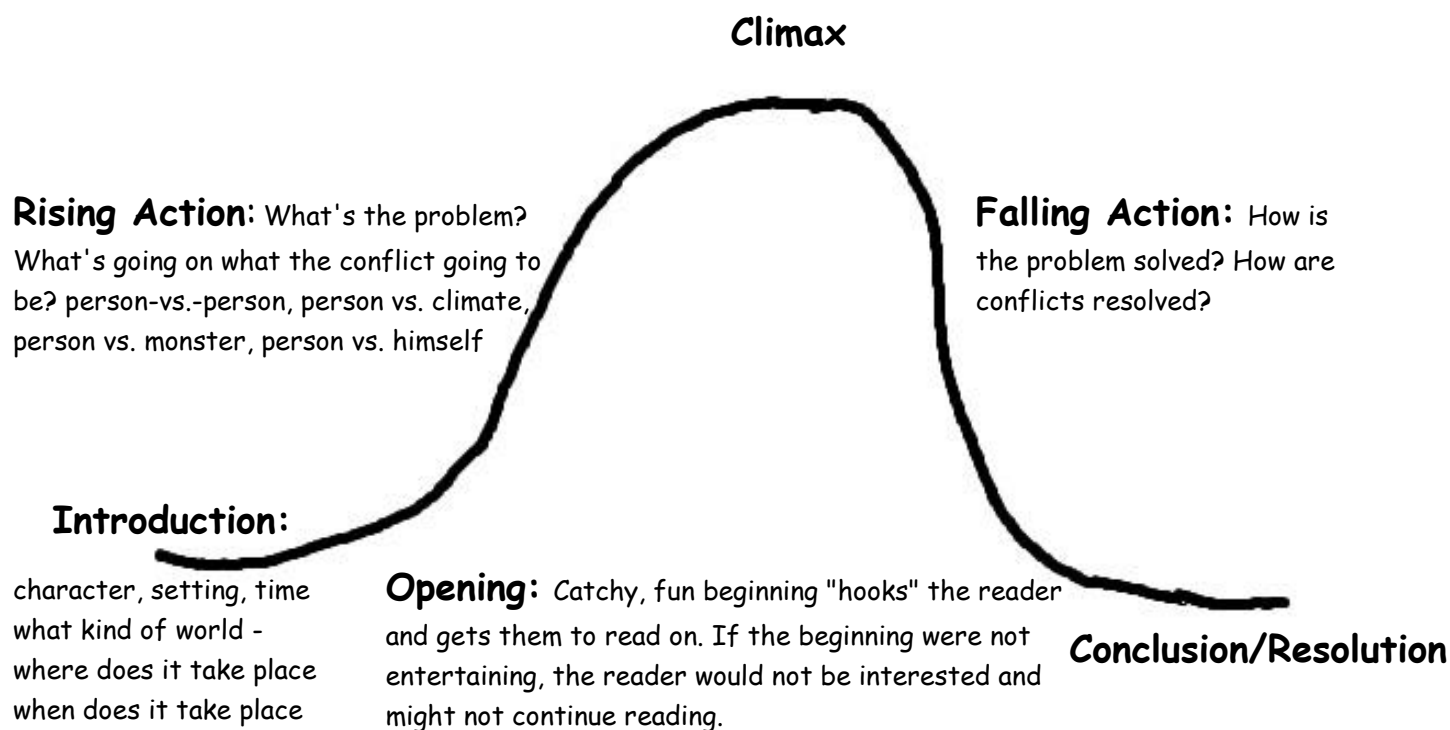
Lively  
Language

# Writing: The Big Picture

Sometimes it really helps to know where your story is going so that it's not just a series of events, actions. It helps to know that many authors rely on a basic pattern or framework.

It's obvious that stories have a beginning, middle and end, right? But there's more to it than that. Good writing has a point or message. Often there is a problem and the tension and anticipation build. Good writers have concrete, vivid details that create a movie in your mind. We want to see the characters grow, change and perhaps learn from their experiences.

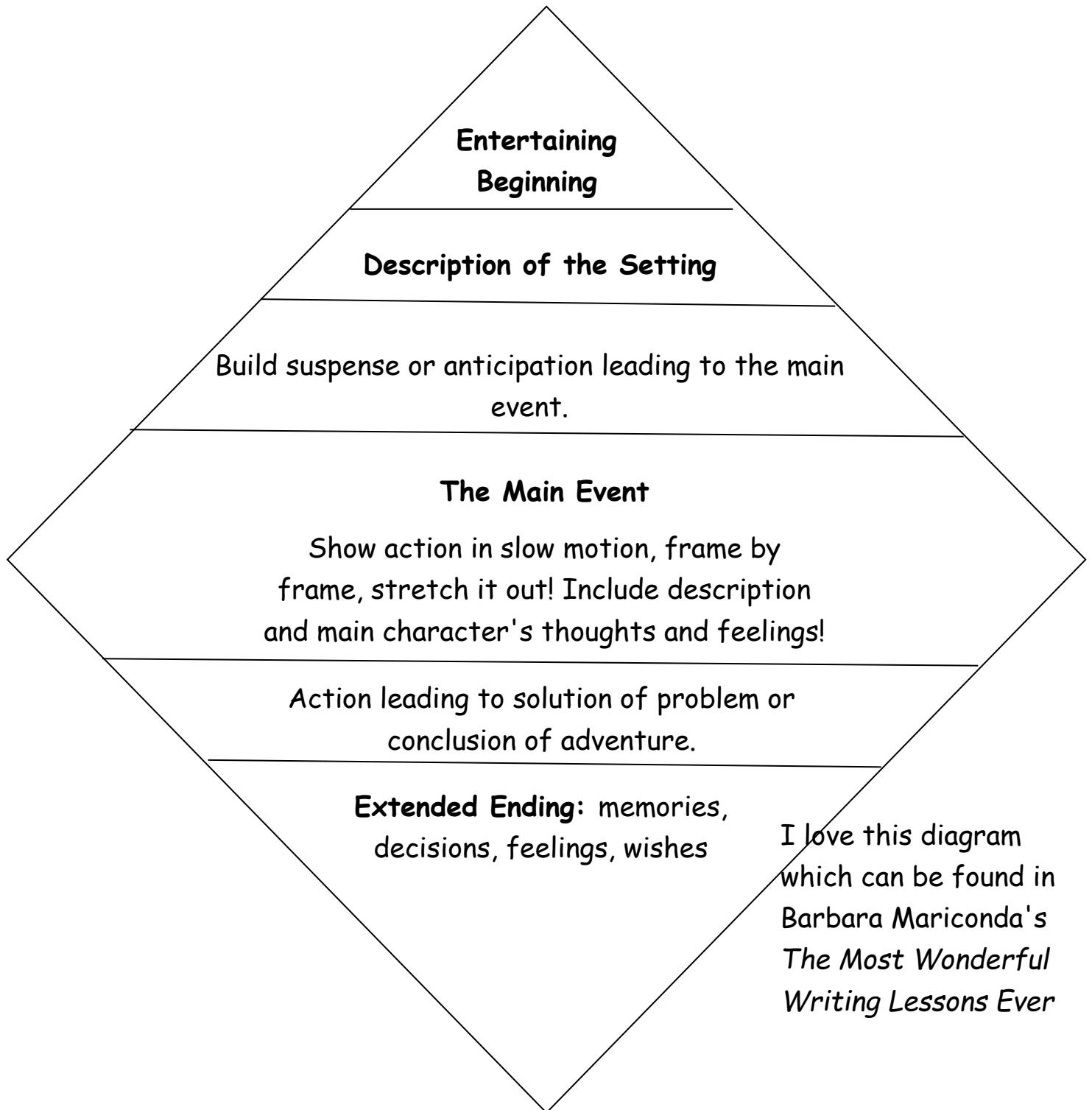
## Story Diagram



Make sure there is suspense, momentum or anticipation to keep the reader engaged. If there is conflict or a problem to be solved, we're often drawn in to the story and to see how things are resolved. We want to see the main character grow or change as a result of the main event. The story should be thought-provoking...

Would you make the same choices the character made?

# Narrative Writing Diagram



I love this diagram  
which can be found in  
Barbara Mariconda's  
*The Most Wonderful  
Writing Lessons Ever*



# Attention grabbing introductions:



Make a good first impression when you begin your stories! Your goal as a writer is to grab your attention, get you excited and build feelings of anticipation.

Put the character in the setting doing, saying or feeling something interesting. The character might do or say something memorable. The opening might reveal what the character is like. Your introduction could start with...

Dialogue

Action

Question

Thoughts and Feelings

Sound Effects

Show the character with a problem doing something interesting.

Begin your story as close to the main event as possible.

If you're going to write a story about a volcanic eruption, don't begin the story the moment you were born.

State the purpose of your story. The quicker you make what is happening clear, the more likely you'll be able to draw your reader into your story.

# Using Descriptive Words and Elaborative Details



Details make writing more interesting.

color	size	material	age
texture	condition	shape	weight
feelings	sounds	facial expression	



See pages 50-52 in *The Most Wonderful Writing Lessons Ever*.

## Show Don't Tell

Use details to create a visual image. Specific details allow the reader to experience and observe the fictional world through the main character's five senses. Use elaborative detail to create a movie in the mind of the reader. So rather than telling the reader, "The room was messy," the author might show how trash was spread all around the room. The room smelled like dirty socks... etc.

## General vs. Specific Adjectives

Use specific not general adjectives.

Words like these mean very little:

nice	pretty	cool	awesome
fantastic	great	scary	beautiful

Show don't tell... describe a face in detail...

Go over How much to tell (p. 49 in The Most Wonderful Writing Lessons)

Go over Using Description Selectively

- Don't have a laundry list a big, green, scary, sad monster
- Don't just add in words -- a very, very, very hot day

Writing emotions -- don't just tell someone -- Fred was sad. Show them... Tears streamed down his pink face. He breathed in giant heaving gulps of air.

Make a chart of what feelings look like (pp. 58-59)

# Features of Non-Fiction Writing

**Types of Print** - Highlighted, italics, underlining and/or bold text -  
Helps the reader identify important words or concepts

**Headlines** - Makes important words and concepts stand out

**Captions** - the words under a picture

**Table of Contents** - helps the reader identify key topics in the text

**Index**-an alphabetical listing of the items in a book and their page number

**Glossary** - an alphabetical list of important words and key terms. It gives the definitions of these terms to help the reader better understand the text

**Charts, Table, Graphs** - Helps the reader compare information and data by presenting it in a visual way

**Lists** - Helps organize information in a quick, concise manner

**Maps** - Helps the reader know where things are in the world

**Labels**-helps the reader identify the picture and its parts

**Diagrams** - helps the reader visualize the text

**Close ups** - Helps the reader see things in small detail

**Cutaways** - Helps the reader see how something works on the inside

**Comparisons** - Helps the reader understand the size of something by comparing it to something familiar

**Photographs** - Helps the reader see exactly what something looks like

**Directions** - Helps the reader understand the steps to follow in the activity, experiment or game

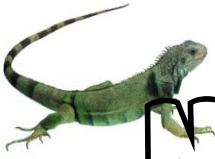


# Non Fiction Features

Find an example of each of the following. Write down the book's title and page number.

Feature	Book Title	Page Number
Types of Print		
Headlines		
Captions		
Table of Contents		
Index		
Glossary		
Charts, Table, Graphs		
Lists		
Maps		
Labels		
Diagrams		
Close ups		
Cutaways		
Comparisons		
Photographs		
Directions		





# Non-Fiction Writing



**Focus:** Make sure your topic or subject is small enough that you can tackle it effectively. You wouldn't want to tackle Ancient Egypt, but you might want to write about the Egyptian death masks.



**Questions:** Spend some time thinking about what you would want to know about your topic. Questioning is at the heart of research. Many authors begin their study with a topic with a question they have. If you ask questions in your writing, you draw the reader in and help place your readers in your writing.

**Hook:** Make sure you connect with your reader right from the beginning. Draw your reader in perhaps with an unusual fact, a question, an emotion. You might want to "share a secret" ... Many people know that xxx, but did you know that also yyy? Start with a rhetorical question (a question that everyone will answer yes or no to.) Use some of the facts you've learned to create a scene. Set the scene -- describe the environment, place or time period in detail.

**Content:** As you are writing, build your content by including rich description. Think about your five senses and include some of those details when writing about your topic. Be sure to search for interesting content. Include a few little-known, unusual or fun facts about your topic.

**Comparisons:** Many times, it is useful to compare and contrast something unknown to something known. For example, you might explain that the world's largest flower has petals the size of dinner plates. These comparisons can help make "boring facts" more interesting. Humor can also help make your content more interesting.

**Examples and Explanations:** Again, by using examples in your writing you help to clarify points that might be new and difficult for your reader to understand. What if your reader doesn't know what the word "omnivore" means? if you offer a quick example of what it eats or explain what the term means, your reader will follow along better.

**Anecdotes:** Use a brief first-hand account to help illustrate a point or explain more about someone's character or experience. If you were writing about tornadoes, it would add a lot to your writing if you were to add in a short description of what happened to your aunt's house during a tornado or to explain how your cousins have to go to a "safe spot" in their house when the tornado warning goes off and to explain where that is.

**Supporting features:** You may want to include pictures or photos with captions, graphs, charts, diagrams with labels, cutaways, cartoon drawings, time lines, maps and so forth to help your reader visualize things better.

Name: \_\_\_\_\_

# Show Don't Tell: Helping the Reader to Experience the Story

Some sentences are downright boring.

- She was happy.
- He went to the store.
- It was a good day.

You can provide much more detail to help the reader imagine what is happening. Imagine the specific details of the scene so the reader can almost visualize, hear, smell and feel that world. You want the reader to feel as if they are right there, experiencing the story with the descriptions, actions, thoughts and feelings.

Describe someone who is:

angry

sad

List interesting and descriptive images of the following characters:

Rumpelstiltskin

Hagrid from *Harry Potter*

Name: \_\_\_\_\_

What kinds of details help people to form mental images in their minds?

_____	_____
_____	_____
_____	_____
_____	_____

Describe the scene when Cinderella arrives at the ball. Be descriptive!

_____
_____
_____
_____
_____
_____
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_____

Describe how the scene when Hansel was tricked by the witch and was locked in a cage. In this paragraph really show what Hansel was thinking and feeling at that moment.

_____
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_____
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_____
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Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Don't be too obvious when you write. Try to build interest and suspense as you write by adding details that make people think. Describe the situation without stating it outright. Paint a picture to help the reader imagine the scene, describe what is going on, show the person's emotional reactions, and so forth.

Describe your encounter with Bigfoot.

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The words we choose when we are writing can be exciting or hum-drum. Use the space below to describe someone's feelings. I've provided some "boring" options. Now you should brainstorm and find some better choices that show a wide range of feelings:

Positive Emotions		Negative Emotions	
boring	happy, glad,	sad, angry	
	jubilant	fussy, perplexed	
interesting			

Name: \_\_\_\_\_

## Show Don't Tell

DETAILS! Who? When? Why?  
What? How? Feelings, 5 Senses

They were afraid.

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The house was shabby.

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He felt very sad.

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There was a bad storm

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She was sick.

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Name: \_\_\_\_\_

## Show Don't Tell

DETAILS! Who? When? Where? Why?  
What? How? Feelings, 5 Senses

We hurried to the hospital.

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I had a bad day.

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They went to the store.

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It was hot.

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There was a drought.

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Name: \_\_\_\_\_

List some descriptive sensory words for each of the 5 senses:

Sight

Sound

Taste

Smell

Touch



## Sample Answers

Describe someone who is:

angry	sad
red in the face	sobbing, crying, splotched face
pursed lips	watery eyes
frowning	runny nose
eyebrows touching	trembling lip
narrow eyes	hanging head
seething	sniffing
gritting their teeth	red eyes
clenched fists	bloodshot eyes
breathing heavily	shoulders drooped
	holding their head

What kinds of details help people to form mental images in their minds?

Color

Size

Age

Weight

Shape

Condition

Texture

What did you see? Hear? Smell? Taste? Feel?

What expression did they have?

What was he wearing?

## Positive Emotions

## Negative Emotions

boring	happy, glad	sad, angry
interesting	jubilant, invigorated, exuberant, cheerful, ecstatic, overjoyed, proud, relaxed, empowered, calm, appreciated, honored, protected, secure, upbeat, elated, blissful, perky, thrilled, peaceful, chipper,	fussy, perplexed, trapped, upset, worn-out, stressed, morose, overwhelmed, insecure, irritated, betrayed, chastised, agitated, hostile, stubborn, hopeless, humiliated, bereft, crushed, depressed, out-of-control, vulnerable, hesitant, disappointed, grave, troubled

## Sight

Bright, dark, hazy, light, straight, translucent, striped, etc.

## Sound

Bleating, braying, chiming, jangling, roaring, spluttering, splashing, growling, howling, screeching, wailing, whinnying, croaking, sobbing

## Taste

Sour, bitter, dry, salty, stale, spoiled, juicy, sweet, tangy, fishy, chocolatey, spicy,

## Smell

Rotten, dank, new, musty, pungent, putrid, smoky, strong, woody, rainy, decayed, earthy, mildewy

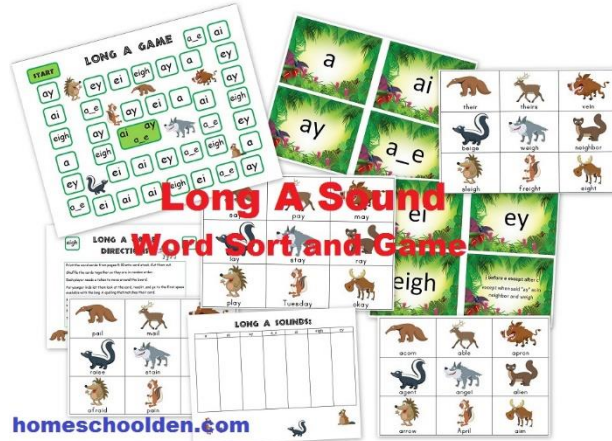
## Touch

Sandy, sticky, rough, smooth, gooey, glassy, gritty, puffy, soft, slimy, flexible, steamy, velvety,

You might be interested in some of our Spelling Games and Word Sort Activities:

## Spelling Activities

- [Long A Sounds /ay/ – a, ai, ay, a-e, ei, eigh, ey –Sorting Cards and Board](#)



### [Game!](#)

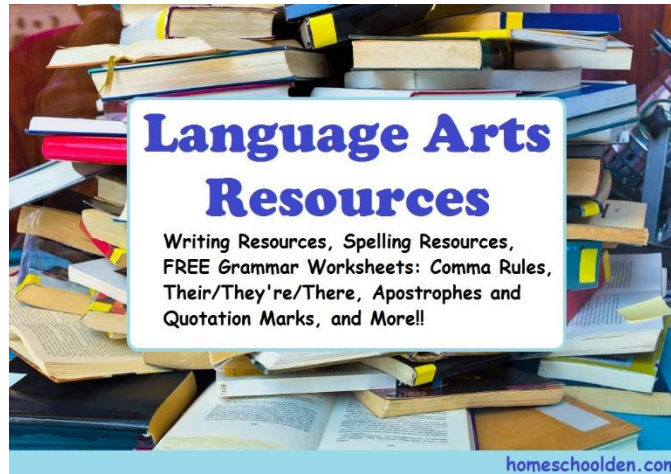
- [ow ou oy oi aw au Word Sort Activities](#)



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Various free grammar worksheets available.

