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Why Write?

Why write? The following story might answer this question:

In Africa, a little boy asked his father if the lion is the king of the jungle. His father replied, "Yes, son, the lion is the king of the jungle." The little boy said to his father, "Then why, when I read a story about a lion and a warrior, does the warrior always win?" The father answered, "When the lion learns to write, the ending will then, and only then, be different."

Writing requires the ability to reason, or think things out. While you and all of your classmates have this ability, lions and other four-legged creatures do not. Thinking and writing give each of you special powers—the ability to explain, describe, analyze, persuade, and, of course, tell a story.

Write Ahead and You

The *Write Ahead* student handbook will help you develop your writing, thinking, and learning skills. Once you get to know this handbook, it will become your most valuable school resource:

Writing Skills Writing is covered in a variety of ways, including how to write paragraphs, essays, and narratives.

Study-Reading Skills The reading strategies included in your handbook will help you read with more purpose.

Learning Skills Thinking clearly, speaking and listening, and taking notes are some of the skills covered in *Write Ahead*.

Editing and Language Skills The "Proofreader's Guide" covers all of the rules for language and grammar.

There's More!

The "Student Almanac" in the back of the handbook includes charts and maps that cover everything from science and math to geography and history. This section truly makes *Write Ahead* an all-school handbook—and your personal learning guide.

"Don't take yourself too seriously. **Good writing can't be forced.**"

—Donald Murray

Traits of Effective Writing

There are six main traits found in the best essays, stories, and reports. (A *trait* is a quality or feature.) Write with these traits in mind, and both you and your readers will be pleased with the results.

STIMULATING IDEAS

Effective writing presents plenty of interesting information. It holds a reader's attention from start to finish and shows that the writer knows a lot about his or her topic.

LOGICAL ORGANIZATION

Good writing has a clearly developed beginning, middle, and ending. The overall organization is logical. It effectively holds the writing together and makes it easy to follow.

ENGAGING VOICE

In the best writing, you can hear the writer's personal voice. Voice is the special way a writer expresses his or her ideas. Writing that has an engaging voice shows that a writer really cares about his or her topic.

ORIGINAL WORD CHOICE

Good writing contains all the right words in all the right places. It includes vivid action verbs (*sizzle, stumble, chop*), specific nouns (*stop-watch, chili, laptop*), and colorful modifiers (*earsplitting, scarlet, steamy*).

EFFECTIVE SENTENCE STYLE

Effective writing flows naturally from sentence to sentence, but it isn't predictable. Sentences vary in length and begin in different ways. Smooth-reading sentences give writing a pleasing rhythm.

CORRECT, ACCURATE COPY

Good writing follows the rules for punctuation, mechanics, usage, and grammar. It is carefully edited to make sure that it is accurate and clear in every way.

Writing Traits in Action

On the following pages, a writing sample is provided for each of the six traits of effective writing.

STIMULATING IDEAS

In the following passage from *Catfish and Mandala* by Andrew X. Pham, the writer describes a low point in his life.

Four months ago, I emerged from Mexico and returned to the Bay Area, jobless and homeless. I did something unthinkable in America: I moved home to my parents. It was the perfect Vietnamese thing to do, fall back into the folds of the clan. Free food, free shelter while you lick your wounds and plot your resurrection. My non-Asian friends pitied me. My Vietnamese-American friends wondered why I hadn't lived at home in the first place; a good son doesn't leave home until he is married. . . .

No one, not my brothers or my best friends, know about my plan to bicycle to Vietnam.

(Pham discusses his difficult return home and gives interesting information about Vietnamese culture. The passage makes a reader want to find out what happens next in Pham's life.)

LOGICAL ORGANIZATION

In this passage from *The Short Sweet Dream* of Eduardo Gutiérrez, Jimmy Breslin captures the drama of an attempted border crossing into Texas from Mexico.

At dawn, the group stopped while the guide looked at his watch and muttered. A truck was supposed to be here, he said. They waited for two hours. Then in the first heat of morning, Silvia walked into a town with her uncle and Moises, Eduardo's cousin, to buy food. Suddenly a white Border Patrol van came onto the street. The three crouched behind bushes—big bushes that could hide them all day, Silvia thought. Some moments later, she heard a sound alongside her. Next to her now was the polished boot of an immigration agent. Several Border Patrol cops with guns in their hands stood over them. They put Silvia, her uncle, and Moises into the van and . . .

(Breslin organizes this scene chronologically (by time), using the following transition words and phrases—"at dawn," "then in the first heat of morning," "suddenly," and "some moments later.")

Selecting Strategies

Teachers usually base their writing assignments on the general subjects that you are studying. For example, if in English class you are reading stories and articles that deal with community life, your teacher may ask you to write an essay about this theme. Your job would be to select a specific topic for the essay.

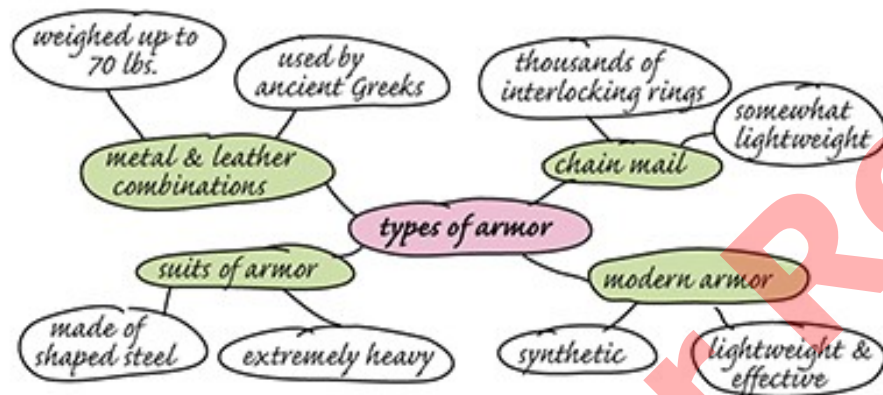
General Subject Area: Community Life

Specific Writing Topic: A New Citizen Watchdog Group

The following strategies—clustering, freewriting, listing, using a checklist, and completing sentences—will help you select worthy topics for your writing.

Clustering

Begin a cluster, or web, by putting the general subject in the middle of the page. Then cluster related words around it, as you see in this model:



✧ After you are finished, review your cluster for an idea that interests you. Write for 3 to 5 minutes about this idea. With any luck, a few specific topics will come to mind as you write.

Freewriting

With a general subject in mind, write quickly for 5 to 8 minutes. Do not stop and think during this time; just keep writing. You will probably discover one or two specific topics as you write.

Listing

As you think about your assignment, freely list ideas that come to mind. Keep your list going for as long as you can. Then look through your list for a few good writing topics.

Using the "Basics of Life" Checklist

This checklist names the categories or groups of things that we need to live a fulfilling life.

acceptance
agriculture
animals
art
books
choices
clothing
community
culture
education
energy
environment
exercise

faith
family
food
freedom
friends
health/medicine
housing
justice
language
laws
lifestyle
love
machines

money
music
nationality
natural resources
neighborhood
plants
rules
safety
science/technology
tools
trade
values
work/play

Here's how this checklist can help you think of writing topics:

- Choose one of the categories: **agriculture**
- Decide how it relates to your assignment: **Write about farming in today's world.**
- List possible topics: **the use of chemical fertilizers; farm life today vs. yesterday; raising buffalo; organic farming**

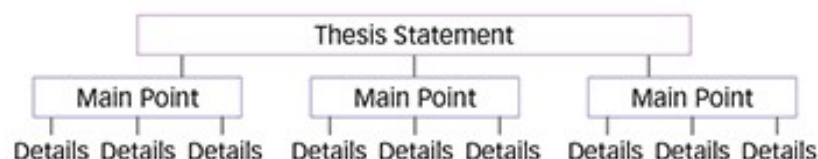
Completing Sentences

To think of writing ideas, complete open-ended sentences in as many ways as you can. Word these sentences so that they relate to your writing assignment. Here are some samples:

I hope our school ... Television is ...
I just learned ... Music can be ...
One place I like ... A good friend will ...

Understanding Explanatory Writing

Basic explanatory writing often follows a specific pattern. It begins with a thesis (a special focus) about the topic, and then provides a series of main points that support the thesis. A variety of details support each main point. This pattern helps writers to fully develop their ideas and readers to better understand the topic.



Types of Explanatory Details

Specific details make explanatory writing truly informative. You should use a variety of details and select them according to your purpose. (The following examples come from the essay on pages 171–172.)

Purpose	Type of Detail	Example
To sound well informed . . .	use facts and statistics .	By the 1950s, an estimated 15 percent of U.S. ironworkers were of Mohawk descent.
To explain words . . .	use definitions .	Ironworkers build the <i>truss</i> , or the framework of a bridge.
To explain concepts . . .	use examples .	The traders ran along log rafts to transport the floating timber downriver.
To connect to life . . .	use anecdotes .	After work, Mohawk workers climbed from span to span atop the bridge for fun and practice.
To appeal to authority . . .	use quotations .	According to historian Robert Venables, "Virtually every skyscraper in New York City has been built by Mohawk and other Iroquois. . . ."
To answer <i>why</i> . . .	use reasons .	By custom, young men of the Mohawk tribes learned to seek adventure and to prove themselves.

Sample Explanatory Essay

In this essay, Bronson Gordon explains the fascinating origins of Native American ironworkers. As you read it, notice how the three parts of the essay—the beginning, the middle, and the ending—work together. (Note: The essay's bibliography page is not shown.)

New York Skywalkers

BEGINNING

A question and explanatory details lead up to the thesis (highlighted in yellow).

What do you picture in your mind when you think of New York City? You probably think of huge skyscrapers towering above busy streets. Tall buildings have come to dominate the skylines of big cities like New York. **However, it may surprise you to know that these skyscrapers would not exist today had it not been for the many Native American ironworkers who helped to build them.**

MIDDLE

Each middle paragraph discusses a different point in history.

By custom, young men of the Mohawk people of northeastern North America learned to seek adventure and to prove themselves. In the 1700s, they worked as fur traders in Quebec, venturing as far west as the Mississippi to sell animal pelts. By the late 1800s, the Mohawks' taste for economic adventure shifted to the lumber trade. The traders ran along log rafts to transport the floating timber downriver. This dangerous task required incredible dexterity and balance.

The courage and agility displayed by Mohawks in the fur and timber trades were on full display when they got their first taste of iron work. In the 1880s, Mohawks were contracted to assist in the construction of iron bridges on the Canadian border near Ontario. Their fellow bridgeworkers noticed the

Using Graphic Organizers

Graphic organizers can help you visualize science topics and break them into their parts. Experiment with these graphic organizers.

Time Line

Mass Extinctions

444 mya	End Ordovician 86 percent species lost
375 mya	Late Devonian 75 percent species lost
251 mya	End Permian 96 percent species lost
200 mya	End Triassic 80 percent species lost
66 mya	End Cretaceous 76 percent species lost
0 mya	Holocene ?? percent species lost

Cause-Effect Chart

Causes

Meteor impact
Volcanism
Hypoxia
Drought
Climate Change

Permian
Extinction

Effects

96 percent ocean extinction
83 percent land extinction
Ecosystem shift
"Disaster" species spread
Rise of dinosaurs/mammals

Features Grid

	Nervous System	Vertebrae	Egg Laying	Homeo-thermic	Care of Young
Mollusks	X		X		
Fish	X	X	X		
Amphibians	X	X	X		
Reptiles	X	X	X	X	
Birds	X	X	X	X	X
Mammals	X	X		X	X

Writing in Social Studies



In Washington, D.C., the Peterson House Museum preserves the bedroom where Abraham Lincoln died. It also includes a five-foot-wide stack of books about Abraham Lincoln, a stack that rises three stories tall. Millions of pages explore all aspects of the life of the 16th president. History and writing truly do go hand in hand.

Writing helps us know what happened in the past and what it means for us in the present. It also helps us know what is happening today. That's why journalism is often called "the first draft of history."

Writing helps you think in all of your social studies classes. And the things you write can begin a whole new history of your own times.

What's Ahead

This chapter shows how you can use writing to succeed in social studies, from keeping notes to writing historical narratives to answering document-based questions (DBQ).

- Taking Notes in Social Studies
- Keeping a Social Studies Log
- Summarizing a News Article
- Writing a Historical Narrative
- Responding to Document-Based Questions
- Using Graphic Organizers

Comma

To Set Off Dialogue

Use a comma to set off the exact words of the speaker from the rest of the sentence.

Ms. Arbogast asked, "Do you know how proud you made me?"

- * If you are telling what someone has said but are not using the person's exact words, do not use commas or quotation marks.

Ms. Arbogast asked if I knew how proud I had made her.

To Set Off Interruptions

Use commas to set off a word or phrase that interrupts or emphasizes the main thought of a sentence.

You may someday, as a matter of fact, own a wrist-watch computer.

EXAMPLES The following words and phrases often interrupt or emphasize main thoughts.

INTERRUPTING WORDS

for example
however
in fact
moreover
as we all know
to be quite honest

TESTS Try one of these tests to see if a word or phrase needs to be set off with commas:

1. Take the word or phrase out. If the meaning of the sentence does not change, use commas.
2. Move the word or phrase to another place in the sentence. If the meaning does not change, use commas.

To Set Off Interjections

Use a comma to separate an interjection or a weak exclamation from the rest of the sentence. (An *interjection* is a word or phrase showing surprise or strong emotion.)

No kidding, are you saying we've practically won?

Okay, now what do I do?

- * If an interjection shows very strong feeling, you may use an exclamation point (!) to separate it from the rest of a sentence.

Wow! The fireworks were incredible!

EXAMPLES The following words and phrases often function as interjections.

INTERJECTIONS

Hey	Wow
Oh my	No kidding
Okay	Hello

In Direct Address

Use commas to separate a noun of direct address from the rest of the sentence. A noun of direct address names the person(s) being spoken to.

I'd really like to try out for the track team, Mr. McGinley.

The truth is, Maria, I simply cannot dance.

To Set Off Titles or Initials

Use commas to set off titles or initials (and first names) that follow a person's last name.

Gregory House, M.D., was no Dr. McCoy.
(titles following names)

Hickok, J. B., and Cody, William F., are also known as "Wild Bill" and "Buffalo Bill."
(initials following last names)

- * If an initial comes at the end of a statement, use only one period.

His initials are C. J.

Planet Profusion

There are hundreds of billions of galaxies in the universe. Our solar system is located in the Milky Way galaxy, which is 150,000 light-years in diameter. Even though this galaxy contains an estimated 250 billion to one trillion stars, our solar system contains only one star—the sun. The sun, which is the center of our solar system, has eight planets and myriad dwarf planets, asteroids, meteorites, and comets orbiting it. The planets are large, nonluminous bodies that follow fixed elliptical orbits about the sun.

Some of the planets are considered terrestrial planets—Mercury, Venus, Earth, and Mars—which resemble Earth in size, chemical composition, and density. They have rocky bodies and distinct atmospheres. Some planets are considered Jovian planets—Jupiter, Saturn, Uranus, and Neptune—which are much larger in size and have thick, gaseous atmospheres, low densities, and only a small hidden rocky core. The dwarf planets are balls of rock and ice large enough for gravity to make them round, but too small to clear away other objects in their orbits. Some, like Pluto and Eris, have at least one moon. An estimated 200 dwarf planets lie beyond Neptune in the Kuiper Belt. Only Ceres is closer, in the asteroid belt between Mars and Jupiter.

Sun
Mercury
Venus
Earth
Mars

Jupiter

Saturn

Uranus

Neptune

	Sun	Moon	Mercury	Venus	Earth	Mars	Jupiter	Saturn	Uranus	Neptune
Orbital Speed (in miles per second)		0.6	29.8	21.7	18.5	15.0	8.1	6.0	4.2	3.4
Rotation on Axis	25 days 10 hrs. 46 min.	27 days 7 hrs.	59 days	243	23 hrs. 56 min.	24 hrs. 37 min.	9 hrs. 56 min.	10 hrs. 39 min.	17 hrs. 15 min.	16 hrs. 7 min.
Mean Surface Gravity (Earth = 1.00)	28.02	0.17	0.38	0.90	1.00	0.38	2.53	1.07	0.92	1.12
Density (times that of water)	150 (core)	3.4	5.4	5.2	5.5	3.9	1.3	0.7	1.3	1.7
Mass (times that of Earth)	333,000	0.01	0.06	0.82	5.98 $\times 10^{24}$ metric tons	0.11	318	95.3	14.6	17.2
Approximate Weight of a 150-Pound Human	4,203	26	57	136	150	57	321	161	138	168
Number of Satellites	8 planets	0	0	0	1	2	67	53	27	14
Mean Distance to Sun (in millions of miles)		(234,878 miles from Earth)	36.0	67.24	92.96	141.63	483.7	885.9	1,783.9	2,795.1
Revolution Around Sun		(27 days 7 hrs. around Earth)	88 days	227.4 days	365.25 days	687 days	11.86 years	29.46 years	84.0 years	164.8 years
Approximate Surface Temperature (degrees Fahrenheit)	10,000° surface 27,000,000° (center)	-250° to 250°	-279° to 801°	864°	-126° to 136°	-125° to 23°	-234°	-288°	-357°	-353°
Diameter (in miles)	864,949	2,160	3,030	7,521	7,926	4,222	88,846	74,898	31,764	30,776