

# Teaching the Modes of Writing

## Contents

|   |    |
|---|----|
| What About the Modes of Writing?<br>Establishing a Purpose..... | 1  |
| The Influence of the<br>State Writing Assessment.....           | 1  |
| The Connection Between Traits<br>and Modes.....                 | 2  |
| Assessing Papers by Mode.....                                   | 3  |
| Scoring Guides for Each Mode:                                   |    |
| Narrative Writing.....  | 4  |
| Expository Writing.....   | 5  |
| Persuasive Writing.....   | 6  |
| Student Papers for Each Mode:                                   |    |
| Narrative.....  | 7  |
| Expository.....   | 9  |
| Persuasive.....   | 12 |
| Conference Planners for Each Mode:                              |    |
| Narrative Writing.....  | 15 |
| Expository Writing.....   | 17 |
| Persuasive Writing.....   | 19 |

# What About the Modes of Writing?

## Establishing a Purpose

There are three basic modes of writing: narrative, expository, and persuasive. According to George Hillocks, Jr. (2002), these modes help the writer establish a purpose for the writing—to tell a story, to inform or explain, or to construct an argument—and make that purpose clear to the reader. By zeroing in on the purpose of the writing, the writer establishes why he or she is writing the piece and, in the process, is likely to narrow his or her topic.

Traditionally, children begin writing in the narrative mode. As early as kindergarten, they produce stories about their birthday parties and trips to Walt Disney World. Or they spin wild tales about space travel and princess balls. As they move up the grades and are introduced to academic topics, they begin writing in the expository and persuasive modes. This is no coincidence, according to Hillocks. In his examination of the nation's large-scale writing assessments, he observed that many assessments require students to write to a prompt that is tied to a mode, usually a narrative prompt at the elementary level, an expository prompt at the middle school level, and a persuasive prompt at the high school level (in Ezarik, 2004).

### The Influence of the State Writing Assessment

When it comes to mode it's easy to see the influence of the state writing assessment on the curriculum. I urge you to use caution and not to confuse the state assessment with what is truly important about teaching writing. Don't assume students will score higher on the test if they practice only the kind of writing found on the test, as Tommy Thomason and Carol York (2000) point out. Our goals should be broader than helping students to pass a test by teaching them how to write in only one mode of writing.

Writing in all modes should be encouraged at all grade levels. Young writers have genuine reasons to create informational pieces right along with stories. And we should stretch the writing muscles of older students by giving them the option to write stories right along with research papers, literary analyses, and essays. Variety hooks students into writing because it allows them to explore their interests and exercise their strengths. Instead of limiting students' choices, broaden them. Help them learn to ask *why* they are writing and then encourage them to select the mode that best suits their purpose.

### Narrative writing's purpose: to tell a story

The narrative writer typically:

- Offers a clear, well-developed story line
- Includes characters that grow and change over time
- Conveys time and setting effectively
- Presents a conflict and resolution
- Surprises, challenges, and/or entertains the reader

### Expository writing's purpose: to inform or explain

The expository writer typically:

- Informs the reader about the topic
- Transcends the obvious by explaining something interesting or curious about the topic
- Focuses on making the topic clear for the reader
- Anticipates and answers the reader's questions
- Includes details that add information, support key ideas, and help the reader make personal connections

### Persuasive writing's purpose: to construct an argument

The persuasive writer typically:

- States a position clearly and sticks with it
- Offers good, sound reasoning
- Provides solid facts, opinions, and examples
- Reveals weaknesses in other positions
- Uses voice to add credibility and show confidence

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## The Connection Between Traits and Modes

The traits of writing cut across all three modes. Regardless of his or her purpose for writing—telling a story, informing and explaining, or constructing an argument—the writer must come up with an original idea, organize his or her thoughts logically, find a voice that’s right for the audience, pick the best words possible, and use them to create sentences that flow, and, of course, check conventions for accuracy and present the work neatly and legibly. The mode is the umbrella under which all seven traits fit snugly.

As a rule of thumb, don’t just ask students what they want to write. Ask them to explain *why* they are writing it, too. Their answers may surprise you. A student may want to create an essay that’s as satisfying to read as a good short story. Or a memoir that takes into account meaningful world events. Or an editorial for the local paper that contains a poem to hammer home her argument. When you help students clarify their purposes for writing right from the start, you energize them. You encourage them to do the hard thinking that writing demands.

### References:

- Ezarik, M. (2004). Beware the writing assessment: Q & A with George Hillocks Jr. (Curriculum update: the latest developments in math, science, language arts and social studies). *District Administration Journal*, 40, 66.
- Hillocks, G., Jr. (2002). *The testing trap*. New York: Teachers College Press.
- Thomason, T., & York, C. (2000). *Write on target: Preparing young writers to succeed on state writing achievement tests*. Norwood, MA: Christopher-Gordon.

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# Assessing Papers by Mode: How Successful Is the Writer in Meeting His or Her Purpose?

Assigning a mode score to a piece of writing answers one more important question for students: “How successful was I in making the purpose for writing clear?” If the student writes a narrative piece, we might ask, To what degree did she include characters, a chronological series of events, setting, and a problem to be resolved? If she writes an expository piece, we might ask, How clearly does she inform and explain? And if she writes a persuasive piece, we might ask, Did she successfully convince the reader that she had a valid point of view on the topic?

In other words, a mode score provides feedback on how well the piece meets its purpose. When we assess for mode using the mode scoring guides on pages 4–6, it’s important to add on the score to the trait scores—and avoid attempting to combine them. The traits are present in everything we write regardless of the mode in which we write. The mode is specific to the writer’s purpose. Therefore, it’s essential to assess writing separately for traits and modes—and report scores separately.

## Scoring Guides for Each Mode

In this section, you will find a scoring guide for each mode, scored and critiqued benchmark papers by middle school writers, and a conference planner for each mode to help you and your students link modes to traits. Assess the papers on pages 7–13 by following these guidelines:

1. Familiarize yourself with the appropriate mode scoring guide.
2. Read the student paper carefully.
3. Ask yourself if the purpose for the writing is clear, keeping in mind that writers often mix elements of modes without losing sight of their purpose.
4. Assess the paper by matching the scoring guide’s descriptors to elements found in the text and assign a score of 1–6.
5. Check your score against mine and read my critique. Do you agree with it? If so, why? If not, why not?
6. Think about how you would explain the score to the writer and encourage revision.

# Scoring Guide: Narrative Writing

Narrative writing re-creates a real or imagined experience. It usually contains four elements: characters, a setting, a chronological sequence of events, and a conflict or problem to be solved. The writer typically builds in high points by putting characters into interesting situations, weaving in plot twists, incorporating vivid details, and creating a central conflict or problem that builds suspense and holds the piece together.

|                                |  |
|--------------------------------|--|
| <b>6</b><br>↑<br><b>HIGH</b>   | <b>EXCEPTIONAL</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Starts with a lead that sets up the story and draws in the reader.</li><li>• Contains characters that are believable, fresh, and well described. The characters grow and learn.</li><li>• Describes a setting that is unique and rich.</li><li>• Features events that are logically sequenced and move the story forward. Time and place work in harmony.</li><li>• Is a complete story that has never been told or is an original twist on a familiar story. The plot is well developed. There is a key conflict or problem that is compelling and eventually solved.</li><li>• Features well-used literary techniques, such as foreshadowing and symbolism.</li><li>• Leaves the reader feeling intrigued, delighted, surprised, entertained, and/or informed.</li><li>• Ends satisfyingly because the key conflict or problem is solved thoughtfully and credibly.</li></ul>   |
| <b>5</b><br>↑<br><b>MIDDLE</b> | <b>STRONG</b>  |
| <b>4</b><br>↑<br><b>MIDDLE</b> | <b>REFINING</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Starts with a lead that sets the scene, but is predictable or unoriginal.</li><li>• Contains characters that are a bit too familiar. The characters show little change in their thinking or understanding as the story moves along.</li><li>• Offers a setting that is not described all that well.</li><li>• Features events that are given the same level of importance. Significant ones mingle with trivial ones, and sometimes stray from the main story line.</li><li>• Is a nearly complete story that may not contain new or original thinking. The plot moves forward, but then stumbles. Minor conflicts and problems distract from major ones.</li><li>• Contains examples of literary techniques such as foreshadowing and symbolism that are not all that effective.</li><li>• Leaves the reader engaged at some points, detached at others.</li><li>• Ends by providing the reader with a sense of resolution, but he or she may also feel unsatisfied or perplexed.</li></ul> |
| <b>3</b><br>↑<br><b>LOW</b>    | <b>DEVELOPING</b>  |
| <b>2</b><br>↑<br><b>LOW</b>    | <b>EMERGING</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Starts with a lead that is perfunctory: "I'm going to tell you about the time..."</li><li>• Contains characters that don't feel real. The unconvincing characters are stereotypes or cardboard cutouts.</li><li>• Offers a setting that is not at all described clearly and/or completely.</li><li>• Features simple, incomplete events that don't relate to one another and/or don't add up to anything much. There is a mismatch between the time and place.</li><li>• Is a story that jumps around illogically. There is no clear conflict or problem to be solved.</li><li>• Contains no examples of literary techniques—or, at most, poor, purposeless ones.</li><li>• Leaves the reader frustrated and/or disappointed. He or she feels the story was not thought out before it was committed to paper.</li><li>• Finishes with no clear ending or, at most, a halfhearted attempt at an ending, leaving the reader wondering why he or she bothered to read the piece.</li></ul>      |
| <b>1</b>                       | <b>RUDIMENTARY</b>   |

# Scoring Guide: Expository Writing

The primary purpose for expository writing is to inform or explain, using reliable and accurate information. Although usually associated with the research report or traditional essay, expository writing needn't always contain "just the facts." The writer might include personal experiences, details from his or her life, to enliven the piece. Strong expository writing has an authoritative, knowledgeable, and confident voice that adds credibility.

|                                |                    |  |
|--------------------------------|--------------------|--|
| <b>6</b><br>↑<br><b>HIGH</b>   | <b>EXCEPTIONAL</b> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Delves into what really matters about the topic.</li><li>• Offers an insider's perspective.</li><li>• Provides unexpected or surprising details that go beyond the obvious.</li><li>• Is focused, coherent, and well organized.</li><li>• Invites the reader to analyze and synthesize details to draw his or her own conclusions.</li><li>• Is bursting with fascinating, original facts that are accurate and, when appropriate, linked to a primary source.</li><li>• Contains anecdotes that bring the topic to life.</li><li>• Anticipates and answers the reader's questions.</li><li>• Stays on point and contains a compelling voice until the end.</li></ul>  |
| <b>5</b>                       | <b>STRONG</b>      |  |
| <b>4</b><br>↑<br><b>MIDDLE</b> | <b>REFINING</b>    | <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Provides an overview of the topic and only a few key facts.</li><li>• Offers the perspective of an outsider looking in.</li><li>• Lacks fresh thinking or surprises. Relies too heavily on common knowledge. Provides mostly mundane, predictable details about the topic.</li><li>• Is relatively focused, coherent, and organized. Generally stays on topic.</li><li>• Contains focused descriptions, but also fuzzy ones. The writer doesn't consistently connect the dots.</li><li>• Includes facts that are somewhat suspicious and not linked to primary sources.</li><li>• Features few, if any, anecdotes to bring the topic to life.</li><li>• Does not anticipate the reader's questions.</li><li>• Speaks in a spotty voice—commanding one moment, cautious the next.</li></ul> |
| <b>3</b>                       | <b>DEVELOPING</b>  |  |
| <b>2</b><br>↑<br><b>LOW</b>    | <b>EMERGING</b>    | <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Misses the main point completely. The writer's purpose is not clear.</li><li>• Offers a complete outsider's perspective.</li><li>• Contains details that are completely unrelated to the main topic.</li><li>• Is unfocused, incoherent, and poorly organized.</li><li>• Makes sweeping statements. Nothing new is shared.</li><li>• Lacks fascinating, original facts. Any facts the piece does contain are seemingly inaccurate or unsupported.</li><li>• Contains no anecdotes to bring the topic to life.</li><li>• Does not anticipate the reader's questions. In fact, the piece contains no evidence that the writer has thought about audience at all.</li><li>• Requires energy to read from beginning to end.</li></ul>  |
| <b>1</b>                       | <b>RUDIMENTARY</b> |  |

# Scoring Guide: Persuasive Writing

Persuasive writing contains a strong argument based on solid information that convinces the reader to embrace the writer's point of view. Sometimes persuasive writing is a call to action, such as a donation solicitation from a charitable organization. Other times, it's an attempt to change attitudes, such as an op-ed piece in your local newspaper. Regardless of the format, the writing needs to be clear, compelling, and well supported. The writer should not waver in his or her position.

|   |   |        |                    |   |
|---|---|--------|--------------------|---|
| 6 | ↑ | HIGH   | <b>EXCEPTIONAL</b> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Influences the reader's thinking through sound reasoning and a compelling argument.</li><li>• Contains opinions that are well supported by facts and personal experiences. Differences between opinion, facts, and personal experiences are clear.</li><li>• Takes a position that is defensible and logical.</li><li>• Exposes weaknesses of other positions.</li><li>• Avoids generalities and exaggerations.</li><li>• Includes many moments of sound reasoning and judgment.</li><li>• Reveals only the best evidence to make the strongest statement possible.</li><li>• Connects to a larger "truth."</li></ul>   |
|   |   |        | <b>5</b>           | <b>STRONG</b>   |
| 4 | ↑ | MIDDLE | <b>REFINING</b>    | <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Raises questions for the reader, but may fail to persuade him or her because the thinking is superficial and only hints at something deep.</li><li>• Mixes opinions, facts, and personal experiences. The piece relies on emotion more than truth. Data may be present, but not used to full effect.</li><li>• Contains an argument that starts out strong, but fades. Offers few new insights into the topic.</li><li>• Attempts to expose holes in other opinions, with mixed results.</li><li>• Features generalities or exaggerations, but also concrete information and clear examples.</li><li>• Includes a few moments of sound reasoning and judgment.</li><li>• Contains some evidence that hits the mark and some that veers off course.</li><li>• Waffles. Many statements are plausible while others are far-fetched, leaving the reader unconvinced.</li></ul> |
|   |   |        | <b>3</b>           | <b>DEVELOPING</b>   |
| 2 | ↑ | LOW    | <b>EMERGING</b>    | <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Does not influence the reader. The writer's thinking and reasoning is vulnerable to attack.</li><li>• Abounds with opinions that are not supported by facts or personal experiences.</li><li>• Takes a position that is not clear or not credible. The argument is illogical or implausible.</li><li>• Ignores the opposing side of the argument.</li><li>• Offers only generalities and exaggerations—no hard facts that could sway the reader.</li><li>• Includes no moments of sound reasoning and judgment.</li><li>• Lacks the evidence necessary for the reader to take a stand.</li><li>• Does not question or does not probe. The piece misses the target.</li></ul>  |
|   |   |        | <b>1</b>           | <b>RUDIMENTARY</b>  |

## Narrative Writing: To Tell a Story

Assess the following two student papers using the narrative mode scoring guide on page 4. Then check your scores and comments against mine to see if we agree. To show strength and control in the narrative mode at the middle school level, writers must add original thinking, layering all the elements of narration together seamlessly. It's not as easy as good writers make it look!

### Student Paper #1: Grade 6

## When I Was Eight

When I was eight my Dad rented a scary movie about a man who had been abducted by aliens. My step mom, Julie had toled my dad that I shouldn't watch the freaky movie. I, not wanting to be left out, begged my eight year old heart out. Finally my dad said I could watch the movie. I had my eyes closed half the night. The movie had aliens putting needle in the poor guys eyes. The movie was disgusting.

That night I couldn't sleep. I was so scared. I knew if aliens came my dad could not make up the stairs in time to save me. I kept turning on the light checking to see if aliens had come. It was as if anything could turn into an alien and start to do painful tests on me at any moment. I stayed up so late I finally could not fight the sleep and so I practically passed out.

Juli wanted me to take a bath or shower later that week but I was to scared, I refused. The only way I would take a bath was if someone watched the door. Finally Juli watched the door while I took a bath. If I took a shower I would have had to move the shower curtain so I couldn't see what was out side of the shower. I didn't want that.

The next summer I came to my dad's house again. I was over my thoughts about aliens abducting me. I went over to my grandma's house, she was watching Jerry Springer. Ironically the person who made the movie claimed it was true. He said it happened to him. It was weird.

#### Mode Score: 3

The writer sets the scene at the start, gives details of what happened in the body, and moves forward a year at the conclusion. We don't know how she recovered from her memories of alien abduction, however. It might be helpful to know how long she was traumatized and what helped her get back to normal. Was it only time? Most of her descriptions are strong: turning on the lights and having someone watching the door. But some are superficial: Dad allowing her to watch the movie and the Jerry Springer reference at the end. Overall, this narrative piece has a balance of strengths and weaknesses.



## Student Paper #2: Grade 8

### A Time I Did Something I'm Proud of

There was a boy in school whom nobody liked. He was overweight and every body made fun of him including me. We called him names, pushed him around, and left mean notes on his locker. I could never understand why everyone disliked him, so much, to me he actually seemed quite nice. The reason I made fun of him was so my friends would think I was cool.

As time passed I started thinking of all the things my friends and I had said to him, not really meaning it myself, realized the damage we could be causing him. The guilt hit me quite hard. I felt stuck. If I apologized to him then my friends would think I was an idiot and then may start making fun of me too.

That's when it came to me, if they were the kind of people to do that, then who needs them as friends.

The next time I saw the kid "Nobody liked," I approached him, of course he thought I was there to make fun of him again. So he started running down the hall, needless to say I caught up with him and quickly said, "I'm so sorry." I told him every thing I had said to him I did only to impress my friends, which I included made me low life. Then I asked him for his forgiveness and if he could ever be my friend, and being the kind person said, "Thank you, and sure that would be great." He asked me what my friends would think about us being friends and I told if they didn't like it then I didn't need their friendships.

I couldn't believe how the face of my new found friend seemed to glow. He seemed so happy and the feelings I were experiencing were quite nice too. Actually I felt a warm tingle down my arms and back. After all of that I knew I had actually chosen the right thing to do.

You know, eventually all of my friends came around and all of us ended up being good friends even with the kid "Nobody liked."

#### Mode Score: 6

Notice the clearly drawn characters in this piece. Although the setting is not described in detail, "school" creates an image in the minds of most readers. A key problem is solved, a lesson is learned, and the characters grow. The condensed time period works as well. This is an example of a piece of writing that mixes modes. This text has expository qualities within the narrative structure: the writer informs and explains. However, his intent is always clear, to tell a story. It's nicely done.

## Expository Writing: To Inform or Explain

Assess the following two student papers using the expository mode scoring guide on page 5. Then check your scores and comments against mine to see if we agree. Expository writing is a mode students will use extensively throughout their academic and working lives. It's an important mode for them to understand and an essential tool in the writer's toolbox.

### Student Paper #1: Grade 8

#### Drugs are really bad for peoples health.

I am really against drugs. They make people get "high." They make people see things that aren't really there.

If people keep on taking drugs there will be more people in jails. I want people to know that drugs are bad for there health, and they are killing people. They are bad for everyone.

I know that there are people in my school that do drugs. They should know what they are doing to there bodies. If people say no to drugs it will make that persons life better and the peoples around them too. And it will keep them out of jail.

#### Mode Score: 1

Although this writer deserves to be commended for explaining why drugs are unhealthy, he does not dig into the topic. He relies on safe, sweeping statements that lack detail. There are no surprises because he relies on commonly known information. Furthermore, he doesn't seem sure of his purpose. Did he want to explain why drugs are bad or persuade people not to use them? This piece does not inform or explain clearly. The sentence "They make people see things that aren't really there" has possibilities for development, and I would suggest this writer develop it as a key point in a future revision.

## Student Paper #2: Grade 8

### My Hero

Of all the people I've known, my father is my hero. He is the most honest and dependable person. I can recall many times when he has purchased an item and received back too much money and without thinking whether he should keep the money or not, he returns it graciously. He's the kind of person who is very aware of things and rarely will embarrass you in public.

Through my childhood I've seen many people ask my father for some kind of favor whether it be working on their car, information on buying a home or advice on their taxes, he's always ready for them. What fascinates me the most is that my father will never ask for anything in return, not even a favor. Even though I feel he deserves one. I really admire my father for helping people who are in need and never turns his back on anyone. It takes a real special person to be like my father.

An aunt of mine, my father's sister from Michigan, asked him if she should stay with us until she could put her life back together with her 16 year old daughter. She couldn't afford an apartment and had no money nor a job. She wanted to move here so her daughter could start a new life for she had been a problem child there. As it turned out, it took 6 to 9 months before she moved out, during this time our cousin was causing a lot of problems here also and they ended up moving back to Michigan. While she was here, it was like having an extra child in the house and more responsibility to raise her while her mother worked. It was easy for my father to get real frustrated and handle the situation poorly, but he seems to look at things at a different perspective than any other person would. That's why my father is so remarkable. And if I had to go through a similar situation in life, I hope I can have his kindness and patience to do as well.

My father's generosity showed again when my aunt-in-law's brother died in a tragic accident in Florida. He was only 29 years old and had just visited the family a week before he left to Orlando, Florida for a musical gig. The family was so devastated by the news that the family contacted my father to handle all the arrangements. He had many brothers and sisters, but the family did not have a lot

of money to pay for the funeral. So my father offered to help pay for the funeral because of their financial situation, but moreover, because he really liked the deceased. He had seen this young man grow up to be a wonderful individual. They were very grateful and said they would pay him back as soon as they could.

To my father money isn't the biggest thing in life. The most important thing is friendship and a helping hand. Again I like to stress that not many people think of life at that perspective as does my father and I hope that I can follow in his footsteps. Every day I see the simple good deeds he makes and I respect him without a doubt. Although the deceased family felt it was their responsibility as his siblings to come up with the money, they did not hesitate my father's offer to have the wake at our home with all the financial responsibility to feed over 100 people.

The good qualities that my father possess all stem from being the simple man he is. He never went to college, but has good character, a well up bringing, and a love for people. He is always aware of the things around him for he has educated himself by reading a lot of books. He has worked at the LaVoie Steel Company as a maintenance man for the past 17 years. He was never sick, worked rotating shifts, sometimes even straight graveyard shifts for 5 years, is dedicated and very responsible at work as well as his family's needs. He is retired now. Call it luck, hard work, or simply the returns of his good deeds, but he is my hero and the man whose footsteps I'd like to follow.

**Mode Score: 6**

This loving tribute has all the hallmarks of a great piece of expository writing. The writer provides specific details about why his father is his personal hero and backs them up with examples, giving the reader all the necessary information to create a vivid image. I especially appreciate the insight in the last paragraph, where the writer sums up his father by calling him a simple man, who was brought up well and who cares about others. I applaud this writer's ability to write in the expository mode and his desire to follow in his father's footsteps.

## Persuasive Writing: To Construct an Argument

Assess the following two student papers using the persuasive mode scoring guide on page 6. Then check your scores and comments against mine to see if we agree. Persuasive writing can be tough for students. To help them understand it, I often tell them, “Persuasive writing is good expository writing—with an attitude.”

### Student Paper #1: Grade 7

## Green is Good

Vegetarians. Aren't they those health-food-nut, skinny-as-a-rail joggers we all see so much of? No. Vegetarians are just everyday people like you and me, especially me. I have been a vegetarian for almost three months now and I still can't find a reason to go back to eating meat.

Why do people eat these innocent animals if they know the harm that it's doing to their bodies? Studies show that vegetarians have a lower risk of heart disease, diabetes, and some forms of cancer. Besides that, red meat will clog up your kidneys.

I really don't understand hunters. How can they kill anything as precious as a deer, then shoot it, cook it, and eat it? Just hours before it was grazing in the grass, pondering the finer aspects of life, and now there it is laying helplessly on your plate.

Deciding to become a vegetarian took me weeks of in-depth research. I had to keep my protein level up somehow. After reading that most of our forests were getting cleared away for cattle grazing, I finally made my decision. So eat the greener way and avoid all those guilty feelings.

#### Mode Score: 2

Although this piece makes an argument, it needs more evidence to be truly persuasive. It contains facts, but they're not well organized. The writing jumps around, throwing the reader off course. Furthermore, the writer liberally mixes those facts with opinion. His position on this issue is clear, but how he arrived at it isn't. The other side of the issue is not represented.

## Student Paper #2: Grade 7

### The Pet I Always Wanted

Dear Mother and Father,

Do you recall when you said, I could have a pet of my choice when I think I'm ready, well that time has come. I would greatly appreciate having a Siberiean Tiger. I am vowing never to bring it in the house or force it to gobble up my sister, which I would really like it to do. I'm willing to pay for all the acomodations to the animal such as food, shelter, and any others that might apply, out of my own allowance.

I also would like to remind you that the tiger can be useful for more than just making me stop writing these dreadful letters which will promptly stop once I get the animal.

I'll name it Duke and allow it to sit on the front steps to ward off people liek those pesky miniture sized devils that call themselves girl scouts, it can also show sales people that we don't want to buy there junk.

I can be responsible if that's what you are pondering, to show you that I am I'll bathe it, feed it, and train it well. I've shown you I'm responsible, I've shown you that I can, now can you show me that what you announced to me was true, by getting me the pet that I want.

Sincerely your son,

Chico

P.S.

If I were you I would bye the tiger because my next choice would be a Gorilla!! Also thank you for reading this whole letter.

#### Mode Score: 4

Even though he bases the piece on an absurd premise, the writer does a credible job of building his case for his request, giving reasons for why his parents should honor it, and expressing how he will follow through on his end, responsibly. The piece is so original and, indeed, persuasive, it's hard not to love it. At the same time, it feels like the writer let his imagination take control and, in the process, lost control of the writing. The piece would benefit from a few more solid, less creative examples.

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# Conference Planners for Each Mode

Once you've scored a student's paper, give the appropriate conference planner on the pages 15–20 to him or her, with the trait or traits you'd like addressed highlighted. The planner will help the writer prepare for a conference by thinking through changes to the draft that need to be made.

# Narrative Writing Conference Planner

Name \_\_\_\_\_ Class \_\_\_\_\_

Before our conference on your narrative piece, read the list of questions and directions after the trait(s) that I've highlighted on this sheet. We'll review your responses in the conference.

## Ideas

|  |   |
|--|---|
| <b>Finding a Topic:</b> What is the controlling idea for your narrative?   | <b>Focusing the Topic:</b> What problem did you set out to resolve?   |
| <b>Developing the Topic:</b> List at least three elements from the body of your piece that make it a complete narrative. | <b>Using Details:</b> Underline several sensory details (sight, touch, taste, smell, hearing) you feel work well in your narrative. |

## Organization

|   |                          |                 |                         |
|---|--------------------------|-----------------|-------------------------|
| <b>Creating the Lead:</b> Circle the type of lead you used in your narrative. |                          |                 |                         |
| analogy or comparison   | anecdote or case history | direct address  | fact                    |
| metaphor  | description              | one word/phrase | controversial statement |
| statistic   | summary                  | other:          |                         |

**Using Sequence Words and Transition Words:** Using a highlighter, mark the sequence words and phrases. Then, using a highlighter of a different color, mark the transition words and phrases.

**Structuring the Body:** Circle a place in your narrative that shows you were thinking about pacing as you wrote.

|   |          |                  |        |
|---|----------|------------------|--------|
| <b>Ending With a Sense of Resolution:</b> Circle the type of ending you used in your narrative. |          |                  |        |
| epiphany  | moral    | image            | irony  |
| tragedy   | surprise | Hollywood ending | other: |

## Voice

**Establishing a Tone:** Circle a place where you've established a specific tone and name it.

**Conveying the Purpose:** List specific narrative elements (characters, setting, plot) you included in your paper that contribute to the voice.

|  |  |
|--|--|
| <b>Creating a Connection to the Audience</b> |  |
| Who is your audience?                        | Name the voice you used to address that audience specifically: |

**Taking Risks to Create Voice:** Put a star next to a place in your narrative where you stretched and took a risk to create voice.

## Word Choice

**Applying Strong Verbs:** Circle the "to be" verbs and other weak verbs that could be made stronger. Write the new verbs above the original ones.

**Selecting Striking Words and Phrases:** Have you used any figurative language in your narrative? Put a box around examples.

**Using Specific and Accurate Words:** Highlight any words that you feel are perfect for describing the people, places, and things in your narrative.

**Choosing Words That Deepen Meaning:** Underline two examples of words or phrases you changed or added to make a part of your narrative clearer and/or more meaningful.



## Sentence Fluency

**Crafting Well-Built Sentences:** Circle the sentence beginnings in your narrative. How alike are they? Underline the ones that should be revised.

**Varying Sentence Types:** Put a 1 by any simple sentences, a 2 by any compound sentences, a 3 by any complex sentences, and a 4 by any compound-complex sentences in your narrative. Do you have enough variety? If not, revise.

**Capturing Smooth and Rhythmic Flow:** Read your piece aloud to a classmate. Put a check mark next to any place the writing does not flow as well as you'd like.

**Breaking the "Rules" to Create Fluency:** What "out of the box" techniques did you try to improve your narrative's sentence fluency?

## Conventions

**Checking Spelling:** List three or more words you stretched to spell correctly.

**Punctuating Effectively and Paragraphing Accurately:** Put a box around any punctuation you used for stylistic reasons.

**Capitalizing Correctly:** Double-check to make sure you capitalized all proper nouns and words at the beginning of your sentences. Circle the words in your title that are capitalized correctly.

**Applying Grammar and Usage:**

Do your subjects and verbs agree? Give an example.

Do your pronouns and antecedents match? Give an example.

## Presentation

**Applying Handwriting Skills:** Highlight the section that is easiest to read. Underline the section that would benefit the most from better handwriting.

**Using Word Processing Effectively:** What font and size did you choose?

Is the font easy to read?

Is it appropriate for your audience?

**Making Good Use of White Space:** Make sure your margins neatly frame the text. Did you leave room around the edges? Did you double-space the text, if requested?

**Refining Text Features:** List text features you used such as title, subheadings, page numbers, page headers or footers, and bulleted lists.

## Overall

Circle the trait you used most effectively in your narrative piece.

|                  |              |              |             |
|------------------|--------------|--------------|-------------|
| Ideas            | Organization | Voice        | Word Choice |
| Sentence Fluency | Conventions  | Presentation |             |

Explain why:

Circle the trait you used least effectively in your narrative piece.

|                  |              |              |             |
|------------------|--------------|--------------|-------------|
| Ideas            | Organization | Voice        | Word Choice |
| Sentence Fluency | Conventions  | Presentation |             |

Explain why:

What is your plan for improving upon the trait you feel needs the most work?

# Expository Writing Conference Planner

Name \_\_\_\_\_ Class \_\_\_\_\_

Before our conference on your expository piece, read the list of questions and directions after the trait(s) that I've highlighted on this sheet. We'll review your responses in the conference.

## Ideas

|  |   |
|--|---|
| <b>Finding a Topic:</b> What is your expository paper's topic? Underline it in the first paragraph. If you can't find it, revise the paragraph.                      | <b>Focusing the Topic:</b> Underline the key points you make about this topic. You should have more than one.                                   |
| <b>Developing the Topic:</b> Will your expository piece leave your reader with questions about the topic? List one or two things she or he might still need to know. | <b>Using Details:</b> Have you included credible details in your piece, gleaned from reliable sources? List the sources for those details here. |

## Organization

**Creating the Lead:** Circle the type of lead you used in your expository piece.

|                       |                          |                 |                         |
|-----------------------|--------------------------|-----------------|-------------------------|
| analogy or comparison | anecdote or case history | direct address  | fact                    |
| metaphor              | description              | one word/phrase | controversial statement |
| statistic             | summary                  | other:          |                         |

**Using Sequence Words and Transition Words:** Circle common sequence and transition words such as *first, second, next, finally, plus, and another*. Revise some of them to be more thoughtful and less superficial.

**Structuring the Body:** Put a star next to the point in your piece where you slowed down to give more information.

**Ending With a Sense of Resolution:** Did you tie all your details together with an effective type of ending? Circle the type of ending you used.

|           |           |                  |                     |
|-----------|-----------|------------------|---------------------|
| summary   | call-back | thematic reprise | encouraging message |
| quotation | Ta-da!    | other:           |                     |

## Voice

**Establishing a Tone:** Name the tone you set out to establish in this piece:  
 \_\_\_\_\_  
 Circle where it comes through the strongest.

**Conveying the Purpose:** Star at least three places in your piece that convey its purpose by providing specific information.

**Creating a Connection to the Audience:** Who is your audience?  
 \_\_\_\_\_  
 What did you do in particular to address this audience?  
 \_\_\_\_\_

**Taking Risks to Create Voice:** Did you push to express yourself in a credible yet interesting way? If so, highlight a section that proves it.  
 \_\_\_\_\_

## Word Choice

**Applying Strong Verbs:** Name the five strongest verbs you used to show you understand this topic well.  
 \_\_\_\_\_

**Selecting Striking Words and Phrases:** Circle any words and phrases that help to explain this topic particularly well.

**Using Specific and Accurate Words:** Underline words and phrases that are specific to this topic and might not be used to explain any other topic.

**Choosing Words That Deepen Meaning:** Highlight a place in the writing where you've used words that help the reader make a deeper connection to the topic.

## Sentence Fluency

**Crafting Well-Built Sentences:** Count the number of words in each sentence. How many sentences are close to the same length? Star two that could be combined to make a longer one.

**Varying Sentence Types:** Label each of your simple sentences with a 1, compound sentences with a 2, complex sentences with a 3, and compound-complex sentences with a 4. Put a star by the type of sentence you used most often.

**Capturing Smooth and Rhythmic Flow:** Read your piece aloud to a partner. Put a check by any section that needs to be smoothed out.

**Breaking the “Rules” to Create Fluency:** Did you construct any sentences in an unexpected way to add interest to your piece? Any fragments? Any exclamations? Any interjections? Any natural-sounding dialogue? If so, circle them.

## Conventions

**Checking Spelling:** What topic-specific words did you use? Circle them and check their spelling.

**Punctuating Effectively and Paragraphing Accurately:** If you copied what someone else said or wrote, did you set off his or her words in quotation marks? Check to make sure you cited the source. How many paragraphs did you write? Do you have one for an introduction and one for the conclusion? How many others did you include?

**Capitalizing Correctly:** Check the beginnings of your sentences and the proper nouns for capitals. Highlight any you are not sure about.

**Applying Grammar and Usage:** Have you followed the rules of standard English? Underline any parts that are examples of informal language you may have included for a particular reason and explain.

## Presentation

**Applying Handwriting Skills:** Highlight the section that is easiest to read. Underline the section that would benefit the most from better handwriting.

**Using Word Processing Effectively:** What font and size did you choose?

Is the font easy to read?

Is it appropriate for your audience?

**Making Good Use of White Space:** Make sure your margins neatly frame the text. Did you leave room around the edges? Did you double-space the text, if requested?

**Refining Text Features:** List text features you used such as title, subheadings, page numbers, page headers or footers, and bulleted lists.

## Overall

Circle the trait you used most effectively in your narrative piece.

|                  |              |              |             |
|------------------|--------------|--------------|-------------|
| Ideas            | Organization | Voice        | Word Choice |
| Sentence Fluency | Conventions  | Presentation |             |

Explain why:

Circle the trait you used least effectively in your narrative piece.

|                  |              |              |             |
|------------------|--------------|--------------|-------------|
| Ideas            | Organization | Voice        | Word Choice |
| Sentence Fluency | Conventions  | Presentation |             |

Explain why:

What is your plan for improving upon the trait you feel needs the most work?

# Persuasive Writing Conference Planner

Name \_\_\_\_\_ Class \_\_\_\_\_

Before our conference on your narrative piece, read the list of questions and directions after the trait(s) that I've highlighted on this sheet. We'll review your responses in the conference.

## Ideas

|  |   |
|--|---|
| <b>Finding a Topic:</b> Restate your topic in a simple sentence. | <b>Focusing the Topic:</b> What is your position on this topic? |
|--|---|

**Developing the Topic:** Circle the techniques you used to persuade the reader to accept your point of view:

|            |        |          |                   |             |             |                  |                    |
|------------|--------|----------|-------------------|-------------|-------------|------------------|--------------------|
| statistics | quotes | examples | personal opinions | predictions | comparisons | well-known facts | little-known facts |
|------------|--------|----------|-------------------|-------------|-------------|------------------|--------------------|

**Using Details:** Circle at least three details in your piece that are particularly strong and will likely persuade the reader to accept your point of view.

## Organization

**Creating the Lead:** Circle the type of lead you used in your persuasive piece.

|                       |                          |                 |                         |
|-----------------------|--------------------------|-----------------|-------------------------|
| analogy or comparison | anecdote or case history | direct address  | fact                    |
| metaphor              | description              | one word/phrase | controversial statement |
| statistic             | summary                  | other:          |                         |

**Using Sequence Words and Transition Words:** Underline the sequence words and phrases in your piece. Then, put a box around transition words or phrases.

**Structuring the Body:** How many sentences did you devote to your side of the argument?  
How many to the other? \_\_\_\_\_. Make sure you have more sentences that support your side of the argument.

**Ending With a Sense of Resolution:** What image did you create or what point did you make at the end to nail your position?

## Voice

**Establishing a Tone:** Name the tone(s) of your piece.

**Conveying the Purpose:** Highlight a section that is particularly credible and convincing.

**Creating a Connection to the Audience**

|                             |  |
|-----------------------------|--|
| Name this piece's audience. | Put a check next to any words or phrases that you selected just for that audience. |
|-----------------------------|--|

**Taking Risks to Create Voice:** What did you do that might surprise the reader but that will help convince him or her that your side of the argument is stronger?

## Word Choice

**Applying Strong Verbs:** Circle your three strongest verbs.

**Selecting Striking Words and Phrases:** Star your most visual word or phrase.

**Using Specific and Accurate Words:** Put a box around the words and phrases you revised to make them more specific or accurate.

**Choosing Words That Deepen Meaning:** Underline the word or phrase that you believe captures the essence of your argument.

## Sentence Fluency

**Crafting Well-Built Sentences:** Check your sentences to make sure the subjects vary from sentence to sentence. Underline any that should be revised because their construction is too repetitive.

**Varying Sentence Types:** Label each of your simple sentences with a 1, compound sentences with a 2, complex sentences with a 3, and compound-complex sentences with a 4. Put a star by the type of sentence you used most often.

**Capturing Smooth and Rhythmic Flow:** Read your piece aloud to a partner. Put a check by any section that needs to be smoothed out.

**Breaking the “Rules” to Create Fluency:** Highlight any examples in which you broke rules to create fluency in your piece, such as using a fragment.

## Conventions

**Checking Spelling:** List three words you feel are a stretch for you to spell.

**Punctuating Effectively and Paragraphing Accurately:** Highlight an example of how you used punctuation to help your reader engage with a key point. Highlight an example of how you used paragraphing accurately.

**Capitalizing Correctly:** Double-check all proper nouns and sentence beginnings for capitalization. Circle the words in your title that are capitalized correctly.

**Applying Grammar and Usage:** Make sure your subjects and verbs agree. Underline an example. Do your pronouns and antecedents match? Underline an example.

## Presentation

**Applying Handwriting Skills:** Highlight the section that is easiest to read. Underline the section that would benefit the most from better handwriting.

**Using Word Processing Effectively:** What font and size did you choose?

Is the font easy to read?

Is it appropriate for your audience?

**Making Good Use of White Space:** Make sure your margins neatly frame the text. Did you leave room around the edges? Did you double-space the text, if requested?

**Refining Text Features:** List text features you used such as title, subheadings, page numbers, page headers or footers, and bulleted lists.

## Overall

Circle the trait you used most effectively in your narrative piece.

|                  |              |              |             |
|------------------|--------------|--------------|-------------|
| Ideas            | Organization | Voice        | Word Choice |
| Sentence Fluency | Conventions  | Presentation |             |

Explain why:

Circle the trait you used least effectively in your narrative piece.

|                  |              |              |             |
|------------------|--------------|--------------|-------------|
| Ideas            | Organization | Voice        | Word Choice |
| Sentence Fluency | Conventions  | Presentation |             |

Explain why:

What is your plan for improving upon the trait you feel needs the most work?