

Developing *Fluency*

For Beginning-Level Writers

Grades: 9-12, especially for students with special education needs
 May be adapted for younger students.

Length of time: 5-10 min. per day (longer for English Language Learners)

Objectives:

• To get reluctant students writing.	
• To get students in the habit of writing.	Affective Goals
• To give students confidence in their ability to write and their development as a writer (padding a portfolio).	
• To demystify the MN Basic Standards Writing Test.	
• To challenge students to come up with ideas quickly.	Institutional Goals
• To challenge students to write efficiently under pressure.	
• To give students helpful, non-threatening feedback.	
• To teach students to think about mechanical aspects of writing (capitalization, punctuation, grammar, etc.).	Pedagogical Goals

Context: This activity can be used at the beginning of class for 1-3 days per week. It works best when it becomes a part of the writing classroom routine.

Resources: paper, pencils, overhead projector or chalkboard

Brief summary:

1. Begin class with a writing prompt on the chalkboard or overhead. Include a “focus” and estimated length.
2. Students are responsible for writing a response to the prompt.
3. Teacher notifies students when there are 2 minutes left.
4. Teacher notifies students to “finish the sentence you’re working on.”
5. Students immediately hand in their work as teacher segues into the next activity.
6. Grading: Teacher marks *only* corrections pertaining to the focus and awards a grade of 1-5 (or - (+). Add compliments if appropriate.

Example Prompts:

“Eighty percent of success is showing up.”

-Woody Allen, film director

Do you agree that it is 80%? Give an example of a situation that proves just showing up is or isn't important to be successful.

Focus: Complete sentences 5 or more sentences

“A man only curses because he doesn't know the words to express what is on his mind.”

-Malcolm X

Why do you think people curse?

Focus: Appropriate language _ page

Who is the smartest person you know?

What makes them smart? Good grades? Knowing how to fix things? Knowing lots of facts? Being good at lots of things? Something else?

Focus: Capital letters 2 or more paragraphs

Describe the most beautiful place or object you've ever seen.

Focus: Spelling 2/3 page

If you could be anywhere in the world right now, where would you be?

Focus: Commas 2 or more paragraphs

Modifications:

Alternate with... a modified daily oral language activity. This gives students a small break while maintaining the daily habits of a beginning writing activity and focusing on mechanical aspects of writing. (See example below.)

[1. Write on board] Yossarian had everything he wanted in the hospital, the food wasn't too bad, and his meals were brought to him in bed.

-Catch 22 by Joseph Heller

[2. Give directions] Jot this down, but change anything you think is wrong or doesn't sound right.

[3. Give directions.] See what the person next to you changed. Compare answers, or help each other figure out what might be incorrect.

[3. Call on volunteers to physically come up and change what is on the board]

[4. The rest of class agrees or disagrees with the edits, justifying their opinions with rules wherever possible. Teacher scaffolds and confirms.]

For ELL students: A highly structured dialogue journal between teacher/student allows students to practice using the English language in a communicative context with a focus on form.

For advanced students: Integrate prompts with curriculum. Possible focuses:

Paragraph structure

Quotations

Figurative language

Avoid the words “I” or “me”

Variety of sentence length

Citations (providing students with a *brief* source)

Variety of sentence beginnings