Directions:

The electronic files have been formatted to use as saved files on a disk or computer drive, or you may print the pages.

1. Read the lesson and work the exercises and activities. These prepare you to complete the assignment.

2. Write the assignment.

3. Use a dictionary or spellcheck program. Read your assignment aloud and follow the proofreading guidelines to evaluate your work.
We are always communicating with each other. Sometimes we communicate without thinking about the meaning of what we are expressing, and sometimes we are quite aware of what we express through our choices in spoken and written words and through our actions and reactions. Our ability to communicate is a privilege and responsibility.

Sloppiness, vagueness, unreasonableness, dullness, and dishonesty require little effort. A true education focuses on exploring and practicing communication with thoughtfulness, order, and morality. We cannot choose the right words and actions if we cannot think clearly. We learn how to express ourselves to others clearly, logically, creatively, and honestly in order to become more fully human. The goal of Writing Workshops is to provide opportunities to explore and practice both clear thinking and writing.

“Education is simply the soul of a society as it passes from one generation to another.” G. K. Chesterton
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User Agreement

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LESSON 1 — TOOLS AND SKILLS

Writing as a Tool

Why do you have to learn to write? For the same reason that Native Americans had to learn to use a bow and arrow. You are living in the information age, and in order to survive, you must learn to write. Writing is a tool that can get you where you want to be.

The better you can write, the richer your life will be. You will be able to express your feelings to friends and relations. You will be able to file complaints to address problems. Writing will help you succeed in college. Writing can get you a good job and help you keep your job even if your job does not seem to have much to do with writing because writing helps you think. Being able to write well means you will be able to communicate well with others.

Writing does take time. College students are often surprised at the length of time they must spend on writing a four page paper.

Guidelines for Writing

• Writing is talking on paper (or on-screen). You use the same words, except they are represented not by sounds but by symbols that represent sounds. You use grammar to make reading easier.

• Write about what you like to talk about. Even when you have a specific assignment, often you can put your own special insights and experiences into the subject. For example, if you like dogs and your assignment is about people, then compare people to different kinds of dogs. Some people may remind you of poodles while others remind you of rottweilers. If you like sports, perhaps you could use sports talk when giving a play-by-play account of your vacation.

• Speak to your audience. The writer has a privilege and a responsibility. The privilege is to capture someone’s attention and the responsibility is to be kind to your reader. Consider the needs of your reader. Don’t use big words if your reader will be a first grader. Be clear. Be interesting. Be careful. (Double-check your facts.) And proofread as a courtesy to the reader. You may not enjoy proofreading, but it is your responsibility to make reading as easy as possible for your audience.
• Make your writing your own. Express your insights and experiences and understanding of the world in your writing. Make original connections, dig for meaning. Writing is hard work, so make it meaningful. You might have had a fun time during your summer vacation, but did you learn anything, did you change, how are you different? What do you appreciate most about your experiences as an Irish dancer? Why do you spend so much time playing basketball? What’s going on inside your head when you make a mistake? Give your readers specifics. What did you or your characters do?

**Play with Your Words**

Keep the writing guidelines in mind, but don’t forget to enjoy expressing yourself when you write. Many writers enjoy playing with words. Try the following games on your own or with a friend.

**Reworded**

Change one or two letters or words in the following book and movie titles to create new blockbusters.

Example: Star Wars  >  >  > Stir Wars is the epic struggle between two cooks for possession of a secret recipe.

- The Wizard of Oz
- Merry Adventures of Robin Hood
- Count of Monte Cristo
- Pride and Prejudice
- War of the Worlds
- The Princess Diaries
- Singing in the Rain

**Hinky Pink**

This is a rhyming game you can play on your own or with a friend. Start with rhyming words and create a definition for them. If you are playing with a friend, give the definition and have your friend guess the rhyming words.

Examples: A moist domesticated animal would be a “wet pet.”
A slender look alike would a “thin twin.”
Guess these:
A little shop that sells dentures would be a _______ ________.
A cruel royal would be a _______ ________.
A quick lyre would be a _______ ________.
A heeded remark would be a _______ ________.
A cool boat would be a _______ ________.

Answers to the hinky pinks are in the answer key.

Definitely
You need a dictionary and a friend or family member for this game. One player opens a dictionary at random and chooses an unusual word, such as “agraphia.” Then read either the definition for “agraphia” or the definition for any other words preceding or following or make up your own definition. The other player must guess if the definition is correct or not. Some words have various meanings. Try to avoid scientific and obsolete terms.

Here are a few for you to puzzle over:

Wicket—Things made of thin, flexible twigs?

Umbrage—offense or resentment?

Prevaricate—to turn aside from the truth?

Lenient—having length, esp. being too long?

Cad—a dead body?

Reading Resources

*Cloudy with a Chance of Meatballs* by Judi Barrett
*Amelia Bedelia* by Peggy Parish

These two books for children are easy reading and probably below your reading level, but they show professional writers playing with words.

“Jabberwocky” by Lewis Carroll  (a poem that uses words Carroll invented)

This is perhaps the most famous nonsense poem in the world, even though Carroll used it in a children’s book, *Through the Looking Glass*. You can find the poem on the Web, and Wikipedia. com even attempts to give definitions for many of the words in the poem based upon later letters and works by Carroll.
Assignment for Lesson One:
Newest Words in the World

The English language is expanding each year with the addition of new words or old words being used in new ways. For example, you might be able to figure out that a “mouse potato” is probably also a “netizen.” A “meanderthal” is someone who walks aimlessly or slowly in front of you when you’re in a hurry.

Lewis Carroll, who wrote “Jabberwocky” and other gloriously nonsensical works, made up many strange words for his poem. Some of these words, such as “chorl,” began to be used by other people, but most of them, such as “tulgey,” are still not in the dictionary.

Your assignment is to create ten new words. Check a dictionary to make sure the words are not in use already. Spell the words phonetically (the way they sound) and put them in a sentence. Another option is to combine two words to create one new word, such as “mouse potato.” Write your definitions of these new words.

Examples: A pride-rider fluffed his leather jacket and hopped onto his pedal-scoot. The graxon glubbed over to the moxlet.

Think About It

When you are writing, you may want to make up words as Lewis Carroll did and as many people do today for computers and internet communication. When you do, make sure the meaning will be clear for your reader from the context of the sentence or from a separate sentence explaining the meaning. New words or old words used in a new way can make your writing more interesting and enjoyable.

You could use the most beautiful words in the English language to describe a beautiful landscape. According to Mr. Wilfred Funk, these words are dawn, hush, gracious, golden, tranquil, chimes, murmuring, melody, mist, and luminous. And if you want to describe something less than beautiful, try using these dissonant words: treachery, gripe, crunch, sap, cacophony, and goggle.
Lesson 2 – How to Write Well Using Both Hands

Description
I’m not talking about learning touch typing. Look at the hand that you do not use for writing. If you are right-handed, that will be your left hand, and vice versa.

How many fingers? Five. Let each finger represent one of your senses—seeing, hearing, smelling, tasting, and touching. The palm of your hand can represent emotions and interpretations of experiences. Various sights, sounds, smells, tastes, and touches can lead to a variety of emotions and interpretations. Unless you are giving your reader just the facts, you want to include emotions and interpretations. More about that later.

Now if you were lost, and not just at a loss about what to write, what would you want someone to put on your poster? A very complete description would be helpful. You want to be found as quickly as possible. Look in the mirror and describe yourself aloud. You can close the door to your bathroom or bedroom if you are worried about someone listening to you talking to yourself. (See, the emotions and interpretations pop up everywhere.) Look at yourself. Using your handy hands again, say aloud ten details that you see about yourself. These could be your hair, eyes, glasses, braces, clothing, etc.

Great! But we still have four more senses. Find a place either in your imagination or in your house that is noisy. Can you hear ten sounds? If you were to list these sounds, could someone figure out where you were?

Smelling and tasting are more difficult. We don’t rely on these two senses except in certain situations. Recall your last meal. Can you describe at least three tastes and one smell? You could walk about your house smelling objects, such as the dog or the bookshelves, but I don’t want your brothers and sisters to laugh at you.

Next, we have touch. You could casually and quietly walk about your house letting your fingertips drift over various objects. What does a book feel like? How about your cat? Your clothing? A tree? The temperature and the texture of objects can be interesting details to add to your descriptions, especially if you are describing something that is imaginary. People have never heard of a grixlet, but if I write that a grixlet is fuzzy and warm, smells like cinnamon, and
clicks its tongue, then they will have an idea of what a grixlet might look like.

Finally, we have emotions and interpretations about objects and events. Remember, the palm of your hand represents emotions and interpretations. What emotion do you experience when your shirt rips, when you climb up high in a tree, when you are reading a great story, when you hear your favorite music, when you see your pet, and when you sit at the dinner table and have to eat two bites of the food that you wish your mother would stop cooking? What do these events and objects mean to you?

Here’s a real life example of what I’m talking about:
I enjoy talking in front of a crowd. As long as I have prepared myself and have notes to refer to, I am excited but eager to speak. Sometimes, my knees shake at first, but I know that when I begin speaking and looking at the faces in the crowd, I will focus on the information and forget about myself. Then my knees stop shaking, and my voice gets stronger and clearer. I watch faces in the audience to see if people understand what I am saying and if I am holding their interest. If I seem to be losing their attention, then I wrap up my talk or move as quickly as possible to the strongest point in my speech. I do not want to lose my listeners.

**Focus**

If you do not focus your writing, it can sound like a fill-in-the-blank exercise.
I tasted ice cream. It was cold. It was smooth. It tasted of chocolate. The cone was crunchy. I was happy.

This is boring, very boring, boring to write and boring to read. Are you bored yet? I am. If you send me writing like this, I will probably send it back to you, asking you to revise it. So let’s rewrite this description. What is most important about ice cream? The flavor, the coldness, or the satisfaction?

You could choose any of these important aspects of ice cream, but let’s choose two to compare and contrast. Which senses did the writer focus on?

1. I wrapped the brown, crispy cone with a white napkin. Then I pulled the silver ice cream scoop out of the drawer. Now for the tough part, I thought. Do I want pink strawberry, dark chocolate, or green pistachio? I stared at my choices. Finally, I closed my eyes, waved the scoop, and plunged it into a carton. Green pistachio crowned my brown, crispy cone.
2. I shivered when I licked my chocolate ice cream cone. Wintertime sat on my tongue and filled my mouth. It was ninety degrees outside, but I didn’t care anymore. I swallowed the cold, cold ice cream, not letting a drop of it fall to the ground.

Notice that the focused writing is very different from the original description. An original description is almost always a rough, unfinished description.

**Insight**

Insight and interpretation are vital to writing well. You do not ever want your reader to shrug her shoulders and say, “So what?” The way to prevent this horrible indifference in your audience is to offer honest emotions and insights. Have you ever been afraid to do something because you expected trouble or inconvenience? Maybe you have never doused yourself in beet juice, but everyone has had the anxiety of expecting things to go wrong and then the frustration of having things go wrong.

The point is that you are not sharing mere facts with your readers. You are sharing meaning. You do not have to spell out the meaning for your reader, but you should indicate the meaning in some way. This is such an important point that you will be reading about it again and again in these lessons. Don’t worry if you do not understand precisely what I’m talking about. Sharing meaning will become clearer as you continue through the lessons.

Reread the ice cream paragraphs. In paragraph one, the writer experiences the difficulty of choosing between three good and desirable things. In paragraph two, the writer is savoring the coldness of ice cream on a hot day.

**Reading Resource**

Find a book that you have enjoyed reading. Reread a favorite passage from the book.

- How many of the senses did the author include in that passage?
- What is the emotion of the passage?
- What meaning does the author want to share with you?
Assignment for Lesson Two:
Imagine That

Choose a question below to answer in 100 to 200 words. Use as many of the senses as possible. If a sense does not fit, do not include it in your answer.

- What if I stepped into a time warp and was transported into the future?
- What if people could fly and didn’t need cars?
- Where would I go if I could travel to an imaginary place?
- What if people had to build their own houses to live in?

Now, choose one sense to focus on. Which sense is the most important in your writing? Rewrite your story or paragraph, going into greater detail. Cut out the sense descriptions that are weak. Delete or rewrite to focus only on one sense. Your second draft should be very different from the first draft.

Completely rewriting a paragraph or story from one to fifty times is quite normal for professional writers. I’m not going to ask you to rewrite anything fifty times, but be prepared to rewrite at least once or twice. A professional writer may spend 25% of his time researching material, 25% writing, and 50% rewriting. Those percentages compare with the way I spend my writing time, or perhaps the rewriting just seems to take twice as long as the actual writing.

Proofreading Practice for the Writer

- Did you include specific details?
- Did you use as many senses as possible in the first paragraph?
- Did you focus on one sense only in the second paragraph?
- Check punctuation.
Think About It

Should you always try to include as many senses as possible in your description? Probably not. Focus on the strongest or most appropriate sense for the situation. If you are describing a landscape or a person, sight will perhaps be the sense to emphasize. If you are writing a battle scene, sounds and emotions might predominate. If you want to intrigue your reader and create suspense, focus on texture, taste, or smell, that is, the senses we don’t often rely on for information.

You can also use sense details in more subtle ways. For example, the “r” sound in the passage about pirates was not a coincidence. It’s a rough sound. Short sentences can indicate an atmosphere of hurry or impatience. Using words with the long “o” sound can draw out the time, as “Toad took the long road home, going over and over the only excuse he could offer: ‘I should have known not to trust the chameleons, but I wrote a note of apology right away.’”

Lots of conversation can move the story forward or stall it, depending upon whether or not the speakers reach an agreement. Characters can think aloud or talk to themselves to create an illusion of time and to indicate their emotions.
Lesson 3 — Questions Please

Who, What, When, Where, Why, and How?

Newspaper writing is distinct from other styles of writing. Just the facts, ma’am. All the important information strikes you in the first sentence or two and then the less important details are filled in until the article seems to fade away. Journalists use this pattern because people skim the paper. Newspaper readers don’t generally read the daily paper cover to cover. They want the facts fast and upfront.

The six question words are in the heading above. If a reader knows Who did what when, where, how, and why, then the reader has the facts of the situation. The details to follow in a more leisurely fashion may be how long Who did what, how Who was dressed, and what did Who have to say about what.

Asking Good Questions

Asking good questions is not only a sign of a good journalist, but it is a sign of intelligence. Questions are necessary to do research. You research the who, what, when, where, why, and how of your topic, but you must formulate the questions first so you will know when you discover the answers.

Questions help you make decisions, as when you ponder the awful mystery of “What will be on my math test next week? What ought I to study in order to earn the highest score possible? When will I find the time to study?”

My older sister was once criticized by co-workers for asking software designers many questions before she wrote software user manuals. The other writers warned her that she would get fired because she didn’t seem to know her job. However, she was promoted within the first year because she learned a great deal by asking good questions, and her supervisor was pleased with the accurate information in the user manuals.
\textbf{Generating Questions}

Study an image, such as a painting or a photograph, and write down as many questions as you can about the image. M.C. Escher’s graphic art is handy for this activity, but an old photograph would work well too. You will find M.C. Escher’s art on the Web.

Here are some questions one of my students wrote about a copy of a Monet painting:
- Who are the people in the picture?
- Did the artist paint from his memory or outside?
- Where are the people going?
- What kind of red flowers are in the painting?
- Who owns the house behind the trees?
- Why is the lady carrying an umbrella on a sunny day?
- Why didn’t the artist paint the people’s faces?
- What else is behind the trees?
- Did he like his painting when he was finished? –John G., age 9

A European art museum once collected people’s questions about a work of art and submitted these questions to the artist. The artist answered the questions, and the curator displayed the questions and answers near the painting. People visiting the museum spent more time looking at that particular painting and discussing it than at any other work of art there.

\textbf{Reading Resources}

Several of Emily Dickinson’s poems are based on questions:
“Why Do They Shut Me Out of Heaven?”
“Will There Really Be a Morning?”
“Of Tolling Bell I ask the Cause?”
“Why Should We Hurry”

The \textit{Imponderables} series by David Feldman are bestsellers that attempt to answer those perplexing questions we all have, such as why do clocks run clockwise, do penguins have knees, and why doesn’t plum pudding have plums?
Shakespeare’s Hamlet questions himself as to whether he should seek revenge:

\begin{quote}
To be or not to be, —that is the question:
Whether ’tis nobler in the mind to suffer
The slings and arrows of outrageous fortune
Or to take arms against a sea of troubles,
And by opposing end them?
\end{quote}
Assignment for Lesson Three:
The Interview

Who would you like to interview and what would you like to find out? Those are the first two questions to get you started. You should come up with about eight to ten open-ended questions once you decide whom to interview. **Open-ended questions are those that require more than a yes or no answer.** These questions should have a particular focus instead of being spread out over a wide field. If you are interviewing your grandparents, ask about what Sundays were like when they were young, or what school was like, or about the different places they lived. Do not pretend to interview someone. Conduct an actual interview. This is not a fiction assignment.

Use the six question words as a guideline for writing your questions: Who, what, when, where, why, and how?

If the person you interview is talkative, you may have time for only one question. That’s fine because you want in-depth answers. But the first or second question may not generate much information from your interviewee, and some people will give only brief answers. So be prepared with several questions.

Suggestions:
- Interview your parents about their life when they were your age.
- Interview grandparents.
- Interview someone in an interesting career.
- Interview someone who is a local community leader, such as president of a university or the president’s secretary if you cannot get an interview with the president, the director of the local food bank, the chief of police, or the mayor.
- Interview someone who has an unusual job, such as a clown, a symphony conductor, a stone carver, a limousine driver, a news director, or the elephant keeper at the zoo.
- Interview a war veteran. (The Oral History Project is a resource and helpful guide for collecting information from American soldiers, especially those who fought in WWII because these soldiers and support troops are now in their 80’s. If you are interested in doing such a large and permanent project, the website is http://oralhistory.minds.tv/ You will probably require some assistance to do such a project, so you may work with someone else as a team.)
Proofreading Practice for Writers

• Did you distinguish between your questions and the answers?
• Is your punctuation correct?
• Did you find out something new?
• Are your questions too obvious?
• Are your questions focused?

Think about It

When would you use this pattern in your writing? If you were writing a factual article for a newspaper, you would use this pattern. If you were writing a research paper, you would want to write many questions and then choose the best ones to focus your research, although you would not want your research paper to sound like a newspaper article.

Many times, fiction writers must research information for a story. They might need to know what kind of trees grow in the forests in Maine, what the inside of a luxury yacht looks like, or how a photographer prepares for a trip to film African elephants. As strange as it may seem, reality strengthens fiction. The writer is not free to make up absolutely everything in a fiction story.

As Emily Dickinson’s poems show, a poet might focus on a specific question. Characters in stories often have questions. A detective in a mystery story would want to ask many questions. A child searching for a lost pet might want to interview the neighbors to find out if they have seen the pet.

Once you write a fiction story, you might consider proofreading your story by pretending to be the reader and asking questions about the characters and plot. Did you answer the questions that your reader might want to know? Where was Sally when she discovered that her bike had been stolen? What did the peasant say to the king to secure help against the vile robbers, and what did the king say in response? Who could have taken that huge chunk out of Dan’s birthday cake? When did Misty decide that she must face her fear of fire-breathing dragons? How did the skunk get shut up in the garage? Why did Philip dig all those holes in the backyard?
Lesson 4 – Repeat That, Please

Repetition in your writing can either weaken it or strengthen it. If your readers are young, they will be delighted with obvious repetition as in the wolf’s threat to the three little pigs, “I’ll huff and I’ll puff, and I’ll blow your house down.” This will not be quite as thrilling to older readers who will get bored by simple repetition. When you use repetition in your writing, think about your target audience.

Older readers will appreciate more subtle repetition. A subtle repetition may be a phrase or word that is repeated with a slight variation or perhaps the same phrase repeated by another character. Poetry and music often use repetition as a unifying theme. Think of Edgar Allan Poe’s “The Raven.” This repetition of “nothing more” and “nevermore” becomes eerie. Other words are also repeated and yet do not become tiresome. The dreary, repetitive “or” sound casts a mournful atmosphere over the poem—Lenore, implore, door, lore, explore, before.

Several of O. Henry’s short stories use subtle repetition. “The Gift of the Magi” uses a reverse or mirror repetition in which the husband and wife both make sacrifices of their prize possessions. In “The Ransom of Red Chief,” the kidnappers write several ransom notes. The father of the kidnapped child writes the final ransom note.

Repetition is often used to bring a story or an essay full circle for a strong ending. A person’s early remark may be restated or referred to at the end of the story with a deeper and unexpected meaning. Father Brown remarks at the beginning of a G. K. Chesterton story, “I always like a dog, as long as he isn’t spelt backwards.” This statement in “The Oracle of the Dog” is debated until Father Brown demystifies a particular dog’s howling at the time of a murder by using common sense to solve the mystery. The conclusion of the story refers to St. Francis and the wolf as a reminder that St. Francis and the wolf liked each other, but St. Francis would never have worshipped the “unknown” powers of the wolf. The wolf was obedient to the saint because the saint was obedient to God.

In G. K. Chesterton’s short story “The Queer Feet,” the criminal relies on a similarity in dress codes during the late 1800’s. One man declares that a gentleman could never be mistaken for a person of lower rank after he himself has already made this mistake twelve times within the course of one meal. The repetition in this story is implied; the author did not specifically repeat the same scene twelve times.
The “Alleluia Chorus” from Handel’s *Messiah* is extremely repetitive. The word “Alleluia” is repeated again and again, but the music varies: the words are sung in parts by soprano, alto, tenor, and bass; the music moves at different rates of speed; words are repeated in different rhythms and with great force at times. All the variations create a powerful oratorio.

In the past, you may have been told not to repeat words in your writing. This is quite correct if you understand the difference in intention. If you continually use the word “small,” your writing can get boring as in “The small girl took her small dog for a short walk in the small woods.” The repetition here results from carelessness or a lack of imagination. You do not improve the sentence by rewriting it as “The little girl took her small dog for a short walk in the tiny woods.” You could improve it by adding dialogue as in “‘Come on, Bitsy! It’s time to go out,’ said the six year old to her toy poodle. ‘Let’s go to the park, but we have to run because Daddy will be home soon.’ A careless or unimaginative repetition weakens your writing. The repetition must be strong, colorful, intriguing, rhythmical, or even nonsensical, as in “Hickory, Dickory, Dock,” which is both rhythmical and nonsensical. Use repetition intentionally and vary it when necessary.

**Reading Resources**

- “Who’s on First” This was originally a radio skit performed by Abbott and Costello. It is still performed live, sometimes by baseball players. The questions and repetition are wildly hilarious. Find the text at: [http://fisher.osu.edu/~tomassini_1/whotext.html](http://fisher.osu.edu/~tomassini_1/whotext.html)

- Locate “The Ransom of Red Chief” and read the whole story. While kidnapping has never been a humorous subject in reality, O. Henry wrote this story in a different era, and he makes the point that parenting is not for the cowardly, greedy, or weak person.

- “The Oracle of the Dog” from *The Complete Father Brown* by G. K. Chesterton

These examples illustrate various kinds of strong repetition in writing.
Assignment for Lesson Four:
The House that Jack Built

If you completed Writing Workshops I and II, you may remember a similar assignment. This assignment goes beyond what you wrote previously. Be sure to consider your audience before writing.

Use the basic pattern from the nursery rhyme “The House That Jack Built” to create your own story of about 200-400 words. Do not use rhyming words. Although the example below also uses a house, you might decide to write about the treasure that Tim found. Your story may be based upon a true event if you wish.

Consider your audience before writing. If you are writing for young children, your story should be different than if you are writing for someone your own age. The beach house story that follows was written for ages 3 to 7.

If I wanted to write for an adult audience, I would have taken out the sound words and made the repetition less obvious. I would have focused on the interior of the beach house and the significance of the items in the house. Perhaps my father had made the wooden table, and seeing and using the table would remind me of his skill, his sense of humor, and his work ethic. Perhaps a good friend had given me a cuckoo clock for the beach house, and the little bird would remind me of my good friend each time he popped out.

If I wanted to write for a teenaged audience, I would concentrate on activities that teens would be most interested in doing at the beach. I might write about the annual sandcastle competition or the annual 5K race that I hoped to win. I might focus on fishing at the beach with the sea gulls catching more fish than I did.

Example:

“Hurray! Here is the beach house that we visit each summer.

Creak! That is the old wooden door of the beach house that we visit each summer.

Swish! This is the salty sea wind that blows through the old wooden door of the beach house that we visit each summer.

Crash! That is the wave-rolling ocean of the salty sea wind that blows through the old wooden door of the beach house that we visit each summer.
Look! These are the new swimsuits we will wear in the wave-rolling ocean of the salty sea wind that blows through the old wooden door of the beach house that we visit each summer.

Ow! This is a crab which should NOT be on the swimsuits we wear in the wave-rolling ocean of the salty sea wind that blows through the old wooden door of the beach house that we visit each summer.”

—excerpt from “This is the Beach House”

**Think About It**

What is the purpose of repetition? Are you developing a rhythm? Are you using it to organize your writing? Are you lulling the reader into a false sense of security? Does the repetition tie up the loose ends of your story? Is the repetition emphasizing something you want your reader to remember? These are all appropriate reasons to use repetition.

Repetition may consist of the same sounds, the same words, the same idea, the same rhythm, and the same person. Repetition may also involve a descending or ascending order. For example, as a hiker walks down a mountain, she sees larger and larger objects or smaller and smaller objects. To indicate a person’s increasing wealth, the writer might mention the person wearing more and more expensive clothing during the story. If the person suddenly buys less expensive clothing, the reader will figure out that something has happened to the person’s wealth.
Lesson 5 – Cause and Effect

Many years ago, storytellers could introduce effects with no causes, but today’s writer must show the connection. Cause and effect is a simple pattern, which can be expanded into complicated plots. “If you give a mouse a cookie” is the opening line and title of a book by Laura Joffe Numeroff. This entire book shows the obvious pattern of cause and effect. If you give a mouse a cookie, then something is going to happen and when that happens, it will cause something else to occur and so on.

This pattern is quite true in real life. If you learn how to swim, then you can enjoy swimming at the local pool, and if you are swimming at the local pool, then you can join in some of the better games with the other swimmers. If you join in the games, then you will meet new people, and if you meet new people, you will have more friends who can teach you new skills. The pattern can continue on and on.

Determining the effect of a cause can be daunting if you are short on experience. And some effects must simply be imagined because the cause is too dangerous or impossible to experiment with in reality. You may not smash a car into a tree to be able to add realism to your story, and you must use your imagination to figure out what it would be like to fly a spaceship through a time warp.

Young children will be delighted with the simple If /then pattern. Older readers will want the pattern to be less obvious. Numeroff’s books (If You Give a Moose a Muffin, If You Give a Pig a Pancake, etc.) are as obvious as you can write. Fairy tales are written at a slightly more complicated level. Because the porridge was too hot, the Three Bears went for a walk. Because the door was unlocked, Goldilocks went in. Because she was hungry, she ate the porridge. Because she was tired, she fell fast asleep. Because Goldilocks should never have entered a strange house and made herself at home, she must be punished by being frightened. The story is not written in this way, but the cause and effects are all there.

If Cinderella had not been mistreated at first, her fairy godmother would not have appeared. If her fairy godmother had not appeared, then Cinderella would not have glass slippers. If Cinderella did not have the glass slippers, then the Prince would not have been able to find her.

When you are writing a story, if your cause is specific, then the effects usually follow easily. If you do not know the cause, the effects will be difficult to imagine. For instance, Charlotte is
walking down the street. If she is walking down the street because she stormed out of her house in anger after an argument, then perhaps she should be rushing wildly down the street toward her best friend’s house to look for sympathy. If she is walking down the street because she is tired of being indoors, then she may be strolling happily along, admiring the flowers and waving to people she passes. If she is walking down the street because she is annoyed that her neighbor’s dog has dug a hole under the fence again, then she may never notice the flowers or the other neighbors. Perhaps her face is red with anger, her eyes are blazing, and she is marching down the street. Better stay out of Charlotte’s way.

**Practicing the If/Then Pattern**

1. If you give a goose a hat, then __________. And if __________, then __________.
   
   Ty H., age 8, wrote, “If you give a goose a hat, then she will want a dress to go with it. Then she will begin to dance.”

2. If we were always happy, then __________. And if __________, then __________.

3. If you bring an elephant to a tea party, then __________. And if __________, then __________. And if __________, then __________.

4. Because no two fingerprints are alike, ______________.

5. Because Thomas Edison was persistent, ______________.

**Reading Resources**

If you are not familiar with Laura Joffe Numeroff’s books, locate one and read it. These books are aimed at ages 3 to 8. This is an example of a very obvious cause and effect pattern, which will be appropriate for young children. Older readers will want a more subtle pattern.

A few ancient Greek playwrights were notorious for ignoring cause and effect and using *Deus ex machina*, which refers to an improbable or artificial ending. A god or goddess might descend at the end of the play to set everything right. For example, in Euripides’ play Alcestis, Hercules is so embarrassed by his poor behavior towards his host that he battles Death and brings the dead back to life to resolve the story. Another example would be the timely arrival of the cavalry in a Western. Although an implausible or artificial ending may work with some stories, usually, modern writers try to avoid it.

Read several stories from a book of fairy tales, such as Andrew Lang’s *The Blue Fairy Book*. Lang’s stories are not the sanitized children’s cartoon versions. These may be best for ages 12 and up. Can you see the causes and effects in the stories? Are there any improbable or artificial endings?
ASSIGNMENT FOR LESSON FIVE:
REWITING FAIRY TALES

Locate a short story or fairy tale, such as “The Princess and the Pea,” “Jack and the Beanstalk,” or “The Three Little Pigs.” Change at least two causes in the story and rewrite the whole story, showing the new effects arising from your change. Aim for a length of 300-500 words.

Do not copy the original story and simply add your own causes in. Rewrite the story in your own words. For example, this is one version of Cinderella:

Once there was a gentleman who married for his second wife the proudest and most haughty woman that was ever seen. She had by a former husband two daughters of her own humor, who were, indeed, exactly like her in all things. He had likewise, by another wife, a young daughter, but of unparalleled goodness and sweetness of temper, which she took from her mother, who was the best creature in the world.

You would need to rewrite this in your own words:

Once upon a time, a lady’s husband died, and so after a year, she married again. Her new husband had two daughters who were very proud and mean. The lady had a wonderfully kind and beautiful daughter from her first husband. You may guess that trouble would start between the three daughters.

Here are a few more ideas—“The Goose that Laid the Golden Egg” could be changed in a variety of ways. It might become “The Shrub that Bloomed Golden Roses,” “The Dog that Wore a Golden Collar,” or “The Gold that Turned into Geese.” One of my students rewrote “The Three Bears” as well-to-do members of a proper British family. Use your imagination when you decide what to change, but be sure to write the entire story in your own words.

You can find fairy tales online at Project Gutenberg http://www.gutenberg.org/wiki/Main_Page
Think About It

Stories are frequently rewritten in the way described above. There are many versions of “Cinderella” and “Beauty and the Beast.” Jerry Lewis starred in a movie called *C Cinderfella* in 1960. *Ella Enchanted* by Gail Levine is another retelling of the Cinderella story with so many changes that you may not recognize the original story. The 2005 movie *Phantom of the Opera* is a beauty and beast story for adults, which was originally a novel and later was transformed into a musical by Andrew Lloyd Webber. If you have an assignment to write a story and have difficulty thinking of a story, begin with a familiar story and change the causes, which will lead to different effects.

Fractured fairy tales are sometimes used in children’s theater. These are common fairy tales that may be spliced together. For example, the three little pigs meet Sleeping Beauty or perhaps the pigs wind up with fairy godmothers. This is not plagiarism, which is against the law.

Plagiarism is copying someone else’s work. Sometimes there is a fine line between rewriting and plagiarizing, but if you change the causes in a story, the original will be barely visible, and your effects must be different because they should follow logically from the causes. Writers must reuse story lines as an artist must reuse the basic elements of art—lines, angles, dots, and circles. There are less than a hundred basic plots (Plots are what happens in a story, such as a shipwreck, a dangerous journey, a friendship lost, etc.), but the variations of a plot are endless.
Lesson 6 – Creating Tension

The best stories and even some nonfiction writing, such as biography and history, often have tension. What is tension? Tension is what happens when everything is not going well; tension refers to obstacles, trials, and suffering. C. S. Lewis remarked that writing about perfectly good times covers little space. The details are in the distress.

How many people want to read about someone who never had a problem in her life, where everything turned out exactly as she desired, and she never had to exert herself to get what she wanted? In reality, ordinary lives are filled with twists and turns, and history is a record of those twists and turns.

Tension may be as slight as embarrassment or as major as the destruction of life, but it must be present in your story, and most importantly, you want to dwell on it. Don’t create tension and then skip past it without a thought to the consequences. For instance, don’t make the hero fall down the stairs and then limp off in one sentence. Draw the scene out. He might take two sentences to fall down the stairs and then three more sentences to give your reader some anguish over his physical and mental state. He should get up slowly. People around him should react. He needs to speak, or at least groan, and make sure that nothing is broken or discover that something is indeed broken. You may leave him there after the fall to keep the reader in doubt or because he is unconscious, and you are going to describe what else is going on in the story at this time, but at some point, you need to return and describe the aftermath of the fall.

How do you create tension, which is what leads to suspense, which keeps your readers turning the page, in your writing? Later on we will talk about plots, which are the events occurring in your story. You can create tension without having a plot, however.

Methods of Creating Tension

- Questions can create tension. Ask the reader a question. Get him wondering. This works well for fiction and nonfiction.

- Riddles, either direct or indirect, create tension. A direct riddle is an obvious one. An indirect riddle may be a clue or part of a conversation. You do not directly ask the reader to guess an answer, but the reader begins to suspect that something is up. An indirect riddle may work well for nonfiction.
• Repetition can create tension if the repetition is stressed and then varied. The reader is hoping that tragedy will not strike again every hour on the hour. The strange knocking at the door will perhaps bring good news this time.

• Cause and effect is yet another way to create tension if the writer establishes a pause between the cause and the effect. A terrible windstorm will bring terrible results to the little rural town. The discovery of each consequence unfolds slowly. The hasty, angry letter will create a deep rift between two close friends and then slowly spreads to their other friends and relatives.

• Lists can create mild tension if you postpone the description or explanation of the list. Rustle, slice, ow! Paper cuts hurt. Flags, ribbons, uniforms, scars, and tears—the soldiers were coming home. Lists can be useful for adding tension to nonfiction writing.

• Dialogue, which will be covered in the following lesson, may create tension through disagreement and argument. Dialogue may be used in fiction or nonfiction, although actual quotations will generally be preferable for nonfiction instead of created dialogue.

• Speeding up the pace and slowing down the pace of a story can create tension. Short, choppy sentences leave the reader breathless. Passing over several years in a character’s life can create suspense. Hinting at danger before the danger arrives creates suspense. How bad will the danger be when it finally hits? Leaving the character in a tight spot and moving to action occurring at the same time in a different location will keep your reader guessing.

As you can see, writers have a variety of tools for creating necessary tension. You may have to try one or more before you find the right tool. The techniques mentioned above, however, do not automatically create tension. In order to guarantee tension, you must intend to create it by using some method. The tension must be connected with your writing. That is, the tension must serve a purpose. It cannot be simply thrown in for the sake of tension. An argument must be a meaningful argument. The riddle must have something to do with the story.

_Tension-less_

Take a favorite novel or chapter book and read only the happy parts. Is the story satisfying without the distress?

Read the first chapter of the same book. How does the chapter end? What techniques does the writer use in the first chapter to create tension? P. G. Wodehouse often left the reader hanging at the end of the chapter.
**Story-in-a-Round**

When you are on a long car trip, try telling a story-in-a-round. Player one begins the story and immediately gets the hero into a jam. Then without warning, he passes the story to anyone else willing to play along. Just say, “Your turn, ____.” The next player has to get the hero out of the tight spot and get him or another character into a different difficult situation. The story is again passed along, until the last player makes up a happy ending.

You could also play this game with a pen-pal by passing the story back and forth.

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**Reading Resources**

*The Red Keep* by Allen French. This story contains much physical and emotional conflict and much suffering.

P. G. Wodehouse was a master of suspense although his stories are light-hearted. He frequently ended chapters with the hero in distress, usually because the character had done something silly and must suffer the consequences. “Episode of the Dog MacIntosh” goes wrong from the beginning and becomes so muddled that it looks as if nothing will ever come right again, but I promise you, the story has a happy ending. Comedy also relies upon suspense.
ASSIGNMENT FOR LESSON SIX:
DISTRESSING DETAILS

Choose three methods of creating tension to describe one of the scenes below. That is, write the same scene three different ways. Do not combine all three into one description. The length of each method should be about 3-5 paragraphs. Take your time with the descriptions. Review Lesson Three if necessary to refresh your memory.

Which method do you think worked best for the scene you chose? Scenes:

• Overhearing unpleasant gossip about yourself
• Losing the gift that you bought ahead of time for your mother’s birthday
• Arriving a day late at a birthday party because you remembered the date incorrectly
• Discovering that someone has stolen your bicycle
• Breaking your arm the day before you were supposed to go camping with your dad and grandfather
• Being ignored by your best friend who has just made another best friend
• Getting something that you always wanted and finding out that it creates nothing but problems for you

Examples:

1. Where was she? What happened? Why was she on the ground? What was she covered with? That red stuff. What was it? She heard people shouting. She must have done something wrong, but she couldn’t think what.

   “Are you okay?” Who was that? Someone was beside her, talking to her. She just looked about and raised one arm vaguely to her face.

   “You are going to be all right,” someone else said, patting her and making her lie still. “You’ve been in a car accident, but everything is going to be okay.” (questions)

2. We speed up. The road signs fly past. The engine roars. Houses and trees sweep by. The road twists. The white lines blur.
We see a white sedan ahead. It looks tiny. It’s growing larger. We’ll pass. The sedan is standing still. The turn signal comes on.

But it can’t turn. Not now. Not right here. No time. We brake and swerve. Oh, no! It’s too late. Too late. (short choppy sentences)

3. My stomach tightening, my hands flying up to cover my face, a smacking, crunching, grating sound, and then I was falling.

People talking, someone tugging at me, feet running up, faces next to mine, and a terrible, frightening pain in my chest—the car had finally stopped moving.

My head spinning, my face bleeding, and my body caught in the seat belt were enough to convince me that I wasn’t dreaming, but I could scarcely think straight or answer any of the questions people were asking me.

The front end was wrinkled, the fender all crooked, the windshield cracked, and the airbag deflated—when I saw it two days later, it hardly looked like our old familiar van. (list)

Notice that only in the first example are the words “car accident” mentioned, and yet by reading the details, you can figure out what has happened without being told.

Proofreading Practice for the Writer

- Did you use a separate tension-creating pattern for each method?
- Is there a connection between cause and effect?
- Did you use specific details regardless of which pattern you chose?
- Check your punctuation.
Tension hooks your reader. It draws your reader into the story, into the world you have created. In real life, tension draws our attention too. We are on the lookout for dangerous situations. Think of the drivers who slow down to get a clear view of an automobile accident. Sometimes these drivers are so busy looking that they cause another accident.

However, too much tension overwhelms your reader. You need to pace your story or your report. Your story cannot be one dire moment after another. Give your reader a chance to breathe. Your report may raise questions, but then you must answer them or, at least, propose a possible solution. Humor is often used to dispel tension in movies and literature.

Think about a dramatic movie you have recently seen. What were the chair-gripping scenes? How did the scenes end? An excellent director guides the audience into and out of tense scenes. As a writer, you must also direct your reader by emphasizing what you want your reader to experience.
Look at examples of new words online at http://m-w.com/info/new_words.htm (Merriam-Webster Online). Have you heard of any of these new words? Each year, many new words are invented for a variety of reasons.

What is plagiarism? How can we avoid plagiarizing someone else’s work?

When would you use simple repetition? When would you use subtle repetition?

What are the six question words?

**Interviewing**

Watch or read an online interview, such as Tucker Carlson. Pay attention to the questions and the answers given. Does the interviewer follow up on questions? How does the interview begin and end?

**Description**

Watch a scene from a favorite movie. Practice writing a description of the scene. Concentrate on description. Do not add dialogue. When a scene is set up, everything you see is placed on purpose. Someone selected every object in the scene if the scene is indoors. If the scene is outdoors, someone spent a great deal of time artificially creating the background or finding just the right natural background.

**Revision**

Take the time to proofread your own work. The first version is a rough draft. It can be improved. This may mean deleting words, sentences, or paragraphs. You may want to rearrange sentences and paragraphs or rewrite and add new sections. When you proofread for content, rather than simple grammatical errors, pretend that you are not the writer and know very little about the subject. What questions do you want the writer to answer? Does the writer answer the questions?

Be sure to read your writing aloud. Your ear may catch an awkward or slow section.
Guidelines for Content Revision

1. Pay attention to the structure of your writing. Did you use dialogue, description, repetition, cause and effect?

2. Should you add more description or dialogue to improve your writing?

3. Are your sentences clear? Do they follow each other logically?

4. Does your writing hold your reader’s attention?

5. Is your writing meaningful?

6. Would suspense or tension improve the writing?

7. Does the writing drag or move too quickly?

8. Read the writing aloud. How does it sound?
Lesson 1
Evaluation Guidelines
1. Is each word defined and used correctly according to the definition?
2. Is each sentence punctuated properly?
3. Are the new words original?
4. Be sure to notice what was done correctly!

Answers to Hinky Pinks
- Tooth booth
- Mean queen
- Sharp harp
- Heard word
- Hip ship

Lesson 2
Evaluation Guidelines
1. Give your child a chance to evaluate the writing first, using the proofreading questions.
2. Then evaluate using the same guidelines.
3. Check for the correct application of recently learned grammar skills.
4. Be sure to indicate what was done correctly.

Lesson 3
Evaluation Guidelines
1. Check punctuation.
2. Are the questions clear?
3. Are the questions focused on the topic or too rambling?
4. Do the questions call for complete answers instead of yes and no answers?
5. Are the questions too simplistic?
6. Notice what was well done.

Lesson 4
Evaluation Guidelines
- Check the punctuation carefully.
- We use “that” for objects and “who” for people or animals that are pets or that are being treated as human. “The man who painted the house that we bought.” “My dog, whom I love very much, is afraid of thunder.” You may sometimes use “that” for people without committing a grammatical faux pas, but often “that” sounds awkward when you are writing about people.
- Is there a logical progression of events in the story?
- Does the story have a strong ending?
- Is the story about 200-400 words long?
Lesson 5

Evaluation Guidelines

- Does the title fit the story?
- Use “that” for objects and “who” for people, as in “The goose that we chased was owned by Tom who was a kindly farmer.”
- Is there a connection between cause and effect in the story?
- Does the writer change at least two causes in the story?
- Would repetition improve the story?
- Does the story have a strong ending?
- Is the story at least 300 words long?
- Is grammar applied correctly?

Lesson 6

Evaluation Guidelines

- Double check the assignment, using the proofreading guidelines at the end of the assignment.
- Check verb tenses. Is the same verb tense used throughout each example? In the examples given, past tense is used twice, but present tense is used in the second example to make the event seem more immediate.
- Discuss which of the three examples creates the most tension.
Are you ready for the final Writing Workshop? Continue fine-tuning your writing skills by designing a parody, writing a debate, creating characters, adding subplots, and writing essays.