

# Writing Skills for Today

Level C

Sample

Sample

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# Writing Skills Mastery

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

Date: \_\_\_\_\_

**Parent:** Below is a list of each unit's objectives. As your student completes an assignment, indicate whether each objective has been met. If your student needs more experience with an objective, revisit this assignment or skill.

	Skill Mastered	Needs Experience
<b>Unit 1: Narrative Voice Attitude</b> Skill Area: Basic Writing		
1. Identify narrative voice attitudes.		
2. Create attitudes in your narrative voices.		
<b>Unit 2: Interesting Sentences</b> Skill Area: Creativity		
1. Add detail to sentences.		
2. Vary sentence structure.		
<b>Unit 3: Arguments That Win</b> Skill Area: Organization		
1. Recognize the points of an argument.		
2. Recognize a valid argument.		
3. Write an effective argument.		
<b>Unit 4: Omniscient and Limited Knowledge</b> Skill Area: Creativity		
1. Narrative voices in fiction can have different degrees of knowledge about actions and characters.		
2. Identify degrees of knowledge.		
3. Create omniscient and limited narrative voices.		

	Skill Mastered	Needs Experience
<b>Unit 5: Write for Action</b> Skill Area: Basic Writing		
1. Passive voice is not exciting to read.		
2. Active voice can be exciting to read.		
3. Use active voice to make your writing more exciting.		
<b>Unit 6: Narrative Voice Position</b> Skill Area: Description		
1. Authors have choices about where they place their narrative voices.		
<b>Unit 7: Where to Start</b> Skill Area: Organization		
1. There are many ways to organize objects.		
2. Organize objects for descriptive writing.		
<b>Unit 8: Dialogue</b> Skill Area: Basic Writing		
1. Punctuate dialogue.		
2. Recognize speech patterns and copy them.		
3. Make it clear who is talking by the way you have your characters speak.		

	Skill Mastered	Needs Experience
<b>Unit 9: An Author Makes the Reader Feel</b> Skill Area: Creativity		
1. Feelings help a reader understand what the author is saying.		
2. An author influences the feelings of his reader by using certain techniques.		
3. Use these techniques in your writing to create feelings in your reader.		
<b>Unit 10: Out of Time</b> Skill Area: Basic Writing		
1. Write dialogue.		
2. Change tenses in dialogue.		
<b>Unit 11: My Thumb</b> Skill Area: Description		
1. Picture an object in your mind that you want to describe.		
2. Learn to look at the details.		
3. Write a descriptive essay.		
<b>Unit 12: Flashback</b> Skill Area: Organization		
1. Learn what a flashback is.		
2. Understand how flashbacks work.		
3. Learn how to use flashbacks in your writing.		

	Skill Mastered	Needs Experience
<b>Unit 13: Foreshadowing</b> Skill Area: Organization		
1. Learn what foreshadowing is.		
2. Understand how foreshadowing is used.		
3. Learn how to use foreshadowing in your writing.		
<b>Unit 14: The House</b> Skill Area: Creativity		
1. Control what your reader understands.		
2. Describe an object so that your reader will “see” it in his mind.		
<b>Unit 15: The Balloon</b> Skill Area: Creativity		
1. Create characters who are motivated by emotions.		
2. Write a very short story with complicated characters.		
<b>Unit 16: Writing Letters</b> Skill Area: Organization		
1. Understand the guidelines for writing business letters.		
2. Learn where to place the parts of a business letter.		
3. Write a business letter.		



This unit is designed to give you practice in making your writing more interesting rather than merely informative.

The following sentence is all that is needed to relay the basic information that a very old man is mad:

*The old man was mad.* — That is straight information and not very interesting.

To make that sentence more interesting, we can add descriptions that help the reader see the mad old man, understand why he is mad, and feel some way about him. Watch what happens when we add detail about how the old man acts when he is mad:

*The old man was so mad he couldn't speak; he just jumped up and down in one spot.* — He is a more interesting old man, right? But he is still not too gripping.

Watch what happens when we add detail about why the old man is mad:

*When the old man woke up and found his bridge was gone, he was so mad he couldn't speak; he just jumped up and down in one spot.* — Better?

We have given our reader an idea about how the old man feels about his bridge being gone, and we have shown how he acts. Now see what happens when we add detail about why he feels so strongly about his bridge:

*The homeless old man called the bridge his home, so when he woke up and found his bridge gone, he was so mad he couldn't speak; he just jumped up and down in one spot.* — Now that we know why he is so mad, his reaction to his bridge being gone is much more interesting.

Let's add one more bit of information to this sentence. Let's add who is watching him and see what that does:

*Bill watched the old man who lived under the bridge wake up and find his home gone. The old man was so mad that he couldn't speak; he just jumped up and down in one spot. A tear trickled down Bill's cheek.* — We have added another person reacting to the old man's anger. Much better, right?

**Objectives:**

- ➊ Add detail to sentences.
- ➋ Vary sentence structure.

## Writing

Now it is your turn. Here is a sentence with only basic information.

*The old man lost his bridge.*

Your job is to give your reader this information in a way that makes it interesting. Add the reason the old man lost his bridge.

**HINT!** As a creative writer, you have two jobs: The first is to give your reader information. The second is to entertain your reader, or at least make your writing interesting.

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Also add the length of time the old man had to be without his bridge.

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Remember to show your writing to your parent for comments and edits. Then rewrite your work.



Write a short sentence that gives your reader nothing but basic information.

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Now write it two more times, adding new details each time. When trying to think about what interesting details to add, try *how*, *why*, *when*, and *where*.

1. 

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2. 

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Congratulations! You have written a sentence that is interesting.

Sometimes we make the mistake of starting all our sentences the same way. Listen to how this sounds:

*Bill saw the old man standing in the stream. Bill asked him why he was standing there. The old man said he was looking for his bridge. Bill thought this was strange. He asked the old man, "How did you lose your bridge?"*

*The old man answered, "When I went to sleep, it was over me, and when I woke up it was gone."*



All of the above sentences begin with a **subject** followed immediately by a **verb**. This is fairly boring to read, even when the subject is interesting. Read the following sentences, and see how much better they sound when the subject-verb pattern is broken:

*When he looked toward the stream, Bill saw the old man standing in the water. Bill asked him why he was standing there. The old man, looking up and down the stream, said that he was looking for his bridge. Bill thought this was strange. "How did you lose your bridge?" he asked.*

*"When I went to sleep," the old man answered, "it was over me, and when I woke up, it was gone."*

Here is another example of how to write with variety. Each of the following sentences contains the same information, but the structures of the sentences are different.

1. Bill saw a field of blue flowers, and in the center of this large area there was an old bridge.
2. In the center of a large field of blue flowers, Bill saw an old bridge.
3. In front of Bill, an old bridge rose over a large field of blue flowers.
4. Blue flowers covered the large field in front of Bill, and in the very center was an old bridge.

Write the following sentence four different ways. Change the structure of the sentence each time.

*Bill walked back to the stream to tell the old man that he might have found his bridge for him.*

1. \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

2. \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_



## Prewriting

A flashback is an interruption of current events in a story to relay a past event that sheds significant light on the story, the character, or his choices.

Sometimes writers start their stories with an exciting event, and then they go back in time by using a flashback to show what caused it. Other times flashbacks are used when writers want to give their readers general background information — like what kind of childhood a character had.

A writer sets up flashback so that the reader knows it is about to occur. He employs one of these techniques: writing in present tense for the current story and then switching to past tense for the flashback, writing in past tense and then switching to past perfect tense when the flashback begins, or having the main character announce that he is telling a memory.

This example of a flashback uses paragraph breaks and the past perfect tense.

*Bill carried the small plastic bag of mud in his pocket. He knew just where he was going to put it.*

Here comes the flashback. (Notice the use of the past perfect tense, *had* plus the main verb, and a new paragraph.)

*Having collected some dirt last night, he had mixed just enough water with it to make it firm and slightly gooey. He had patted it out and trimmed it until it looked just like a brownie. One of his sandwich bags from his lunch had been perfect to put it in.*

Now we end the flashback by going out of the past perfect tense and back to the story line in a new paragraph.

*Bill waited until everyone was watching the game. He knew where Janet had put her sack lunch. Checking the kids at the picnic one last time, he hurried to Janet's lunch bag.*

I wanted to show my reader where Bill had found the mud and how he had kept it. I also wanted to start my narrative with Bill thinking about using the mud for a special purpose. I was able to solve this problem by using a flashback.

## Objectives:

- 1 Learn what a flashback is.
- 2 Understand how flashbacks work.
- 3 Learn how to use flashbacks in your writing.

When you shift to a previous time, use the past perfect tense. This means your first two or three verbs will include the word *had*. When you want to exit the flashback, resume the story at the same place you left off.

Discuss the following list with your parent to help you understand the steps in a flashback. This example uses past tense and past perfect tense.

1. You are using past tense in a narrative.
2. You want to interrupt the story to show your readers something that happened previously.
3. You use a flashback. You introduce your readers to this prior time by using past perfect tense two or three times; then you can use past tense for the rest of the flashback.
4. You tell your readers what you want them to know in the flashback section, and end the flashback by a paragraph change.
5. You resume the story line where you left it, using past tense.

Skilled writers usually develop their stories well before inserting a flashback. Then, when a writer decides to include a flashback, he sets up a situation leading to the flashback. The reader already knows the main character and feels connected to him. Then while the character is going about his day, he suddenly hears or sees something, or experiences an event that reminds him of something from the past.

For example, the character may smell Mother's chocolate chip cookies baking in the oven. The aroma makes the character think of an experience many years ago baking chocolate chip cookies with Grandmother. Grandmother was so kind and gentle, and she took time to show the granddaughter each step patiently. This baking experience had such a significant impact on her that she now realizes she wants to volunteer at a nursing home, sharing time with elderly people. This past event made a significant change in this character's current choices.

## Writing

Write a 2- to 3-page narrative and use a flashback. You can finish the narrative in the next lesson.

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**HINT!** A flashback is just what it sounds like—a flash back to some prior time. This often happens in a movie or show. We know it is happening when we hear the dream music and the picture goes fuzzy around the edges.