The Comprehensive Expository and Opinion Writing Guide for Grades 2 & 3

by Cynthia Williamson with Barbara Mariconda
What You’ll Find in this Guide

This book was designed to provide everything you’ll need to teach expository and opinion writing in grades 2 and 3. It includes not only opportunities for writing informational and opinion texts, but more importantly, we’ve deconstructed effective writing into all of the foundational concepts and discrete skills students need in order to be successful.

Writing is a complex task. Simply discussing the attributes of powerful texts as a prerequisite to writing is not enough. **Students must learn, through explicit, objective-driven instruction the salient features of the genre, author’s purpose, and have a strong grasp of basic concepts that inform these understandings.** For example, before asking students to organize their writing by arranging like details into paragraphs, they must know how to sort and categorize, to use inductive and deductive reasoning. Before we suggest the use of more powerful vocabulary in their writing we need to have students use it comfortably in spoken language. They need scaffolding to grasp and apply these concepts to the writing task. Skipping any of the foundational skills only results in frustration. Many writing resources make a lot of assumptions around these foundational concepts and students suffer the consequences.

**This guide includes clear objective-driven lessons that cover the all-important foundational concepts, and then build writing lessons on this firm base of understanding.** Then, we begin teaching all of the specific skills that are the hallmarks of effective expository and opinion writing.

This approach is extremely powerful for teachers and youngsters alike. Teachers begin to look at writing in more objective terms, in relation to specific skills taught. Students gain by having what can be an overwhelming process broken into manageable parts.

**For ease of use the book is divided into skill sections.** Within each section you’ll find a wide range of lessons – some very directed, others requiring more independence on the part of the student. These can be used at your discretion based on the needs of your students.

**The Skill Sections are as follows:**

- **Section 1:** Recognizing Genre/Organization
- **Section 2:** Broad Yet Distinct Main Ideas
- **Section 3:** Elaboration - Detail Generating Questions
- **Section 4:** Research
- **Section 5:** Introductions and Conclusions
- **Section 6:** Prompts, Projects, Assessments, Process Writing Assignments
Teacher Background

Even in the earliest grades, the demands of the changing standards require that students understand the organizational structure of different genres. Before attempting to write, they need to be clear about the purpose of their writing, the audience, and the organizational framework. An understanding of each genre and its particular organizational structure is not only essential to satisfying the latest state standards for writing, but will help students improve their strategic reading and comprehension skills.

In broad terms, the genres students will encounter most frequently in school and beyond are narrative, expository, and opinion writing. Within each of these broad genres are “subgenres.” The activities in this section are designed to help students recognize the key characteristics of each genre. Since any reading experience should serve as a prewriting experience, you can reinforce these lessons during reading instruction just by asking students to identify the genre and author’s purpose of whatever material you are reading together. Draw their attention also to the organizational structure of the text you’re reading. This reinforces the reading/writing connection in powerful ways.

Defining Narrative, Expository, Opinion Writing

**Narrative Writing** – The first kind of texts children are exposed to are usually narrative stories. These stories focus on a main character in a setting who has a problem to solve, or an adventure or meaningful experience to share. The main character typically grows or changes in some way as the story develops. *Narrative writing is written for the purpose of entertaining an audience of others.* (See the Empowering Writers publication: *The Comprehensive Narrative Writing Guide* for everything you need to know about narrative writing.)

**Expository/Informative Writing** – This genre is different from narrative writing in purpose, organization and tone. *Exposition is written for the purpose of informing an audience of others.* Therefore, the organization is rather linear, typified by an introduction paragraph, a number of paragraphs in the body of the piece, each with a broad yet distinct main idea and followed by a variety of supporting details. The piece ends with a conclusion paragraph that creatively sums up the main ideas. The tone of the expository piece is usually straightforward and the author works hard to present information in an organized, sequential fashion. This does not mean, however, that the piece cannot have style and a unique voice that holds the readers’ interest.

Exposition includes the following subgenres:
- the informational essay
- the “how-to” piece
- the “compare/contrast” piece
- response to text

The focus of all types of expository writing is on a TOPIC.

**Opinion Writing** – The purpose of opinion writing is to share a personal opinion. The successful opinion writer uses information strategically, showcasing facts that support his or her opinion.

With an organizational structure very similar to expository writing, opinion writing focuses on an issue or position that can be looked at from multiple points of view. In order to do this, students must be able to distinguish between fact and opinion and many of the activities provided here give them the opportunity to do just that. As students move on to middle school, opinion writing evolves into the similar but more sophisticated argumentative writing genre.
Objective

Students will begin to recognize and understand the differences between the author’s purpose and the organization of a narrative story and an expository piece. This will later inform their own writing.

Procedure

Reproduce and distribute Grocery Shopping, p. 32 and A Sweet Surprise, p. 35. Explain to the class that they’ll be looking at two pieces of writing about a similar theme, each written for a different purpose.

Review the author’s purpose for narrative stories: to entertain; the author’s purpose for expository pieces: to inform. It might be helpful to write this on a white board or chart paper so students can refer to it as the lesson progresses.

Project Grocery Shopping, p. 32 read the entire piece aloud so that the children get a sense of what the piece is all about. Then go back, with students following along, reading aloud and annotating as per Teacher’s Annotated Copy, p. 33. Follow this sequence:

1. Number each paragraph.
2. Find the title and label it: topic.
3. Circle and label the introduction. Explain that this is the part where you learn what the piece is all about.
4. Bracket the body of the piece. Explain this this is the part where the author delivers information.
5. Underline the main idea sentences at the beginning of each paragraph. These tell the reader what the whole paragraph is about. Write a “blurb” in the margin that, at a glance, states the main idea.
6. Box the conclusion, explaining that this is where the author sums up the information presented.

LESSON AT A GLANCE:

Whole Class Activity

- Define expository/informative and narrative writing and the author’s purpose for each.
- Read and annotate side by side pieces, highlighting the organizational frameworks of each.
- Discuss the similarities and differences between the narrative and the expository texts; compare author’s purpose.

1. Read through the annotated version, naming each section as you go and reminding students that this is an expository piece of writing and the author’s purpose is to inform. Copy, distribute and project the Expository/Informative Pillar, p. 34 and the Student Page with Summarizing Framework, and review with students.

(continued)
2. Next, project *A Sweet Surprise*, p. 35 and read aloud. Discuss how this narrative story differs from the expository piece. Annotate using the teacher’s version, p. 36 and following this sequence:

- Circle the *title*.
- Underline the *main character’s* name, circle the story’s *setting*.
- Underline this sentence in paragraph 2: *(His mouth watered as he imagined biting into a ripe banana.)* Ask students what the character is feeling. *(He is feeling hungry!)* Explain that this is the *story problem*: Spencer is in the grocery store surrounded by food he can’t eat and he is very hungry.
- Then, use a squiggly line to underline the *solution* in the last paragraph and draw a box around the *extended ending* *(It was a sweet ending to a speedy shopping trip.)*

3. Finally, copy, distribute and project the *Narrative Writing Diamond*, p. 37 and complete the summarizing framework as follows:

   This story is about *Spencer*.
   The problem was that *Spencer was hungry at the grocery store*.
   The problem was solved when *Spencer’s mother bought a candy bar for them to share*.

4. For extra practice, complete the same procedures with *Animals of the World*, pp. 38-40 and *Rosie’s Pet*, pp. 41-43.
Grocery Shopping

1.) Most families need to visit a grocery store at least once a week. Big families might need to shop for food more often. Your parents would probably really like it if you helped with the shopping.

2.) The produce is usually in the front of the store. People can buy fruits in the produce section. Your mom can buy potatoes and carrots for dinner. If you like salad, you might pick lettuce, tomatoes, and peppers for a healthy meal. Bananas and berries can make a plain bowl of cereal delicious.

3.) You will find bread in the baked goods section of the grocery store. Most families buy bread to make toast at breakfast and sandwiches for lunch. You can choose rye, whole wheat or white bread. If you need buns for your hot dog or hamburger you will find them in the baked goods section. Among the baked goods you will find yummy cookies, cakes and pies. These will satisfy your sweet tooth! There’s something for everybody in the baked goods section.

4.) Your parents will surely be happy when you help them with the grocery shopping. Helping to choose the fresh fruits and vegetables and tasty baked goods is a great way to make sure you all have healthy meals and snacks to enjoy at home.
Objective
Students recognize and identify narrative, expository and opinion paragraphs.

Procedure
1. Discuss genre with your students and review the author’s purpose for narrative and expository writing. Tell students that today they will learn about a third genre, opinion writing. Chart the following on a white board or chart paper:

   **Narrative:** Purpose – to entertain (focus on a main character in a setting with a problem, adventure or interesting experience).

   **Expository:** Purpose – to inform (focus on a TOPIC.)

   **Opinion:** Purpose—to share a personal opinion (focus on a point of view)

2. Discuss issues around which people might have opinions. A good example might be to look at cafeteria lunch menu. To say “Pepperoni pizza is on the menu for lunch today” is informative. It doesn’t tell you anyone’s opinion about Pepperoni pizza.

   To say “Pepperoni pizza is the best (or worst) lunch ever served in our cafeteria” is an opinion – it tells you how the writers feel about pepperoni pizza. Brainstorm other examples.

3. Reproduce and distribute one of the student activity sheets Narrative, Expository or Opinion?, pp. 69-71. (Choose the activity sheet that best suits your students’ reading level.)

4. Project and read each example together. Identify each paragraph as either Narrative, Expository or Opinion writing. If students need guidance, ask the following questions:
   - Is there a character in a setting? (narrative)
   - Are you getting information or learning something about a person, place or thing? (expository/informative)
   - Is the author expressing a feeling or opinion? (opinion)

5. Point out the characteristics of each genre.

6. Repeat the activity with another of the provided activity sheets. Or, have students complete the activity independently, as homework or in small cooperative groups. When completed, review and ask students to explain why they identified specific paragraphs as they did.

**KEY: NARRATIVE, EXPOSITORY OR OPINION? pp. 69-71**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Summer Camp</td>
<td>1. Narrative</td>
<td>2. Expository</td>
<td>3. Opinion</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Narrative, Expository or Opinion?

Read the paragraphs below and decide if each is an example of narrative, opinion or expository writing. Circle your answer from the three selections below the paragraph.

1. Dogs can be more than just pets. Some of them really help people. Dogs can be trained to be the eyes or ears of people with who have trouble seeing or hearing. They can be taught to help people many other ways too.
   - NARRATIVE  
   - OPINION  
   - EXPOSITORY

2. Without a doubt, dogs are the world’s greatest animals. Not only are they the most loveable pets you could ever imagine, but they can be trained to do fun tricks. They are truly our best friends.
   - NARRATIVE  
   - OPINION  
   - EXPOSITORY

3. Dotty and Danny were a team. Dotty was a Spaniel who helped Danny, a boy with a hearing loss. Danny took very good care of Dotty. One summer morning, Dotty jolted awake to the shrill wail of the fire alarm! She smelled smoke!
   - NARRATIVE  
   - OPINION  
   - EXPOSITORY
Objective

When given three related main ideas, students begin to understand the difference between distinct main ideas and those that overlap. Students start to develop the ability to replace overlapping main ideas with broad yet distinct ideas.

Students will learn to recognize and avoid redundancy in their writing. This lesson will also help them learn how to choose sound main ideas to develop.

Procedure

1. Review the concept of overlapping or distinct main ideas with the class.

2. Copy and distribute the Main Ideas/Main Reasons: Don’t Overlap Them! activity sheets, pp. 127-130 (Choose those you believe are best suited to your students’ abilities and interests or complete them all. This essential skill for writing is not easy for young children to grasp. Your students will no doubt need all the practice they can get.) Remind students that expository writing uses main ideas while opinion writing uses main reasons.

3. Project the activity sheet and read through the main ideas with the class.

4. Direct students to assign each detail sentence to one of the main ideas. Give them this hint: if it is difficult to determine which main idea the detail belongs to, then the main ideas are not distinct enough. If your main ideas are distinct, you will probably not feel confused when you are trying to figure out which detail belongs with which main idea.

5. Help students generate several alternate distinct main ideas for each topic. Following the PICK, LIST, and CHOOSE process outlined on pp. 117-118 is an effective way to generate alternate main ideas and is highly recommended. Have children brainstorm all they know about the topic; their responses will be the details. Chart and then categorize them in order to identify alternate main ideas. Also, you can use the suggestions on the next page. (Keep in mind that if the original, given main ideas ARE distinct from one another, it is often more challenging to generate additional main ideas.)
MAIN IDEAS/ REASONS - DON’T OVERLAP THEM! (1)

Read the TOPIC and related main reason sentences below. Then, write a one word “Blurb” that sums up what the main reason sentence says. Next, see if you can figure out which detail sentence belongs to which MAIN REASON. Some may seem like they fit into more than one main reason. That means they overlap; they are not distinct enough. Remember, the main reasons should be different from each other. If your main reasons are distinct enough, it will be clear which paragraph the detail belongs in. The first one is done for you.

TOPIC: AN AWESOME PLAYGROUND

MAIN REASON SENTENCES:             BLURB:

MAIN REASON #1: An awesome playground is fun.________________________

MAIN REASON #2: There is cool equipment to play on.____________________

MAIN REASON #3: You can play pretend games there.______________________

DETAIL SENTENCES:                  MAIN REASON(S):

I love to go on the giant slide.______________________1,2____

The monkey bars are awesome for swinging.___________

The tire swing is a lot of fun._____________________

You can pretend that the climbing tower is a castle.

Are the main reasons distinct enough? (Check one)

[ ] Yes. Choose yes if it was clear that each detail belonged with one of the main reasons.

[ ] No. Choose no if the details could fit in more than one main reason.
MAIN IDEAS/ REASONS - DON’T OVERLAP THEM! (2)

Read the TOPIC and related main idea sentences below. Then, write a one word “Blurb” that sums up what the main idea sentence says. Next, see if you can figure out which detail sentence belongs to which MAIN IDEA. Some may seem like they fit into more than one main idea. That means they overlap; they are not distinct enough. Remember, the main ideas should be different from each other. If your main ideas are distinct enough, it will be clear which paragraph the detail belongs in.

TOPIC: A DAY AT THE BEACH

MAIN IDEA SENTENCES:  BLURB:

MAIN IDEA #1: Take a swim in the cool, clear water. ____________________________

MAIN IDEA #2: It’s fun to build sandcastles. ____________________________

MAIN IDEA #3: The beach is fun. ____________________________

DETAIL SENTENCES:  MAIN IDEA:

Ride the waves and enjoy the surf. ________

Burying somebody in the sand is always fun. ________

Use water wings if you’re not a strong swimmer. ________

Are the main ideas distinct enough? (Check one)

[ ] Yes. Choose yes if it was clear that each detail belonged with one of the main ideas.

[ ] No. Choose no if the details could fit in more than one main idea.
MAIN IDEAS/REASONS - DISTINCT OR OVERLAPPING? (3)

Read this group of Main Reasons for an opinion piece about winter fun. If they overlap, cross out the ideas that are too similar and replace them with distinct ideas. (Remember, they might not overlap.) Then write a main reason sentence for each main reason. You may use the sentence starters on the bottom of the page to help you.

TOPIC: WINTER FUN
MAIN REASON #1: Fun in the snow
MAIN REASON #2: Sledding
MAIN REASON #3: Snowmen

MAIN REASON #1:
______________________________________________________________________
______________________________________________________________________

MAIN REASON #2:
______________________________________________________________________
______________________________________________________________________

MAIN REASON #3:
______________________________________________________________________
______________________________________________________________________

Sentence Starters
• Who doesn’t enjoy__________?
• Winter’s the perfect time for__________.
• Everybody should try__________.
• Most kids love__________.
Teacher Background:
Introduction to Elaboration

So often, when students begin expository writing, they will simply write a number of facts, without elaborating or expounding on these facts. When we, as teachers, respond by asking, “Could you add some more details?” students generally locate nouns and insert adjectives. These adjectives are often color words, size words, or number words. They have, in fact, followed our directions; however, this simplistic approach to elaboration does little for the overall strength of the piece. The problem is not in students’ responses – the problem is that our directive to them is ineffective.

Here’s a sample of this:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Original Student Version in which the author simply states facts:</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>I wear a seat belt.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Typical Student Revision based on an ineffective cue: “Could you add some more details?”</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>I wear a gray seat belt with a shiny buckle across my shoulders and lap.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Clearly you can see how the student added some “details,” but how these “details” added little to the writing. In the next example, the author “shows” rather than “tells,” using details in a powerful, effective way:

| I wear a sturdy gray seat belt with a shiny buckle across my shoulders and lap so that I am safe when riding in a car. |

The first educational objective in regard to creating “supporting details” is for students to develop an awareness of the power of “showing” rather than “telling.” Even primary students can learn to recognize simply stated versus vividly elaborated details. Instruction begins with opportunities for students to compare the two. As students mature, they learn how to generate this kind of powerful detail.

In order for students to eventually apply these concepts to expository and opinion writing, we need to change our teaching cues - the quality of the questions we ask will determine the quality of the responses students give. Eventually, students internalize the questions, and begin to apply them independently.

So what are these “detail-generating questions?” They’re listed on the Student Reference Sheet on the following page.
WHAT DOES IT “LOOK” LIKE?

Sound like? Feel like?
Taste like? Smell like? Seem like?

WHY IS THAT IMPORTANT?

Why is that important to your main idea?

IS EACH DETAIL IN A SEPARATE SENTENCE?

Separate the Grocery List!

DID YOU GIVE A SPECIFIC EXAMPLE?

Avoid general language such as “stuff,” “things, “nice,” etc.
Objective
Students write sentences using two basic detail-generating questions: What does it “look” like? Why is it important?

Procedure
1. Discuss how the detail-generating questions can help writers go beyond Just the Facts sentences, and allow them to “show” rather than “tell.”

2. Chart the following Just the Facts sentence as a starting point:

   *Swimming is fun.*

   Point out the underlined detail in the sentence (fun). Ask what makes swimming fun? What does it look like to have fun swimming? Answers might include: jumping, diving, clear water, sunny day, floating.

   Revise the sentence using the some of the details students’ contributed:

   *Nothing is more fun on a sunny summer day than jumping into the sparkling, clear waters of the town pool.*

   Now, ask Why is it important? See if students can contribute ideas about why swimming on a hot day might be important. Answers could include: cooling down, getting exercise, frolic with friends.

   *Nothing is more fun on a sunny summer day than jumping into the sparkling clear waters of the town pool with your friends. It is the perfect way to cool down and get some healthy exercise on a hot afternoon.*

3. Point out how this revision corresponds to the detail-generating questions by underlining the What does it “look” like? words (fun, sunny, summer, sparkling clear) and circling the answer to Why is it important? (cool down and get some healthy exercise).

4. Copy and distribute one of the student activity sheets Writing Sentences with - What does it look like? Why is it important?, pp 208-211. Read through the example, underlining the What does it “look” like? words (fluffy, cute) and the circling the Why is it important phrase (it will play with you for hours).

5. Allow students to work independently, applying the detail-generating questions to revise the sentence. Circulate, answering questions and making suggestions as students proceed. Read strong examples aloud.

6. Repeat this activity with the other student activity sheets as needed, or assign as homework.
WRITING SENTENCES WITH:
WHAT DOES IT “LOOK” LIKE? WHY IS IT IMPORTANT? (1)

Read the detail sentence below. Revise the sentence using the detail-generating questions:
What does it look like? Why is it important?

Ex. A kitten is a nice pet.

Revision: A fluffy, cute kitten is a nice pet that will play with you for hours.

Detail sentence:

An apple or peach is a great snack!

Your revision:

_________________________________________________________________
_________________________________________________________________
_________________________________________________________________
_________________________________________________________________
_________________________________________________________________
_________________________________________________________________
_________________________________________________________________
FINDING FACTS IN CHARTS AND GRAPHS (2)

Look at the statistics shown on the chart and the bar graph below. Read sentences that use some of the facts from the chart and graph. See if you can write one of your own.

Remember: A statistic is a fact represented by a number.

Note: The facts on both the chart and the bar graph are the same. They are just shown in different formats.

Of the 26 students in Mrs. Samson’s class:

- 2 have fish
- 2 do not have pets
- 1 has a rabbit
- 2 have ferrets
- 10 have cats
- 9 have dogs

1. Cats are the most popular pet among the students in Mrs. Samson’s class.
2. Only two of the 26 students in Mrs. Samson’s class do not have pets.
3. ________________________________________________________________
   ________________________________________________________________
FINDING FACTS IN OTHER FORMATS (1)

Look at the information shown on the timeline and on the bulleted list of facts. Read sentences that use some of these facts and see if you can write one of your own.

**Remember:** A timeline presents facts on a line in the order they occurred over time.

**Note:** The facts on both the timeline and the bulleted list are the same. They are just shown in different formats.

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**HIGHLIGHTS OF THE SCHOOL YEAR**

- **September:** School starts
- **November:** Thanksgiving vacation
- **January:** Winter Concert
- **March:** Parent’s Night
- **May:** Baseball season begins
- **June:** Last day of school
- **October:** Halloween party
- **December:** Report cards
- **February:** President’s Day celebration
- **April:** Spring break
Objective
Students learn how to find needed information from multiple sources.

Teacher Background
The latest standards require that students integrate information from multiple sources into their expository and opinion writing. This particular lesson presents students with two articles, both addressing related broad topics but focusing on different details. Subsequent activities will ask that students cull information from charts and graphs.

Procedure
1. Copy and distribute student The Australian Outback, p. 249 and Kangaroos, p. 250 or Shorebirds, p. 252 and Feathering a Cozy Nest, p. 253 along with their accompanying activity sheets. Explain to students that this activity will ask them to find information from two different articles. Project as you read the two articles aloud. Complete the accompanying activity sheets as a class.

Key: Australian Outback and Kangaroos:
The information about kangaroos in The Australian Outback, p. 249 article includes details about what kangaroos eat and who (dingoes and native people) prey upon them.

An example of a summarizing framework would be:

**Topic:** Kangaroos
- Main Idea #1: Types of Kangaroos
- Main Idea #2: What Kangaroos eat
- Main Idea #3: How Kangaroos defend themselves

*(Note: Main ideas 1 and 3 focus on information found in the Kangaroos, p. 250 article while Main idea #2 is taken from The Australian Outback, p. 249.)*

Academic Extension: Do additional research to write a separate paragraph focusing on related details, such as the Kangaroo’s diet or about predators who target Kangaroos.

For Shorebirds and Nesting Sites:
The information about shorebirds in the Feathering a Cozy Nest text focuses on where shorebirds build their nests. The Shorebirds text emphasizes threats to the nesting areas of shorebirds.

An example of a summarizing framework would be:

**Topic:** Shorebirds
- Main Idea #1: Herons
- Main Idea #2: Oystercatchers and Piping Plovers
- Main Idea #3: Where shorebirds build their nests

Academic Extension: Do additional research to write a separate paragraph focusing on related details about coastal pollutants that threaten shorebirds or nesting sites of Arctic or desert birds.
The Australian Outback

There are many large cities along the coast of Australia where lots of people live. But most of the inland areas of Australia are open and wild, and few people live there. We call this uninhabited Australian land the Outback.

People often travel to the Outback to see the landscape and the wildlife. Around the town of Alice Springs there is a famous red rock formation called Uluru. It is a sacred place for the native people of Australia. People also enjoy seeing wild dogs called dingoes and the many different kinds of kangaroos that live nearby.

The Outback provides many sources of food for the Aborigines, the native people who live there. They hunt kangaroos and use every part of their bodies for food. Sometimes they compete with dingo dogs, who also prey on kangaroos. Kangaroos can often be seen grazing on grasses and other small plants in the Outback. These wild plants are also an important part of the diet of Aboriginal people. Another surprising source of protein are grubs and other insects. The richness of the land provides a variety of interesting food choices for native people and wildlife of Australia.

While visiting Australian cities can be interesting, the Outback offers memorable landscapes and wildlife that can’t be found anywhere else on earth. But, be ready to rough it! You won’t find a hotel in the middle of this wilderness!
Objective

Students learn how to identify expert opinions and statistics within written text.

Procedure

1. Define a statistic: a fact that is represented by a number. Explain that expert quotes are words spoken by people who have special knowledge about a topic. Explain that we call statistics and expert quotes “Golden Bricks,” powerful details that make expository writing more informative and help support a viewpoint in an opinion piece. (Later, in the middle grades, when students begin to research and insert quotes, statistics, anecdotes, amazing facts, and descriptive segments, we explain that at least one of the detail boxes on the pillar should be a “Golden Brick” and we have them color in that detail box yellow – a visual reminder for them – hence the term “Golden Brick.”)

2. Elicit class participation to develop a list of “experts” and the topics they might be quoted on. For instance: a veterinarian could be quoted about pet care, a dentist about dental care, a soccer coach about improving your soccer skills, a teacher about the importance of knowing your math facts. Post your completed list where students can refer to it.

3. Copy and distribute student activity sheets Recognizing Golden Bricks, pp. 267-274. Project as you read aloud and complete as a class.

Note: Recognizing Golden Bricks 1-4 are opinion pieces; Recognizing Golden Bricks 5 and 8 are expository pieces.
RECOGNIZING GOLDEN BRICKS (1)

Read the paragraphs below. Highlight the “Golden Bricks,” the statistic in pink and the expert quote in yellow.

A Case for Cats

Deciding what pet is right for you can be confusing. “A cat is a wonderful pet for busy families,” says veterinarian Dr. Mehower. “They are loving, playful, and easy to care for.” Cats cost less than dogs too. Yearly costs for a cat can be $670. Dogs can cost up to $800.
DOING RESEARCH AND TAKING NOTES

• Doing research means finding facts to add to your writing.

• You can find facts in books or on the internet. To find facts on the internet, you need to do a **key word search** by typing your topic into a search engine and looking at the results.

• Before you start looking at books and online for facts, list some questions you hope to answer through your research. For example, if your topic is snakes, your questions might read:

  Where would I find a particular type of snake?
  Why should we be careful around snakes?
  Who might eat snakes?
  What is a snake? (A reptile? An amphibian?)
  What do snakes eat?

• As your research reveals answers to these questions, write them down. You don’t need to use complete sentences.
NOTE-TAKING SHEET: EXPOSITORY WRITING

Listen carefully as an expository piece is read aloud. Based on your listening, fill in the summarizing framework.

Complete this summarizing framework for the piece:

**Topic:** ________________________________________________________________

**Main Idea #1** ____________________________________________________________

**Main Idea #2** ____________________________________________________________

**Bonus:** Use the lines below for a bulleted list of facts from the piece.

__________________________________________________________________________

__________________________________________________________________________

__________________________________________________________________________

__________________________________________________________________________

__________________________________________________________________________

__________________________________________________________________________
USING INFORMATIVE VERBS IN INTRODUCTION PARAGRAPHS (1)

Read the summarizing framework and introduction paragraph for the expository piece below. First, underline the topic sentence. Then, replace the boldfaced phrase with an informative verb in one of the sentence starters, below.

**Topic:** Dolphins
**Main Idea #1:** Ocean dwellers
**Main Idea #2:** River dolphins

Imagine an animal that looks like a smiling fish and can leap out of the water and high into the air. You’re probably thinking of a dolphin. **There are** many different kinds of these air-breathing mammals living in oceans and rivers around the world.

Informative Verbs

It is interesting **to learn about** the ________.
It’s important to **understand** that there are ________.
We’ll **explore** the ________.
Let’s **find out about** the ________.
This piece will **examine** the ________.

**Bonus:** What kind of lead appears in the introduction paragraph above?
(Circle your choice)

A question  A descriptive segment  An anecdote
Teacher Background:
The Conclusion Paragraph

Often times the conclusion paragraph of a piece of student exposition is a near mirror of the introduction. Pieces that begin this way:

I am going to tell you all about my house. I am going to tell you about my kitchen, my living room, and my back yard. I hope you enjoy reading my report.

Typically end like this:

So now you know all about my house. You know about the kitchen, the living room, and the backyard. I hope you liked my report. THE END

This bare-bones, predictable conclusion meets the minimum criteria of summing up what was learned. But the boring, word-for-word restatement of main ideas and the “add-on” (I hope you liked my report) leaves a bit to be desired. Yet, it’s never enough to tell students, “Don’t just repeat the introduction at the end! Say it another way!” Instead, we need to provide them with some viable alternatives.

There are a number of techniques for crafting effective conclusion paragraphs. For grades two and three, we will focus on the use of a series of questions, and the restatement of a general topic sentence.

Let’s see how a series of questions would improve the above conclusion, followed by a general restatement of the topic sentence - a summary statement that uses a general adjective (the only place in the piece that a general adjective is preferred!) that would complete this nicely:

So, aren’t you happy you had a tour of the places I enjoy most in and around my house? Didn’t you like our cheery kitchen and comfy living room? Wasn’t playing in the backyard fun? You can see why my house is such a special place!

There are a number of other techniques that can be used to enhance conclusion paragraphs. These include the use of word referents, informative verbs, and definitive words and phrases. In this section we’ve included a number of activities that introduce students to these techniques on an awareness level – in other words, we present conclusion paragraphs that include these skills and ask students to recognize them as they read. This awareness lays a foundation for students to incorporate these techniques into their writing when they become developmentally ready to do so.

As enrichment and for differentiation, or for use in multi-age classrooms, we’ve included several more challenging assignments in which students may apply word referents, informative verbs, and definitive words and phrases. You may opt to use these or not, based on your own professional discretion and the needs of your students.

Here is an example illustrating the way that word referents, informative verbs, and definitive words and phrases can further enhance a conclusion paragraph:

So, aren’t you happy you had a tour of the places I enjoy most in and around my cozy home? You’ll certainly love our cheery kitchen and comfy living room. Once you explore the backyard I know you’ll discover all of the fun things to do out there. Without a doubt, you can see why my house is such a special place!
Objective

Students recognize main ideas and main reasons as they are restated in conclusions.

Procedure

1. Explain to students that conclusions must restate the main ideas and main reasons. Copy and distribute one of the three Find the Matching Conclusion Activity Sheets, pp. 332-334. Project as you review the summarizing frameworks with students and read the conclusion paragraphs aloud. Match the summarizing framework with the corresponding conclusion paragraph and find the word referents.

Word Referents:

Find the Matching Conclusion (1)
1.) exciting hands-on activities
2.) glowing small screen

Find the Matching Conclusion (2)
1.) famous speedsters
2.) magical melodies

Find the Matching Conclusion (3)
1.) black and white creature of the deep
2.) colorful insect gobblers
Like everybody in my class, I love recess, but I enjoy doing science experiments and art projects even more. Surely, you will agree that kids learn a great deal from these exciting hands-on activities.

Some people spend too much time in front of this glowing small screen and others don’t watch TV at all. I believe that it’s fine to watch television for little while every day. After all, who wouldn’t want to laugh along at the cartoons and learn from the nature shows? Without a doubt, watching television can be amusing and educational.
Objective

Students read prompts or assignments in order to identify the given and variable elements necessary for an effective response.

Teacher Background

It is important to note that you can assess your students using any of the prompts provided, pp. 378-389 at any time during the school year. Read students’ impromptu writing through the lens of what you’ve taught, and how much of that is evident in application. After careful assessment you can use these student responses to recognize class trends, to drive instruction, determine where individual students might need additional review and reinforcement, and to document student growth over time. The given vs. variable lessons here are intended to be used prior to assessment, as our first objective is to empower students to respond appropriately, making critical decisions about genre and purpose within the framework of a particular writing task. Please keep in mind that all of the prompts in this section can be used for other teaching objectives besides the analysis of givens and variables. They are also well-suited for use in assessment or for process writing projects.

Procedure

1. Explain to the class that at some future point they will be presented with a prompt that will give them an opportunity to showcase all of the specific writing skills they have learned. Discuss the testing process in a matter-of-fact way, explaining that everyone will respond to the same prompt, that there are several elements provided and several decisions that each individual writer will need to make (givens and variables). It is helpful to stress that timed assessments are opportunities for them to have a positive writing experience, rather than a pressure situation in which they need to compete.

2. Choose one of the prompts on student activity pages 378-389. Copy, distribute and project. Discuss the GIVEN elements – those included in the prompt itself that need to be included in the response. Depending on the prompt you have chosen, the topic may be given and main ideas left to the discretion of the author, or the main ideas are given and the specific topic is a variable.

3. Complete the prewriting framework. Allow students to brainstorm ideas for the variables if the prompt requires. Explain that this is the process you would use to analyze a prompt and create a prewriting plan in a testing situation.

4. For this lesson, you need not actually have the students write to the prompt. (Remember, the objective is to help children analyze for givens and variables.) Just go through this procedure with a few of the prompts to help students learn to analyze them for genre, purpose, givens and variables. They’ll later apply this every time they approach a writing assignment.
ANALYZING PROMPTS (3)

Write a report about a pet you would like to have. Describe what this animal looks like and how you would care for it.

Prewriting Framework:

Topic ____________________________________________________________

Main Idea #1 ______________________________________________________

Main Idea #2 ______________________________________________________
Objective

Students follow a 6-day process writing timeline to create expository and opinion pieces from prompts that provide givens and variables.

Procedure

Day 1

1. Explain to students that they are beginning a 6-day writing process to complete a 4-paragraph opinion or expository piece from a prompt that includes givens and variables.

2. Choose a prompt from those provided on pages 393-398 or create your own prompt from any topic you may be focusing on in your classroom. If, for example, you have recently celebrated Groundhog Day in your classroom and researched this creature, you might create a prompt such as:

   *Groundhogs, also known as woodchucks, are interesting creatures. Write a report describing the appearance, habitat, and behaviors of groundhogs.*

3. Copy and distribute the prompt. Project as you review it with students, pointing out any givens and variables. Allow students time to work independently to complete prewriting frameworks (Topic and main ideas). Circulate as they work, answering questions and helping them generate ideas for main ideas/reasons.

Day 2

4. Copy and distribute template for Introduction Paragraph, p. 399. Review the sentence starters with students and have them work independently to complete the introduction paragraph using the template and the sentence starters. (If you haven’t formally taught introductions, be sure to refer to Section 5 and MODEL an example for students. Without previous instruction you wouldn’t expect students to really grasp this, and that’s fine. If you’ve taught it, you can hold them accountable for applying the skill.)

Days 3 and 4

5. Copy and distribute template for Body Paragraph, p. 400. Review with students, emphasizing that these paragraphs provide details that support the main idea/reason. Remind them that they’ll need a broad yet distinct main idea sentence followed by a number of specific details. Also review the importance of keeping each detail in a separate sentence and remind them to use the questions “What does it look like? Why is it important?” to enhance the writing. Encourage students to use the provided sentence starters and allow them to work independently to compose this paragraph. (If you provided your own prompt, be sure to allow one day for each paragraph in the body of the piece.)

(continued)
Objective

Students read expository and opinion pieces and answer key questions about the content. They are able to identify the organizational elements of each as well.

Procedure

1. Choose one of the Response to Text pieces and the accompanying questions provided, pp. 415-424. Copy, distribute and project as you read aloud while your students follow along. (Option: you might annotate the piece by circling the title and labeling the topic, numbering the paragraphs, circling the introduction, boxing the conclusion, underlining main idea sentences, writing a “blurb” in the margin explaining what the paragraph is all about, etc.)

2. Complete the accompanying questions as a class or have students work independently to answer them. This is an important process, as discussing the questions together is what demonstrates the kind of logical critical thinking required for the task. Response to Text (2) and (3) and Response to Text (4) and (5) can be used on their own or together, providing students with an opportunity to compare and contrast two different pieces. Response to Text (2) and (3): an opinion piece vs. an expository piece. Response to Text (4) and (5): both opinion pieces offering different viewpoints. It’s important to explain that the questions are designed to draw students’ attention to the most important elements in the writing. Their written responses should include the topic and main ideas, as well as highlight important details. In this way it summarizes the literal content of the piece. It also should include personal responses explaining what surprised or particularly interested the reader, or how it might relate to the reader’s life experience (evaluative comprehension). Lastly, students who are developmentally ready may include some inferential reasoning in their responses, drawing conclusions about how their own lives or the lives of others might be impacted by the information provided.

3. Repeat this exercise as needed to help your students not only develop their writing skills, but to build reading comprehension.

Make it Your Own: You can individualize this lesson for your classroom by composing an expository or opinion piece focusing on any topic you are studying or book you are reading as a class. Just create a series of questions like those accompanying the readings provided here or use the suggested questions and sentence starters provided, pp. 425-426.
Name: _____________________________

RESPONSE TO TEXT (1)

Read the piece about recycling and answer the following questions.

1. What is the topic of this piece? ____________________________________________.

2. What is the author’s purpose? (please circle your choice).
   - To inform               - To share an opinion               - To entertain

3. What are the three main ideas? ____________________________________________,
   ___________________________________, and ________________________________.

4. What amazing fact did you learn in the third paragraph? How about the fourth?
   ________________________________________________________________.

5. Will what you read about the topic affect the decisions you make in the future?
   __________________________________________________________________
   __________________________________________________________________

6. On a separate sheet of paper, write one paragraph telling us what you learned about recycling from this piece. Use the sentence starters below if needed.

   Sentence Starters
   This piece explores (topic) ________.
   I never realized that ________.
   The author discusses ________.
   The author explained ________.
   I discovered that ________.
   Amazingly, ________.
   It was interesting to learn about ________.

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