

Ready Writing and Creative Writing Handbook

for elementary and
junior high schools



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University Interscholastic League

Making a World of Difference

Credits

CONSULTANTS

Third Grade • Carol Senn (Elgin ISD)

Fourth Grade • Laurie Davenport (Whitesboro ISD)

Fifth Grade • Susan Henry (East Chambers ISD)

Sixth Grade • Alonzo Molina (Uvalde Consolidated ISD)

Seventh Grade • Elaine Whitfill (Snyder ISD)

Eighth Grade • Linda Foster (Goldthwaite ISD)

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What is ready writing?

Traditionally, ready writing has been defined as expository writing or writing that explains. But, in reality, it can be any kind of writing: narration, description, argument. UIL calls the contest “ready” writing because students come to competition with only writing materials and the information stored in their brains. Students come “ready” to write for as long as two hours about what they can recall or create from their experiences and their imagination.

Ready writing includes various kinds of writing that are sometimes considered separate modes. But in practice they are not separate. Ready writing tends to be a combination. The prompt may state or imply various writing strategies.

For the sake of definition, ready writing strategies may be placed into three categories:

1. *description* (to inform) — describe a happening, person, object or idea from imagination or memory;
2. *narration* — write a story; and
3. *persuasion* — describe and argue just one side of an issue; describe both sides of an issue, then argue only one side; write an editorial; write a letter to persuade, etc.

Contestants are given two prompts from which to choose. The prompts will either state or imply a purpose for writing, the format, the audience and the point of view. For example, the format could be a letter, an article for the newspaper, an essay for the principal, or a report to a teacher.

Writers use forms of the words “explain” or “describe” in ready writing prompts for elementary and junior high. For example, the closing line of a 1995 district seventh and eighth grade prompt stated, “Write a paper explaining your position

on the best way to reduce teenage crime.” Writers can explain by using narration, description, definitions, logical reasoning and perhaps even persuasive arguing. While the overall purpose of the composition will be to explain, the writer may use a variety of writing methods to achieve her objective.

This handbook is intended to serve as a preparation and evaluation guide for teachers to use in preparing students for the elementary/junior high ready writing contest. We welcome your comments and encourage the submission of winning student competition writings and teacher-made prompts to be considered for future publications.

Note that all published student writings in this handbook are transcribed as exactly as they were written by the student wherever possible, including spelling and punctuation.

READY WRITING HISTORY

Ready writing history stems back to 1916, when the League added essay-writing and spelling to the academic high school program. Since the inception of UIL in 1911, the academic program had consisted only of debate and declamation. The essay-writing contest began as a take-home event. Students were required to write a humorous short story, based on personal experience, and submit it through their high school to the contest.

In 1918, elementary and junior high campuses, or ward schools as they were called then, were first given the opportunity to compete in essay-writing. Instead of writing a short story, contestants were asked to submit a patriotic composition on one of eight topics. Note the timeliness of these patriotic prompts:

- My part in Junior Red Cross Work;
- Arguments I Used in Selling War Saving Stamps;
- My War Garden and How It Helps;
- How I Have Economized to Help Win the War;
- “Extravagance Costs Blood—The Blood of Heroes”—Lloyd George;
- What I Am Doing to Help Win the War;
- Why Special Economy Is Needed in the Use of Wheat, Sugar, and Meat; and

- How the Interscholastic League Promotes Patriotism.

In 1919, the UIL set a two-hour time limit and required contestants to assemble to write their essays. In addition, officials added specific instructions for leaving a one-inch margin to the left, and a two-inch margin at the top, and placing page numbers at the top of the page. Most importantly, the elements of organization, interest, and composition were added as criteria for evaluation.

The 1920s and 1930s brought about other changes in the contest. State officials refined and detailed rules and judging criteria in the constitution. In 1939, the name of the contest was changed to “Ready Writing” to provide more flexibility in the types of writing to be used in the contest.

Many similarities to the 1916 contest remain today in both the high school and the elementary/junior high ready writing programs. The one-inch margin on the left of the page is one of those rules that has lasted forever, and League staff writers continue to write timely contest prompts. While changes may occur in such areas as correctness of style or “composition,” as it was called in 1919, the rules of good writing endure.

Why coach ready writing?

The best way to answer this question is to ask the veteran coaches. Elaine Whitfill, ready writing coach at Snyder Junior High School in Snyder, said ready writing is different from the other UIL contests in that it is “not a drill-and-practice skill that can be scored objectively like spelling and number sense, and it is not the recitation of someone else’s creativity as is oral reading. Ready writing is the writer’s own creative self-expression in response to a chosen topic.”

Whitfill said she coaches ready writing because “it provides an outlet for creativity and critical thinking not only for students with dramatic personalities but also for those who are quiet and reserved. From within the safety of the written word, students may assume the voice of a character and freely express themselves without the fear and intimidation associated with public speaking.”

Laurie Davenport, fourth grade ready writing coach at Whitesboro Elementary, said she encourages her students to focus on their own experiences in writing. As she prepares them for competition, she emphasizes, “Be different! Make your writing different from everybody else’s.” She gave an example of a student who won his district contest because he was able to creatively incorporate into his essay things he had learned from his family background in recycling.

Alonzo Molina, teacher for Uvalde Consolidated ISD, said his students learn to develop their own unique styles of writing through ready writing. Becky Lynn Cockerill, one of his winning students, said it is the short amount of time given to write that has most helped her to develop creativity. “(W)ith

a short amount of time given, more thoughts came into my head than I would get with an indefinite time period to write.”

PROVIDES VALUABLE PRACTICE FOR LIFE

SKILLS

Coaches emphasize the value of ready writing in preparing students to be effective communicators of the future. For more than 15 years, Carol Senn, from Elgin ISD, has coached ready writing for third and fourth grade students not only because, she said, “I love to teach writing,” but also because she realizes that the writing strategies she uses to teach children are “tools they can use for all future writing.” She said this is a very rewarding experience.

“Ready writing is also excellent practice for writing as a life skill,” Whitfill said. She added that the capitalization, punctuation, and grammar rules learned through ready writing are applicable to all writing situations and are more relevant to the students because they have learned them within the context of their own writing. The organizational and critical thinking skills learned through ready writing are also useful throughout life.

HELPS DISCOVER UNTAPPED TALENT

Ready writing helps some students discover an untapped talent for writing and opens up such options as creative writing and journalism. In addition, Whitfill said, “Others have found ready writing useful as a means for exploring their own thoughts or venting their frustrations.”

Molina points out that ready writing contests allow students to express inner thoughts and develop unique writing styles which serve to open their minds to new ideas and goals.

HELPS PREPARE STUDENTS FOR THE STAAR

Ready Writing prompts utilize expository as well as narrative prompts, and test writers incorporate the Read, Write, Think prompt format into a selection of the prompts. Competing in Ready Writing allows students to experience a timed writing experience.

The Ready Writing contest focuses on these three domains: Interest, organization, and correctness of style. The STAAR writing assessment focus on: Development of ideas, organization/ progression, and use of language/ conventions. Many teachers use ready writing in the classroom writing activities to help prepare students for the STAAR writing test. Some teachers might note that because they teach STAAR and ready writing together as part of the curriculum showing both the similarities and differences of the writing situations, their students do not need to come after school to prepare for contest.

BUILDS SELF CONFIDENCE

Whitfill talked about working with her students, practicing and polishing their writing skills in the weeks before contest, but when it came to the contest, she noted, "The students know that their essays will be their own demonstration of what they know and who they are as writers, strengthening their sense of achievement when their essays are chosen as winners." And Whitfill produces many winners at district contests.

Molina said his students' feelings of accomplishment give him that same feeling. One of his students, Kellie Hayman, said ready writing allowed her to write in her own style, with confidence that her style would be accepted. She said, "Now I write without fear."

"When you win first place in any contest, you're going to gain confidence," said Davenport who teaches at a small rural school, and whose students compete with larger schools in the Dallas suburban area. "It gives my students a great sense of pride and builds their confidence when they compete successfully with kids from larger towns."

BUILDS SPORTSMANSHIP

Working together with classmates, making new friends, learning how to win and lose graciously — these are also important fringe benefits of any extracurricular contest. Sara Hale, 12-year-old ready writer from Uvalde Consolidated ISD, said she has benefited from ready writing because she has had the opportunity to go to different places and meet new people. She said she not only learned to be a better writer, she also learned "how to be a better sport about stuff."

How do you select students?

Most teachers can spot a gifted writer upon evaluating the first class writing assignment. But getting that gifted writer to participate in a writing contest may not be all that easy. We've talked about why ready writing is beneficial. It will be important to impart some of those benefits to your students as you begin your selection process, and it will be important to set guidelines for the selection process.

But what if you are going to coach students who have never been in your class? Selecting the best students to compete in ready writing may be done in a variety of ways. No one way can be recommended over another because a variety of situations exists on each campus. The selection process should, however, provide multiple opportunities for writing practice and progress, even for those students whom you already perceive to be good writers. Therefore, building a team early in the school year is essential to successful competition. We offer the following suggestions for an equitable procedure for selecting your ready writing team.

1. DETERMINE HOW STUDENTS WILL BE SELECTED FOR COMPETITION.

The following is an explanation of some of the recommended criteria that could be used in selecting ready writing students.

QUALITY OF WRITING. Contestants should be selected primarily on the basis of the consistent quality of their writing. Students should be told from the beginning that they will be selected for the ready writing team primarily on the

basis of the consistent quality of their writing. Determining consistency requires evaluating students' writing in several formats throughout the school year prior to and succeeding contests. One writing contest or session does not provide sufficient information for judging the top writers, especially if you have not worked on a daily basis with these students in a classroom environment.

PRACTICE SESSIONS. Provide a series (perhaps five) of practice/learning sessions in which concepts are taught and students are given opportunities to do prewriting and practice writing activities. These may be incorporated into classroom language arts/writing activities, or practice times may be scheduled before and after school, during an activity period, or at a combination of times that work best for the individual circumstances. The information in "How do You Prepare for Ready Writing" section will be helpful as sessions are planned.

CONTEST SESSIONS. Provide a series of full writing sessions during which the environment is similar to a UIL contest in all aspects. Offer five sessions—require attendance at three of the five. The same two hours or a designated shorter length of time should be provided for all students writing to the same choice of prompts under the same conditions without interruptions.

Invitational meets provide the best opportunities for practicing in a contest environment, but students should not be required to attend these. Parents may choose to allow their children to attend these as part of the three-session requirement. If you find that no invitational meets are being held in your area, contact one or two schools and invite them to come to your school for a ready writing contest or festival. Make the arrangements through the school principals. You will find that a mini-meet will require minimal effort and produce positive results.

ATTENDANCE. Some of the best writers may not necessarily be the most dependable attendants to the practice sessions or to school. Try to make the writing sessions positive, productive meetings that encourage good attendance. Interested students will want to meet high expectations of them, so require attendance at three of the five ready writing sessions, and be sure that parents/guardians know when the sessions are to be held.

Getting judges?

Please don't ask the secretary in the office to judge the ready writing contest. Although this individual may be articulate and capable or even be a free-lance writer with a degree in English, perception that this person "belongs to the school" and knows the writers is the first negative aspect of this selection. Second, students deserve to be judged by a qualified judge or group of judges — those who evaluate student writing on a regular basis.

Students should not be required to attend all practice and writing sessions to be considered for the ready writing district team. Set criteria that suits your circumstances. Use professional discretion concerning illnesses and students' needs to attend other functions scheduled at the same time.

ATTITUDE / BEHAVIOR. As in any school activity, students are expected to follow the school's rules and basic code of courtesy.

GRADES. Although the best writers are usually the avid readers and overall good students, it is not uncommon to find a gifted writer who struggles with, or just doesn't like math, science or some other subject. Be attentive to those individual differences and avoid an overburdening of writing assignments which may contribute to failure in school coursework. Setting a grade standard as part of the selection process should discourage neglect of other subject areas.

2. DESCRIBE THE READY WRITING PROGRAM FOR POTENTIAL COMPETITORS.

- **Explain** what ready writing is to your class or classes.
- If you will be coaching students from other teachers' classes, **provide information** about ready writing to these teachers. Ask that they explain the program to their students.
- **Mention some of the incentives:** awards, recognition, preparation for STAAR, preparation for communications life skills, a field trip with other classmates to competition, etc. Remind students that they don't have to stand up and perform in front of an audience. Add incentives that apply to your school situation — awards program, banquet, publishing winning students' papers, etc.
- **Send a description** of the program home with students or through a newsletter to the community. Parents can be your key to building a successful program.

3. SET A DATE, TIME AND PLACE TO MEET WITH INTERESTED STUDENTS.

Depending on the school's schedule, students may gather during an activity period, home room, lunch, before school, after school, during a designated class period, or on a weekend. The best time to meet likely may be an activity period, whereby most students can be present. You will need

approximately 30 minutes to provide students with an adequate introduction.

Create a flier posting the date, time, and place to meet at least one week prior to the meeting. Include some of the incentives in the flier. Attach a picture of a student or students receiving ready writing awards from a previous contest. Add testimonial comments. Print the flier on bright colored paper. Mention the meeting and the flier during class or school announcements.

4. AT THE FIRST MEETING, PROVIDE STUDENTS WITH SOME OF THE SPECIFICS.

- Reiterate the nature of the contest and its incentives. Announce how many students will be selected to compete from each grade level in your district contest and introduce the criteria for judging.
- Describe how students will be selected for competition. Give students a list of criteria.
- Show students sample prompts, compositions, and judges' comments from winning samples provided in this handbook. (Time may limit the extent of the illustration. Answer students' questions about the program first.)
- Talk about the writing. Add your comments as needed. Have students comment about the prompts and the writing. Some students may say aloud or to themselves, "I can do that," or "I can do better than that." Those who say, "I don't think I can do that" should not be eliminated from the prospective competitors. With a little encouragement, many of these students may become your best writers.
- Provide written information about times and places to meet again. If you have had the opportunity to make arrangements for competition among other schools, provide these dates. You can get together with just one other school in your area and have a ready writing contest after school. Two invitational prompts will be provided by UIL for such a contest; a list of 16 prompts for each of the three elementary and junior high contests is provided in this handbook; or you can compose your own prompts using the guidelines also provided in the sample prompts section of this handbook.

Getting judges?

The UIL *Constitution and Contest Rules* says to select "a single judge or an odd number of qualified and impartial judges, who may not be contestants' coaches." A panel of three judges works well.

- Send students out with a sample prompt and instructions to write an essay to the prompt and turn it in at a designated place and time prior to the next scheduled meeting.

Remind writers

The contest director needs to remind contestants not to use their names, the names of their schools, teachers, or any other specific reference that would indicate the school district. Writing will be more difficult for students under these constraints. To assist the student, the prompt page includes a request that students not write their names or names of their schools on their entries.

5. AT SUBSEQUENT MEETINGS WITH PROSPECTIVE COMPETITORS, GET DOWN TO THE “NUTS AND BOLTS” OF READY WRITING.

First compositions will have been read, and ready writing evaluations that provide constructive comments and notations about areas needing improvement will have been prepared for each student. You will have an initial idea about the writing skills of your prospective writers. Return these compositions to students and discuss the strong and weak areas of this initial effort, always encouraging strengths.

Instruction in the “nuts and bolts” may begin with statements about interest, but focus on the organizational area will provide a framework upon which to build that interesting essay. The section on evaluation criteria in this handbook will provide some helpful tips for beginning.

6. SELECT READY WRITING CONTESTANTS.

Based on the criteria you have established and given to students, select your ready writers. Let the selected students’ parents know as soon as possible in order that arrangements may be made for their confirmed attendance at the district contest.

Hiring Judges

If you have been assigned the job of selecting judges, take into consideration the following suggestions of people you might select:

- Ready writing elementary and junior high coaches who are from a school district not participating in the contest could be your most qualified judges. You might use a barter system, whereby this school furnishes judges for your contest and you furnish judges for their contest.
- You may use high school ready writing coaches from other schools not in your district.
- High school ready writing coaches within your district may be used as long as these coaches do not know any of the contestants.
- Retired language arts teachers who were formerly ready writing coaches make excellent judges and are usually willing to serve.
- College students who have previously competed in ready writing and are majoring in a language arts field have the concepts fresh on their minds and would be willing to earn a little money for this service as well.
- College professors who teach writing can often judge your contest in the shortest period of time and provide excellent comments on students' evaluations.
- Professional writers or editors might enjoy reading and evaluating student writing for a change.
- An interested community member who doesn't know any of the competitors and has experience in a writing field could also be selected as a judge.

Regardless of their writing backgrounds, all ready writing judges should have the criteria for judging the contest explained to them prior to judging compositions. It would also be helpful to provide an example of a first place composition from a previous year as part of your explanation.

How do you prepare for competition?

The composition that best catches the attention of the judges is most likely going to be the winner. Ready writing compositions are judged on the basis of **interest**, **organization**, and **correctness of style**. While the judges take into consideration all three of these elements in selecting the most effective compositions, they're most likely going to choose the one that is most interesting.

Students have already been made aware through regular classroom instruction in writing that a composition should include an **introduction**, a **body** and a **conclusion**. The descriptions and examples which follow elaborate on these concepts, as well as other elements which contribute to the interest factor (*transition, documentation, vocabulary, voice*) in evaluating a ready writing composition.

Interest = 50%

INTRODUCTION

A strong introduction captures the interest of the reader. Writers should get a clear picture of their audience before they begin writing. The audience will be either specifically stated or implied in the prompt. The writer should get to the point – the thesis – and avoid rambling or chit-chatting.

Beth Bullock, sixth grade student at Panhandle Junior High, provides a short introduction that expresses her positive point of view and gives the reader a clear picture of what will be discussed in the paper.

Jobs are very important! If people didn't have jobs there would be no way to pay bills or care for your families. Being a good worker takes a lot of practice, but if you have good skills you won't have to worry about anything. Some skills that might come in handy are being good with people, being polite, knowing how to handle the job, and having fun.

Beth Bullock—Panhandle Junior High School

Eighth grader Lexi Langley prepares her audience for instruction in how to be a good sport in her concise and thought-provoking introduction.

When playing any type of sport, both the fans and the players can get a little upset at times. Some people are able to control their emotions while others aren't. Those who can't control their emotions are sometimes labeled as "bad sports." If you are a "bad sport" who wants to know how to become a "good sport," there are many different ways to show good sportsmanship.

Lexi Langley — Elysian Fields Middle School

Lexi's essay won first place for Elysian Fields Middle School in the 1996 district ready writing contest. This interesting, organized, and correctly-written essay may be read in its entirety in the eighth grade sample winning composition section of this handbook.

Brooke Williams, sixth grade student at Sweeney Junior High School, combines all the introductory elements studied for writing with heightened interest as she speaks directly to her audience in words that they can relate to best. Brooke continues her personal essay by discussing in separate paragraphs the teachers, educational supplies, and the safe environment she introduces in this well-organized opening. (*See chapter five for this composition.*)

Getting to be the one to welcome you all to Bradshaw Jr. High School is truly an honor! Are there any butterflies jumping around inside y'all's stomachs like Mexican jumping beans? Well, if there are absolutely *do not* let them bother you because here at Bradshaw you are offered outstanding instructors (teachers), wonderful educational supplies and equipment (which all add to your learning experience), and last but certainly not least everyone is guaranteed a safe

Transitions

Transitions emphasize the logical order of an essay or story. They are the glue that holds the composition together so that it runs smoothly from start to finish. Here are just a few of the more frequently-used transition words:

Above
Across
Afterward
Again
Also
Although
And
Another
Around
As
At last
At once
At present
As a result
Because
Before
Besides
Beyond
But
Consequently

environment in which to be educated. So please allow me to say again Welcome to Bradshaw Jr. High School!

Brooke Williams—Sweeny Junior High, Sweeny

BODY

Transition: The body of an interesting composition will be clear and include specific details and personal examples that individualize the writing as an outgrowth of the writer's character and experience. Examples focus on the thesis and include transition words and phrases that smoothly connect the elaborated points one to the other. The writer should avoid rambling.

Farmersville Middle School seventh grader Erin Lethco provides an example of a focused and effectively elaborated body in her “no pass, no play” composition found at the end of this section. Note how each of her paragraphs focuses on a separate subtopic that adds emphasis to the overall thesis: No pass, no play is good for students. Smooth transition from one paragraph to the next provides cohesiveness for the theme. Below is an example of Erin's use of transition. Some of the transition words and phrases used at the beginning and within the paragraphs are identified with bold letters.

Second, the “no pass, no play” rule gives you a sense of achievement when you are allowed to play sports. **To define**, it makes you feel like you have already done something special. **For instance**, one of my friends was struggling in math. She really wanted to play basketball. When she passed she felt very privileged. In my opinion the “no pass, no play” rule could build someone's self esteem when they were allowed to play sports, and make them feel like they achieved something special.

Last, but certainly not least, the “no pass, no play” rule offers students a more rewarding future. **In other words**, your education could help you through your adulthood. Every boy has the dream to be a pro athlete. If they never passed their subjects in school, and for some reason could not become an athlete, they would have nothing to fall back on. **However**, if they would have had to follow the “no pass, no play” rule in school they would always have their education to fall back on. This would offer students a more rewarding future.

Erin Lethco — Farmersville Middle School

Documentation: Ultimately, good writing that emphasizes sound logic and isn't overloaded with emotion can best persuade the reader. To persuade, the essay must be credible. The evidence presented must be supported with facts.

A good rule of thumb to follow when relating information from other sources is to include each of the following: who said it; when it was said; and where it was said. In order to be believable, supporting evidence should be factual and relevant to the topic.

Statistics such as, "Nineteen percent of the people in America are left handed," also bring no validity to a paper if they are not documented. Who said that 19 percent of the people in America are left handed? Where was it stated? When?

A ready writing composition that contains no documentation of figures or information that could not have been attained by personal experience may affect a paper's ranking. Sure, it might be possible to fool a few judges with false figures, but well-documented facts, quotations and paraphrased statements produce the most effective elaboration. Farfetched information only renders fluff.

See how fifth grader Victor Villarreal believably documents his quotations from *Red Book Magazine*. Although he does not include the exact page number, the exact date of the issue, or the person who stated the information, the reader can believe that this information does exist by the student's emphatic description of it, as well as his correct use of quotation marks. Judges should be aware that students come to ready writing without notes and may not be able to recall all the information to document a written resource. In making up information, contestants run the risk of being caught by a well-read judge.

While it would have been better to identify the source of the *Red Book* information, Victor played it safe and gave his reader the most important details of the documentation. Then he focused on the explanation and examples in the body of his letter as he assertively illustrated his point.

Transitions

Earlier
Even if
Eventually
Finally
First
For
For example
For instance
For this reason
Furthermore
Hence
Here
However
In addition
In general
In spite of
Later
Likewise
Meanwhile
Moreover
Nevertheless
Next
Nor
Of course
On the contrary
Otherwise
Provided that
Similarly
Since
Still
So
Soon
Then
Thereafter
Thereupon
Therefore
Thus
Too
Yet

The power to make you pay attention

Peter Elbow, author of *Writing with Power*, describes "voice" as a natural outflow from the writer. "Writing with voice is writing into which someone has breathed," Elbow stated. "It has that fluency, rhythm, and liveliness that exists naturally in the speech of most people when they are enjoying a conversation. Writing with real voice has the power to make you pay attention and understand—the words go deep."

Another reason I had in mind is that you will get a profit of it off of the students that could really help our school. Two weeks ago in *Red Book Magazine* I read, "Vending machines are helping schools around the world." I was flabbergasted so I kept on reading to myself, "they've raised money to buy very needed equipment." That's when I thought about our school. We need to make well needed repairs and purchase new equipment. All our equipment has been used daily for what seems by the looks of things centuries. New books and school supplies are a need because 75 percent of the pages are torn or written on.

Victor Villarreal — Kika de la Garza Elementary School

Vocabulary: Avoid filling your composition with stilted or pretentious words. A vivid illustration of this tip was given by Bobby Hawthorne, UIL Director of Academics, in the November, 1994 issue of the *Leaguer*. In Hawthorne's satirical article entitled "In writing contests, spelling is a minor consideration," writers are cautioned to avoid using stilted words which convey little meaning but come across as attempts to hide the writer's "confusion under a canopy of bloated diction."

He illustrates with this passage he called a classic:

"The rights of man, being metamorphosized over the passage of time, vary inevitably between individuals. This can be attributed to the separate and different acculturation of human beings in parallel environments. Therefore, the right craved by a man, rights which can never be capitulated, are the result of the values inherited and adhered to in a culture. The present culture of Western man is one based on humanism, freedom and liberty. These beliefs create an environment that contends that man is entitled to life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness.

On the opposite side of this issue is the want, nay the incurable desire to perpetrate crimes and infringement on the rights of neighbors, simply on a whim. Such is human nature. . . ."

Hawthorne notes that although all the words are spelled correctly, meaning is lost when neither the writer nor the reader can understand what is being said. Since content is the major component of the interest criterion which makes up 50 percent of the elementary or junior high ready writing evaluation, writers want to enhance the content by using clear, concise language.

Use vocabulary that illustrates your understanding of the subject.

While you don't want to use stilted, meaningless words, you also don't want to write a paper consisting of nothing other than words you first learned in second grade. Vocabulary can be a powerful tool for conveying your most interesting thoughts and proving to the reader that you know what you're writing about. For example, Derek Dansby, an eighth grade student at Bowie Junior High School, uses his command of vocabulary as he responds to a prompt that asked for his views on changing the legal driving age.

For centuries mankind has been enthralled by swift transportation. This awe led to the invention of the automobile, but with success and technological advances comes a dark reality, the reality of mortality. For many teenagers and their parents, this reality hits when they see the pile of rubble on the shoulder.

Derek Dansbury — Bowie Jr. High

Derek's allusion to automobile accidents effectively conveys a part of his stand that the driving age should not be raised.

Ilyssa Lugo, a fourth grader at Jourdanton Elementary School, uses meaningful adjectives and interesting expressions to describe the food she eats at her grandma's house.

Besides that the food that my grandma makes is terrific? Her apple pies make my mouth water when I see them. And her warm turkey makes me impatient to sink my teeth into its juicy skin! As I drink the ice cool punch I remember about the cold stream that runs beside our house.

Ilyssa Lago — Jourdanton Elementary

Voice: Write with a “distinctive voice.” Winning compositions often reflect a unique point of view (voice). Judges look for writing that expresses everyday things and happenings in a unique way. Writers who takes chances, have fun with their writing, and risk saying something different in a tone that effectively conveys the purpose set forth in the introduction are going to attract the judges’ attention.

Karen Werkenthin, state ready writing high school director, said, “The best papers come from writers who have a distinctive voice. The writers who take risks, who trust their own style and do not try to follow a formula for a good essay have greater success.” Good writers transfer their thoughts into words as an outgrowth of feelings and experiences.

Victor Villarreal, fifth grade student at Kika de la Garza Elementary, establishes a distinctive voice in his persuasive letter to his principal asking that vending machines be placed in his school without seeking anyone’s vote on the issue. Only a risk-taker would illustrate with the theft of a candy bar from the teachers’ lounge. Although this writer’s spelling may need a little work, his voice on this issue is undeniable.

Forget about the vote,” I thought. My first reason is that it will make kids work better. For example, last year we had a student that everybody thought he was dense because he would always fail. But one day, he secretly snuck into the teacher’s lounge and was able to sneak out a candy bar. Just when he had finished it, class began. The first five questions he rabidly swayed his arm around in the air and was chosen on and got them all right. Research clearly shows that people of all ages work better if they’ve eaten candy.

Victor Villarreal — Kiki de la Garza Elementary

The voice below reveals how strongly the writer believes that U.S. troops should not be sent to assist other countries.

Under a liberated government, we, the United States, have dispatched soldiers into a pool of quicksand. Our soldiers have been killed and their families have wept. We should not be doing this? Troops should only be sent into battle when the well-being of Americans hangs in the balance. Other countries should be able to fend for themselves, or they shouldn’t be countries at all. We cannot try, nor can we believe, that we can help everyone who is not living

on easy street. The government should be conjuring up ways to fight disease or feed the homeless, not pondering the next place we can transport military forces.

Derek Dansby — Bowie Jr. High

CONCLUSION

A strong ending leaves the reader with a final thought, not an exact repetition of what was said in the introduction. It gives the reader a sense of completion. There is no need to conclude with a “The End” to note this completion.

The following paragraph that concludes a fifth grade essay illustrates a short but effective summary of the thesis. It sets forth a parting thought and a challenge to the governor.

Why do you think it is important to be a good neighbor? My class thought these were the most important. Perhaps you can think of more. Decide for yourself which are most important. But remember, we must partner today for a better tomorrow.

Megan Button — Jourdanton Elementary

An eighth grade example of an effective conclusion comes from Kelley Garner of Snyder Junior High. Kelley’s letter to a newspaper editor thoroughly discusses reasons why her school is good, and her poignant conclusion adds further emphasis to this overall point.

Anytime you hear or see negative comments concerning our school, think back to all the medals won, the advanced placement classes we have, and the strong leadership ability among the students. Knowing these qualities, I think to myself ‘On a scale from one to ten, how would I rate my school?’ That’s an easy question. Ten.

Kelly Garner — Snyder Junior High School

The Combined Interest Factor: Observe how the fourth grade writer of the composition which follows has fun with her writing, drawing the reader to her point of view by using her skill with detail in presenting her examples. Amber Turpin’s letter exemplifies what the judges are looking for in an interesting composition, a composition that is alive with personality in the introduction, body and conclusion.

PROMPT - Favorite Holidays: Most people enjoy holidays, and almost everybody has a favorite one. Write a letter to a friend or relative who lives in another town, describing your favorite holiday and what makes it special.

123 Blast Off Lane
Rocketbelt, Mars 97341

Dear Tick Tock,

I thought that we had talked about everything we possibly could. I guess not. We haven't talked about what our favorite holiday is. When you write me back, tell me what your favorite holiday is. For right now, mine is Independence Day.

I like Independence day because of the fireworks. I remember when I was little we would light fireworks. My sister, two brothers, and I would dash around, trying to blow the ashes out, that were still lit, with our bare feet. When we were finish, we would add up how many ashes we blew out to see who got the most. Whoever did get the most would get to light the snake that seemed to grow on and on without stopping. The firecrackers are a big thing at our family's Independence Day celebration.

Another reason why I adore Independence Day is because we can remember special things about about our country. Such as the flags and Statue of Liberty. In our school, we are reading a book called *Sarah's Flag*. It's about a girl named Sarah who makes a flag for her husband, Archie Dodson. It turns out to be that the flag becomes our stat's official symbol. I'm sure Sarah Dodson was proud of herself after that! The Statue of Liberty is also one of our proud symbols. It shows the peace between us and another country.

The last reason why I like Independence Day is because of our freedom. In school we are learning about the Bill of Rights. The Fourt of July is a magnificent day to celebrate those rights as an American citizen. The United States of America is one of only a few countries that are free. Have you ever heard the song "I'm Proud to be an American?" That should be our Independence Day song. I am more sure of that thought than a person wearing Sure deoderant is. And I'm sure that Sure deoderant doesn't make you that sure, don't you think. Well, what I think is I think I'm wearing Sure deoderant! (Ha Ha!) I heard someone say once, "If freedom is good, is good freedom?" That question hasn't really gotten to my

mind yet. But now that. I think of it, I do think good is freedom.

That is a confusing, though.

Well, I do hope you'll write back soon with your favorite holiday included. I hope you have a better Fourth of July this year!

Your cousin,
Kick'en Calamity

By Amber Turpen, Fourth Grade — 1995
Whitesboro Elem., Teacher: Laurie Davenport

WHAT THE JUDGE SAID ABOUT AMBER'S ESSAY:

"This is a very creative work! You have done a wonderful job of organizing your thoughts in the form of a letter. Good elaboration, such as the example of Independence Day memories, really adds to your writing.

"Thanks for working so hard!"

Under "Areas Needing Improvement," the judge said, "Stay with the subject matter. The writing about Sure deodorant seems to detract from the continuity of the essay.

Keep writing and practicing."

Though many fourth grade students might have responded to a prompt which asked for a description of a favorite holiday with simple facts and details, Amber Turpen takes the elaboration process a step farther and adds a flare of fantasy, originality, and a wonderful sense of humor to her friendly letter. Amber won first place in the 1995 District Ready Writing Contest with this letter.

The best feedback from the judge to a student writer specifies examples of what was good or what could be better. In the constructive comments, the judge specifies that Independence Day memories are well elaborated. Be aware that while one judge might see the inclusion of the light comparison of Sure deodorant as a detractor, another might see it as an effective, and funny statement of the writer's surety that "I'm Proud to be an American . . . should be our Independence Day song," something a fourth grader might say to a friend or cousin.

Power writing

Have students write as much as they can for three minutes from an idea set forth by the teacher.

Have students staple five sheets of paper together. The first and last papers are divided into half. This is where the introduction and the conclusion will be written. This procedure helps students format writing papers, showing the parts.

Let students write to the moods of music. "What do you think of when you hear different types of music." They love this, too!

by Alonzo Molina, Jr., Uvalde Consolidated ISD

Organization - 35%

The importance of having a plan cannot be overstated. Compositions lose their impact when ideas are introduced and developed in random order. The prompts provide an initial organizer because they tell about what and to whom the writing should be directed. Effective structuring of writing into an introduction, body, and conclusion is achieved most successfully by students who have been taught how to prepare for writing.

Prewriting activities help students focus on a particular topic or portion of a piece of writing. Brainstorming, journal writing, focused freewriting, power writing, listing, charting, clustering, writing to music, writing with the Venn diagram, and webbing are a few of these techniques covered in current adoption language arts textbooks and STAAR writing preparation materials.

Let's look at webbing, which is an effective means of preparing a descriptive response. The web begins with a circle which represents a major idea in the writing. From that circle, students add other circles which contain connecting ideas or descriptive words about each other. From these circles, lines extend from circle to circles illustrating the connection of the parts to the whole. The webbing, or connecting lines, helps students organize thoughts by depicting objects or ideas in relation to one another and to the whole. By using the web as a guide, students will be more likely to describe one area completely before moving to another, thereby demonstrating an organizational strategy.

In addition, webbing aids the elaboration required for successful responses to prompts by providing a graphic display of related details that can be incorporated in a description.

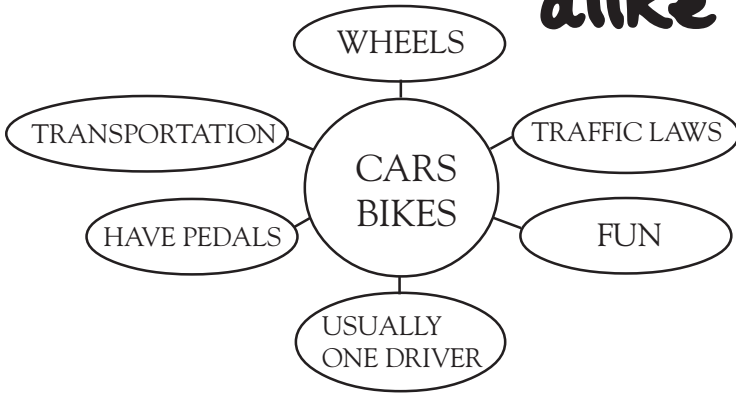
An organized composition will contain the following components:

- A central idea (thesis)
- A logical order
- Transition
- Supporting evidence
- Attention to the audience

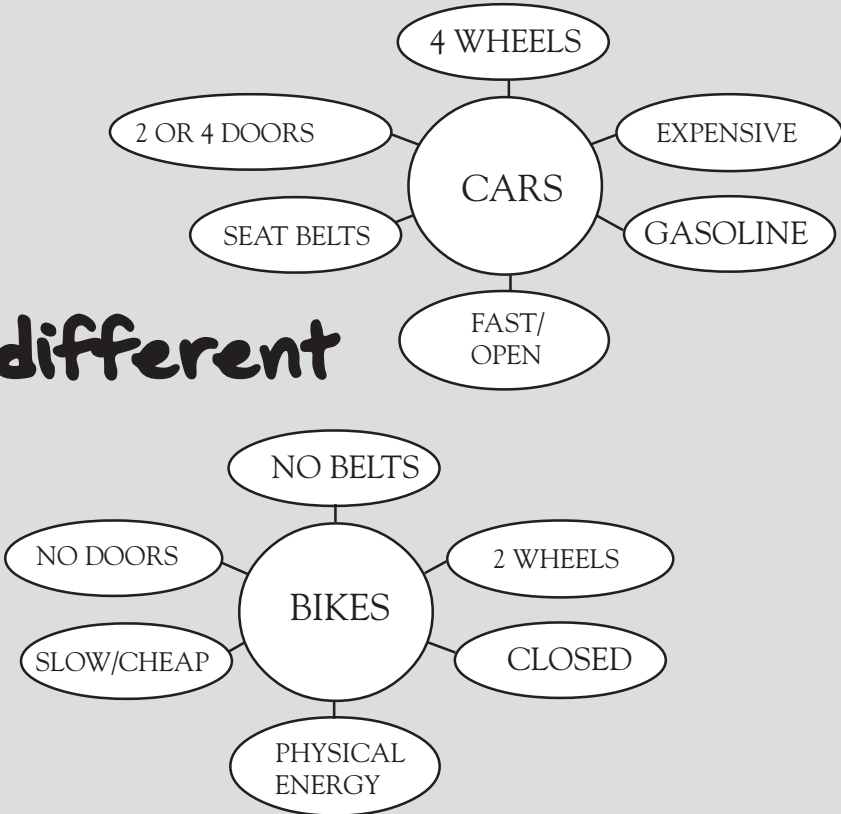
The eighth grade composition which follows incorporates each of these components effectively. The introduction states

Webbing

alike



different



that four items would be selected to be placed in a time capsule. The writer proceeds with description and elaboration on each of the four items in separate paragraphs, then closes with emphasis on the relevance of the activity. Note how the elaboration process flows with description and detail stemming from the introduction of each item in individual paragraphs, while the overall theme of “what should be placed in a time capsule” is maintained throughout the report.

Prompt — *Time Capsule*: Your class is creating a time capsule that will be buried on the school grounds. Your group has been instructed to choose items to be included in the buried container. Choose things that would help someone opening the time capsule fifty years from now to understand something about how teenagers live in your community today. Write a report for your group explaining what you would include and why.

Time Capsule

Wow! A real time capsule buried at our school! It kind of makes you feel like a Jetson, doesn't it? Fifty years from now, teenagers will open this box and think, “Wow, this is what the year 1994 was like!” There are many things I feel that could be selected to place in a time capsule, but I have chosen four items I believe would show children in 2044 what it was like to be a teenager “way back then.”

One item I would put in the time capsule would be an academic scrapbook. This book would be page after page of teenagers who excelled educationally in the year of 1994. This would show the future students what academic morales we had. For example, a page might have a picture of students who were chosen to participate in the Future Problem Solving State Bowl. Underneath would be an article stating how the students were chosen out of thousands of other teams, and other highlights of their competition. This book would also include honor rolls, UIL participants, and debate winners.

My next item I would enter in the time capsule would be a collection of articles and papers that the students of 1994 would write. The topic of discussion would be, “What do you think the year of 2044 will be like?” It would include the subjects of crime, education, and what they think the children 50 years from then will do for fun. A second paper, also by the students, will be included, too, that

will tell what the teenagers lives of 1994 were like. It will tell things such as their home life, their responsibilities, and school academics and athletics. This will be entertaining for the studnets of 2044 to read about because I think it is hysterical, side-spittingly funny when I hear how my parents and grandparents acted, talked, and dressed.

My third piece I would put in the capsule would be another book of how things were done in 1994, like how studnets dressed, how they talked, and what they did for hobbies and fun. One part of the book would have samples of slang writing such as, "Wow, man! That's radical!" Then beside each writing sample would be a translation of what that REALLY said and meant. Another section would be on how students dressed. The school's talented "teenage artists" could draw pictures of clothes that students of 1994 wore, while the authors would write about fads and styles such as the pants sagging, tags hanging off caps, and cowboy boots. The last part of the book could explain about their extra-curricular activities they did for fun, such as sports, going to the movies, and shopping. (Yes, shopping is considered a sport for many female teenagers!)

My last article I would put in my time capsule would be a booklet of what teenagers in 1994 had to face and how they survived being a teenager. For example, it would tell about the importance of pride and values. It would also state the scaryness of being a teenager in 1994, such as drinking, drugs, violence, gangs, and promiscuity.

I think it is very important and fun for students in 50 years to learn and know how we lived, acted, talked, and dressed. And as they say, times do a-change!

By Jillian Inmon, Eighth Grade — 1994

Kerens Middle School, Teacher: Linda Foster

Another example of organized writing comes from a third grader in a descriptive letter to a friends describing a favorite

What the judge said

STRENGTHS:

Strong organization — good flow
Refreshing and imaginative
Fun beginning! Introduction is a cute attention grabber.
Great viewpoint in first paragraph.
Second paragraph — original; creative
Very good ending to third paragraph
Well developed — good to tell *why* you chose certain things. This paper is very entertaining while not being overly wordy.

WEAKNESSES:

Work on your concluding paragraph.
Conclusion is not clear and rather trite after the wonderful introduction. Don't overlook its importance. How would a reaction from the reader from the future have tied the introduction and conclusion together?

holiday. The introduction is short, but to the point. Each paragraph flows well into the next with connecting phrases such as “Besides the Christmas lights.” Noted in bold are some of the transition words and phrases used by this writer to make her writing flow.

PROMPT - *Favorite Holidays*: Most people enjoy holidays, and almost everybody has a favorite one. Write a letter to a friend or relative who lives in another town, describing your favorite holiday and what makes it special.

Dear Chris and Bob,

My favorite holiday is Christmas. I like Christmas because of the beautiful lights, the wonderful tree, and the surprising presents you get from the family.

I like Christmas because of the beautiful lights. The common Christmas lights colors are red, green, yellow, blue and orange. They hang off of roof tops, doors, windows, and the Christmas wreaths hanging on the door. The lights are also strung on trees and balconies **too**. When its dark outside the lights shine like stars in the sky. I like the beautiful Christmas lights.

Besides the Christmas lights, I like the wonderful Christmas tree, with its pretty ornaments. Every year my Christmas tree is pine. We have a lot of shineing ornaments to put on it. We **also** have an angel that we put on the tip-top of the tree. Sometimes we put ice-cicles on the tree, and they are made out of paper that is shiney silver. Some of the ornaments have glitter on them making a design. **And** every year we put lights on our tree. I love the beautiful Christmas tree.

The last thing I like about Christmas is the presents. I like to rip open the presents, and see whats inside. Last year I got a sticker maker,

What the judge said

Strengths:

Good organization. Three reasons listed in introductory paragraph.

I like the simile in the second paragraph. Could you include more?

You are very specific in your details of the Christmas tree. What might be a particular favorite ornament you put on your tree?

I'm glad you focused on wrapping of the presents and not the presents inside. This is a unique perspective.

Weaknesses:

I'm not sure the food you eat at Grandma's house should be included. It detracts from your main idea about presents.

Your introductory and concluding paragraphs need to grab your reader's attention. Knock their socks off so the reader has to read it.

Try not to repeat yourself. Several paragraphs began with "I like."

three barbie dolls, Lisa Frank stuff, and lots, lots more. The red and green rapping paper with a gold ribbon around it is the prettist present I ever saw. I get up in the morning very early and want to rip open my presents, **but** I have to wait till every body gets up. We go to my grandma's haouse and have Christmas dinner there. We get to open presents at my grandma's too. We have fried chicken, carrots, patoes, firut salad, corn, and coke or tea to drink. For desert we have cheesecake or a certain kind of pie or cake. **After dinner** we finally get to open our presents. We rip them open and find wonderful gifts inside.

I like Christmas because of the Christmas lights, the Christmas tree, and the wonderful presents you get from your family.

Love,

Stefanie

By Stephanie Orsak, Third Grade — 1995
Elgin Primary School, Coach: Carol Senn

PROMPT: *“No Pass, No Play”*: The Texas “no-pass, no-play” rule, which makes students who fail any class ineligible for extracurricular activities for six weeks, has been in effect for 10 years. Many people feel it has been successful because it requires students to concentrate on academic achievement. Others fear that the current penalty for failing may discourage students who struggle to pass, but who occasionally make a failing six-weeks grade. Write a letter to the governor or to your Texas legislator expressing your opinion of the “no-pass, no-play” rule.

Dear Mr. Govenor,

I am writing about the “no pass, no play” rule, which has been in effect for ten years, from the student standpoint. I personally feel that this has been very effective for several reasons. I urge you to keep this rule because it prompts students to strive for excellence in all areas, gives students a sense of achievement, and offers students a more rewarding future.

First, I feel the “no pass, no play” rule prompts students to strive for excellence in all areas of school. For example, my weak subject is Science. In order to play sports I know that I have to pass Science. Therefore, I work harder in this area. I know for a fact that other students are in the same boat as I, and this rule prompts them to pass every subject. With this rule in effect the students have to strive for

What the judge said

Strengths:

Well organized (thesis sentence and paragraphs)
Clearly written; easy to understand and follow
Good introduction and supporting paragraphs
Interesting
Good sentence structure
Flowing style

Weaknesses:

Introductory sentence — try not to refer to your writing: "I am writing about..."
Begin with a statement about the 'no pass, no play' rule.

academic excellence, as well as athletic excellence.

Second, the "no pass, no play" rule gives you a sense of achievement when you are allowed to play sports. To define, it makes you feel like you have already done something special. For instance, one of my friends was struggling in math. She really wanted to play basketball. When she passed she felt very privileged. In my opinion the "no pass, no play" rule could build someone's self esteem when they were allowed to play sports, and make them feel like they achieved something special.

Last, but certainly not least, the "no pass, no play" rule offers students a more rewarding future. In other words, your

education could help you through your adulthood. Every boy has the dream to be a pro athlete. If they never passed their subjects in school, and for some reason could not become an athlete, they would have nothing to fall back on. However, if they would have had to follow the "no pass, no play" rule in school they would always have their education to fall back on. This would offer students a more rewarding future.

In my opinion the "no pass, no play" rule is fabulous! I feel that it helps students and prepares them for the real world. I encourage you to continue this rule. Thank you for your time.

Sincerely,
Susie Q.

By Erin Lethco, 7th Grade – 1995

Farmersville Middle School, Coach: Sandie Upchurch

Writing tips

Tips for third and fourth grade students

- Make a plan and follow it.
- When selecting the prompt, choose the one you are most comfortable with.
- Remember your audience is probably a teacher or a person who writes for a living.

Tips for all writers

- Read. Read. Read from a wide range of sources: newspapers, magazines, books. Other than life experiences, the best resources to draw upon to form your own opinions are ideas found in print. Most of your opinions will come from your own experiences. The depth of the ideas will come from information you gain from reading.
- Use imagery—what can be seen, heard, touched, tasted, smelled, and what can be felt inside are products of the writer's experiences. Imagery appeals to the senses of the reader. Select words that are appropriate for the subject matter. Avoid words that are general and trite.
- Avoid repetition and use as few words as possible without deleting any information.
- Pay attention to writing mechanics. Although correctness of style is intended to account for only 15 percent of the ready writing evaluation, it is important to recognize that mechanical errors can destroy an otherwise good composition.
- Vary sentence structure and length. Good writing has rhythm. The copy will sound natural when you read it aloud if you arrange the words in the best possible order. Make the copy fluent and the rhythm appropriate for the subject matter.

Correctness of style—15%

Correctness of style includes avoiding errors in sentence structure, punctuation, grammar, spelling and word use that interfere with what writers are trying to say. Although correctness of style accounts for only 15 percent of the subjective evaluation of a ready writing composition, these errors do affect judges' overall opinion of the writing. It is unrealistic to expect compositions done in a contest situation to be perfect, but judges often comment on the following types of errors:

- run-on sentences (comma splices) (They make it difficult for the reader to follow thoughts presented);
- incomplete sentences or sentence fragments, unless they are used occasionally for stylistic or rhetorical effect;
- overuse of commas;
- absence of periods and other end punctuation;
- overuse of exclamation points (Let the writing, not the punctuation, provide effective emphasis.);
- misuse or overuse of quotation marks (If the writer is using dialogue, these are essential for clarity. Avoid placing too much quoted material or dialogue in ready writing.); and
- misuse of the semicolon (If you do use a semicolon, make sure it connects two statements which have a close relationship.).

If only writing were as easy as talking. If only that flow of ideas that so often seems to slip with such ease from students' lips when they talk wouldn't get lost between the pencil and the paper. Sometimes in an effort to correct and make more formal their printed words, students overcompensate and lose some of the natural flow of their communication. In light of this dilemma, the following grammar and suggestions may be helpful to young writers.

- Use figurative language but don't abuse it. Too many similes and metaphors can make a paper syrupy. However, logical elaboration with an occasional comparison can be quite effective.

- Usually third person will be the best point of view, but first person (I, me, my, we, etc.) is often necessary when students are relating personal experiences.
- Second person is also acceptable, if not overused.
- Avoid clichés. For instance, instead of saying “Love is a dream come true,” say something different like, “Love is a sweet and sour confection,” or infection, or affection.
- A coordinating conjunction, such as “and,” “so” or “but” at the beginning of the sentence is sometimes the best transition word. Fifth grader Megan Button closes her paper on how to be a good neighbor with the coordinating conjunction “but” in the last sentence.

Why do you think it is important to be a good neighbor? My class thought these were the most important. Perhaps you can think of more. Decide for yourself which are most important. But remember, we must partner today for a better tomorrow.

Megan Button — Jourdanton Elementary School

Fifth grader Lauren Fitte’s also illustrates correctness of style in her essay encouraging the use of technology in schools.

With technology, children can connect with the world. Instead of reading about Mount Everest or the children of Tahiti in their social studies books, they can actually meet the person who scaled Mount Everest and meet with a little girl in Tahiti by writing letters through e-mail or seeing a moving picture of these people who live on the other side of the earth—more than 2,000 miles away. Technology is probably the best thing that ever happened to us.

Lauren Fitte — Sims Intermediate School, Mexia

Teachers and students can find rules for writing conventions in grade-level language arts textbooks. The UIL also encourages teachers to include these elements as a part of their effective writing programs.

Ready Writing Checklist

Use this checklist as a guide in revising your ready writing compositions. Be sure you can answer yes to each question.

CONTENT

- Does the first paragraph clearly introduce the topic of the explanation?
- Does the composition explain throughout, rather than just describing, persuading, or telling a story?
- Are statistics and quotations documented with at least who, when and where information?

DETAILS

- Are there sufficient details, facts, and examples to make the explanation clear?
- Do all the details, facts, and examples contribute to the explanation?
- Is every detail, fact or example as specific as possible?

ORGANIZATION

- Are details presented in a logical, easy-to-understand order?
- Are transitional words and phrases used where appropriate?

WORD CHOICE

- Is the language of the explanation appropriate for the audience?
- Is every word as clear and specific as possible? Do the words convey meaning, or are they words that no one ever uses?

SENTENCE VARIETY

- Are the lengths of the sentences varied and interesting?
- Are the sentence beginnings varied and interesting?
- Have related sentences been combined to improve the explanation?
- Have excessively long sentences been divided to make the explanation clear?

Winning Compositions

THIRD GRADE PROMPT

News for New Student: Your class has decided to write a booklet about school rules and routines so that new students can read it and show it to their parents. Write a paper describing the things about your school you think would be important for a new student to know.

One summer day the principal announced on the intercom that one class would be picked to write a book about school rules to the new students so they could show it to their parents. Our class was so excited. Later that day we were picked. The teacher exclaimed "For your homework bring 5 ideas each student."

The next day all the students did their homework. Research says that the more ideas you get you will learn more. "Great," exclaimed the teacher. Now let's pick the five ideas. The first fabulous idea was no fighting because if you fight you'll get suspended. Also you get hurt. If your friends with somebody and you fight your friendship will be broken into zillion pieces. It is very dangerous to fight. "That is a fabulous idea" recalled the teacher. "Let's put that idea on the booklet," exclaimed the teacher. Our second idea students. But of course, I recalled. The second idea is no pencil fighting. I picked that one because last month a little kid lost an eye. He lost it because he was playing pencil fight then the pencil broke and the piece hit his eye. His parents were so worried. "That's a good brainstormed," the teacher said. The third idea. The third idea was that no running in the halls. That's a good idea. "Why?" the teacher asked. because you fall and

trip for example. One time a little kid was running very fast he tripped and fell. He had, excuse me for the interuption but I have an anoucement to make will be leaving in an hour so we have to hurry up. Continue please. He tripped and fell and broke his knee. Luckily he had gone to the hospital in time. That idea is going in the book. Our fourth idea was that no food fight. For the janitors is thier worst nightmare. One kid got a hamburger on one ear and on the other, Fries in the nose. Also because you mess up somebody's clothes and if thier new you really going to get suspended.

Our fifth and last idea is no getting other peoples property. One kid was so sad because they had stolen thier trapper keeper. It had cost a lot of money. We had taken the ideas to our pincapal. He loved them.

The next day thier were ready to go with the students. I was glad we finished that booklet. I was real proud that day. It was so exiting. I went home happy and tired.

By Juan Carlos Lopez, Third Grade - 1995
Kika de la Garza Elementary School
Teacher: Leticia Moreno

Under constructive comments, the judge stated, "Great elaboration to use quotation marks with conversation! I enjoyed how you framed in a story for the introduction and conclusion. That's what makes the reader want to finish it!"

"You have proven each idea so well with details to back up your point. You have thought out your reasons well."

"I can tell you are a risk taker! Keep on trying to incorporate vocabulary you come across in reading!"

Under "Areas Needing Improvement," judges stated: "I think you mean 'exclaimed' instead of 'reclaimed.' Use another synonym. What other words could you use instead? As you practice writing, learn to use a thesaurus."

"You might indent for new paragraphs when you have a new rule or idea."

"Proofread your work. Did you leave out quotation marks in the third idea section? It made it somewhat unclear. Also, make sure all sentences are complete, unless they are quoted phrases."

THIRD GRADE PROMPT

A Hero. Heroes are people we respect and admire because they are special in some way. A hero may be a famous person or someone we know very well. Write a paper about someone you think is a hero and explain why this person is special.

Do you have a hero? My hero is my Mom. Why do you ask? Here's why.

My mom is always there when I need her most. Best of all she understands my problems. If I have trouble with boys, she understands because she went through the same stage. After all, she is a girl. You can say she helps me with "girl things." A lot of moms wait until their daughters are like 17 or 18 years of age to tell them things that they probably had to learn the hard way. My mom tells me those things so that I'll know what to expect.

I'm the oldest of three children. I'm the only girl with two younger brothers. One is five and the other one is one year old. You can see, she has to spend more time with my baby brother. A lot of mothers do spend more time with their youngest one. Not my mom. My mom loves us all the same and spends an equal amount of time with us. She is always fair. If she buys me a suit, my brothers get a suit too. Not many mothers are as fair as my mom.

Everytime I write a story for U.I.L. or just for fun, she always praises me. Once I made a lot of mistakes, but she kept telling me that I did my best and that's all that counts.

Thanks to my mom, I learned how to ride a two-wheeler at the age of four. Everyday, we would go to the Blackie Chesshire Park by my grandma's house. There I would take my bike and ride all around the park. I always had trouble turning, but she was there to guide me through it. My mom is a great instructor.

Now that you know who a hero is, have you found out who your hero is?

By Patricia Hernandez, Third Grade - 1994

Myrtle Cooper Elementary School, El Paso

Coach: Martha C. Guerra

The UIL judges stated, "Wonderful examples. Sounds like your mom really is special to you."

"Strong introduction and conclusion."

"Paper is very interesting."

Under "Areas Needing Improvement," judges stated, "Your

essay lacks organization. If you picked three reasons why your mom is your hero and explained each in a separate paragraph, your paper would ‘flow.’ Ex: One paragraph about fairness, one about praise, etc.”

“Watch verb tense—some present, some past.”

THIRD GRADE PROMPT

A Funny Person: Think of someone who often makes you laugh. What does this person say or do that makes you laugh? Write for your teacher a description of this special person and tell why you think he or she is funny.

A kid with white hair, brown eyes, and a funny-looking face always makes me laugh. Just looking at his face makes me laugh. He tells lots of jokes that are really funny. At lunch one day he started gobbling down his burger and when he was finished, he had ketchup on him from head to tow!

This funny person is also my best friend. When we play hockey he ends up like the puck, if you know what I mean. He practicly makes me swat him with the stick.

When we go in to play nintendo, he enjoys killing himself. For example, when we play Jet Moto, its a racing game, he always trys to crash, cool ways. he’s usally succseful even when he dosen’t try.

Most of all he acts goofy on the trampoline. He jumps off the trampoline with two flips in the air, then lands on the ground with a great thump. He always takes off crying after that, but I get a big kick out of it.

Yesterday you would never guess what he did. He put my dog in the toilet, then flushed it. The dog was too big to go down, but it scared him to death.

My friend started basketball the other day, big mistake. I have not seen him at one of his games, but I don’t think I want to.

I think my best friend is funny. You probably do to. Thats only half the stuff I’ve seen him do.

By Weston Miller, Third Grade — 1997
Detroit Elementary School, Detroit
Coach: Joy Lovelace

Judges commented on Weston's essay:

- Content very interesting
- Good transition
- Good use of details to support ideas
- Excellent paragraph form
- Humorous paper

They noted spelling to be an area needing improvement.

FOURTH GRADE PROMPT

Favorite Holidays: Most people enjoy holidays, and almost everybody has a favorite one. Write a letter to a friend or relative who lives in another town, describing your favorite holiday and what makes it special.

3/30/95

Dear Stacey Hubbard,

Did you know that Halloween is my favorite holiday? Many people like Halloween, but I love it. Halloween is my birthday. It is a nice feeling to know the entire country celebrates my birthday.

Many people go trick-or-treating on Halloween. It is a fun excuse to dress up and get candy. Some popular costumes are witches, mummies, ghosts, and princesses. There are hundreds of other costumes. To receive the candy you have to walk up to someone's house, ring the doorbell, and say trick-or-treat. Since you have so much candy many people bring orange plastic pumpkins to carry it in. Trick-or-treating is one popular activity to do on Halloween night.

Candy and gifts are often given to me on October 31st, because it is my birthday. Money is another present I often receive. On this special day I am allowed to invite friends over for a birthday party. We play games such as pin the tale on the black cat, pumpkin toss, and mummy wrap outside. Inside we usually feast on popcorn hands, traditional cake, and ghost lollipops. I enjoy giving out goody bags as well. We certainly do alot and receive a lot of goodies on my birthday.

Two traditions for my family on Halloween are carving pumpkins and watching scary movies. Some of the movies we watch are the Jason movies, the Freddy Cruger movies, and Amediville movies. All of them are frightening and gruesome. Nothing beats eating popcorn while watching these movies. On Halloween we also carve pumpkins. We carve a nose, eyes, and a mouth. We usually sit him on our mail box to greet trick-or-treaters. Those are two things my

family does on Halloween.

Now you know Halloween is my favorite holiday and why it is.

Your Friend,

By Maeghan Whitehead, Fourth Grade — 1995

Glen Rose Intermediate School, Coach: Shirley Craft

The judges said, “You are fortunate to have your birthday on Halloween. That gave you a unique point of view. Your introduction grabbed my attention enough that I wanted to finish reading your essay.

“You’ve included lots of details to support your reasons.

“I can tell you’ve brainstormed because you’ve organized well!”

Under “Areas Needing Improvement,” judges stated, “You described Halloween, but I’m wondering what is your favorite costume? What does it feel like to go trick-or-treating? Put in your own opinions to make it more interesting. Also what was your favorite present to receive in the third paragraph and why? Evaluate your feelings more. (You did that on the scary movies).”

“Work on a more elaborated conclusion. It’s the last thing a reader remembers. Could you use humor?”

“Also, similes and a larger vocabulary from your reading would help elaboration.”

FOURTH GRADE PROMPT

Favorite Holidays: Most people enjoy holidays, and almost everybody has a favorite one. Write a letter to a friend or relative who lives in another town, describing your favorite holiday and what makes it special.

February 20, 1995

Dear Katherine,

When I think of holidays the first one that pops into my mind is Thanksgiving. Its name gives a great definition of what it is all about. Thanksgiving means to gather together and give thanks for the wonderful feast that takes part in the Thanksgiving tradition. Although many people enjoy Christmas and other holidays Thanksgiving comes first in my book. The reasons in the next few paragraphs are not enough to describe what this special holiday truly means to me.

Living far away from my grandparents makes it impossible to

visit them and the serene country where they live. So now you should know how much it means to gather with our family and friends on this special event. Laughing and talking with my distant cousins gives me a chance to relax a bit. (I come from a family of eleven pesty little brothers and sisters).

Besides that the food that my grandma makes is terrific? Her apple pies make my mouth water when I see them. And her warm turkey makes me impatient to sink my teeth into its juicy skin! As I drink the ice cool punch I remember about the cold stream that runs beside our house.

Thanksgiving also has its own differences that make it better than other holidays. Christmas for example. Christmas makes me fill joyful until my little brothers and sisters ruin everything. One Christmas my little brother, Ralh, tore up all my presents and I never forgave him. However at Thanksgiving I dont have to worry about presents. Another example that makes me shudder comes in October. Yep? You guessed it, Halloween. During Halloween one year a dog came up and scared the wits out of me. At Thanksgiving though the only things that scare me are my brothers horrible faces!

That is why Thanksgiving is so special to me. Wether its tasting my grandma's hearty food or gathering with friends and family, I enjoy evey second of it? I bet you never thought that Thanksgiving could ever be this fun. Well, think again!

Your pen pal,
Ilyssa S. Lugo

P.S. What is your favorite holiday?

By Ilyssa Lugo, Fourth Grade - 1995

Jourdanton Elementary School, Coach: Jane S. Andrus

About Ilyssa's essay, judges stated, "Good contrast with Christmas and Halloween. Good use of descriptive words. Excellent organization. Good conclusion."

"You've done some evaluating and critical thinking that is evident in the first paragraph."

"I like your descriptive vocabulary that not all fourth graders would use ('serene country,' 'juicy skin' of the turkey, 'impatient to sink my teeth in')."

"It's unique that you contrasted Thanksgiving to other holidays. Since you used it in one paragraph, it is effective. If you had focused on it, this would nearly be a classificatory essay."

Under “Areas Needing Improvement,” judges stated, “Work on being specific—What do you talk about with your distant cousins? How exactly do you relax? You’ve listed well in the third paragraph, but why are these different from other meals?”

“Don’t identify yourself during competition. Come up with a fictional name.”

“Word usage—fill - feel, ‘. . . that takes in the Thanksgiving tradition.’ a little awkward.”

FOURTH GRADE PROMPT

Travel: Your class is creating a travel book about interesting places around the world. Write a paper about where you would like to visit if you could go anywhere in the world.

My class and I are creating a book on interesting places to visit. There are many exotic places in this book such as; Phoenix, Dallas, and the Amazon River. Here are the places to visit in this book.

The first place I would like to visit is Dallas, Texas. I would fly there because Dallas has the second biggest airport in the world. This airport is called D.F.W. Another reason I would like to go to Dallas is the Dallas Cowboys. The Dallas Cowboys are the best team in football. If you were in Dallas you could go see the John F. Kennedy Memorial. John F. Kennedy was a president of the United States, but he was shot and killed thirty-two years ago. You could learn a lot of history by going to the John F. Kennedy Memorial. The final reason why I would like to go to Dallas is the Reunion Tower. The Reunion Tower is a tall, slender hotel with a huge sphere shaped top. It is a magnificent sight to drive past it at night, because all the lights on the sphere start twinkling. These are the reasons why I would like to go to Dallas.

Another place I would love to visit is the Amazon River. This river, located in South America, is the second largest river in the world. The largest rainforest is located near the Amazon River. This is called the Amazon Rainforest. It would be very nice to go to the rainforest. There are probably millions of different plants and animals at the Amazon River. It would be wonderful to see them all. The thing I would like to do most at the Amazon River is go on a boatride. It would be wonderful. You could see all the fish darting about in the water. This is why I would love to go the Amazon River.

The third place I would love to go to is Phoenix, Arizona. Phoenix

is the hometown of the Phoenix Suns. The Suns are a very good basketball team. They rule the court. Phoenix is also very close to the Grand Canyon. It would be cool to ride down to the very bottom on a donkey. If you went to Phoenix this January you could see the Super Bowl. The Dallas Cowboys are playing the Pittsburg Steelers. The Cowboys are expected to win by thirteen points. The best thing about Phoenix is the weather. It is always sunny and you never get any snow like the northern states are now. You can play outside sports all year long without having to worry about the weather. That is why I would like to go to Phoenix.

There are many exotic places in the world, but these are the places I like the best.

By Andrew Solomon, Fourth Grade — 1994

Mt. Vernon Intermediate School, Coach: Sharon Harper

About the essay, judges wrote, “Paper is well organized, easy to follow. Student has knowledge of many things exceeding fourth grade level.”

“High level vocabulary. Good use of literary figures of speech—i.e., ‘They rule the court.’ ”

“This paper is an excellent example of UIL ready writing—has interest, organization, and correctness of style.”

Under “Areas Needing Improvement,” judges stated, “You could improve your essay by using more descriptive words, especially adjectives describing nouns.”

FOURTH GRADE PROMPT

Cafeteria Food: If you could change some things about the food in your school cafeteria, what things would you change? Write a letter to your principal explaining what you would change and why these changes would be good.

Dear Miss Line,

I normally don't eat cafeteria food, but I have a number of close friends who do. They quite frequently complain about a variety of changes that should be made, so, since nothing will be any different if we complain, I thought that we could express our feelings in a letter to you.

The first change that my aquantances and I feel should be made is we should have our own cafeteria, instead of using the same food as the Jr. High. Don't you agree that it would be quite pleasant if we

had our own cafeteria to make our own food? (Yes, I know that my first strategy is quite costly, but there is that good old 1-800-MAKE-MONEY hotline that's waiting for your call!)

Next, I personally believe that we should have a variety of mouth-watering dishes, instead of frequently repeating the same menu over and over. A good example of this is Fridays. Every Friday we have hamburgers, milk, french fries, and salad, with an additional slice of applesauce cake or serving of fruit salad for desert. Not that we don't like that specific menu, (no offense please) but it does get quite dull after a few weeks.

Our third request of change of the cafeteria food is that it should be baked to perfection. Which, in our opinions, means no more burnt pizza, no more cold raviolies, and no more brown lettuce in the salads (ect., ect.). It certainly would be a major improvement in our school.

We also think that we shouldn't use styrofoam trays. We only use them every so often, which is terrific, but when we do use them, we throw them all away. Think about it! It takes over 100 years for styrofoam to break down into the earth. When our great-grandchildren are alive, those styrofoam trays that were thrown away years ago will still remain there in the ground.

Our next change is that all of the extra food that we don't eat is thrown away. My mother always says, "There are a lot of people out there who would be grateful to have food today." I think there may be a better way of using up all of food, such as giving it to homeless shelters. Then at least all of the extra food would go to good use.

Another idea is that maybe we should take some poles to see what kinds of food that kids like to devour. I know for sure that some kids can't stand the thought of some of the school foods, such as their pizza, raviolies, and taco boats. A lot more kids would be eating cafeteria food if the school served what they like. I must admit that I would probably eat in the cafeteria a whole lot more if the served my favorite lunches.

By Katie Janke • Fourth Grade — 1997

Allyn Finch Middle School • Coach: Mrs. Chumley

Judges pointed out Katie's interesting use of vocabulary. "Good strategy to get your audience to agree with your position. I like your use of humor (1-800-MAKE MONEY). You elaborated on your ideas and offered suggestions/solutions to the problems you cited."

A second judge remarked, “This is a wonderful letter. I couldn’t wait to read your next idea. Your use of language kept my attention throughout the entire letter. Organization skills are fantastic. Thanks for such an outstanding essay.” And, the third judge made similar positive comments.

Judges suggested for improvement that Katie shorten some sentences and reword them to use fewer words. For example: “A good example of this is Fridays” could have been written “Friday is a good example.”

FIFTH GRADE PROMPT

Being a Good Neighbor: Your class has been studying American cities and towns and the problems neighborhoods face in today’s society. Your group’s discussion topic was “the importance of being a good neighbor.” Write a report that summarizes your group’s opinions for the class.

Why is it important to be a good neighbor? My class had many ideas about this subject. In this changing society it’s hard to tell who is good and who is bad. That is why we should do what we can to help one another. That is why it is important to be a good neighbor.

My class feels there are several other reasons why it is important to be a good neighbor. One reason my class thought that it was important to be a good neighbor was because older people might feel safer, perhaps, in an accident. They also might feel better when you spent time with them. They might feel more important if you were a good neighbor. You could do some chores for them to help them. But helping the elderly neighbors is just one reason to be a good neighbor. The handicapped citizens also need good neighbors. They too need to feel needed and important. It is important to be a good neighbor to them and help them out as much as possible so they won’t injure themselves. Another time to be a good neighbor would be when a new family moves in. You can help them to adjust to a new place. And if they have kids, you could babysit. It would be especially important to be a good neighbor in order for them to feel secure. But the most important reason, in my class’ opinion, to be a good neighbor is because you should help those around you feel more secure. In an ever changing world especially today, we need to reassure them so that they feel secure and aren’t frightened. Today especially, it is important to be a good neighbor.

Why do you think it is important to be a good neighbor? My

class thought these were the most important. Perhaps you can think of more. Decide for yourself which are most important. But remember, we must partner today for a better tomorrow.

By Megan Button, Fifth Grade - 1995

Jourdanton Elementary School, Coach: Patrick Button

The judges said the essay had a strong introduction and conclusion. They also cautioned Megan to avoid repetition.

“(You stated that it is) ‘important to be a good neighbor’ three times in the last two paragraphs. Try to think of another way to state this concept, such as ‘neighborly people are essential. . .’”

Finally, judges advised Megan to organize thoughts into separate paragraphs.

FIFTH GRADE PROMPT

My School: Your teacher has arranged for you and your classmates to be pen pals with students in a school located in another state. The out-of-state students have expressed an interest in knowing what is good about your school. Write a letter to your pen pal explaining what you like about your school.

Dear Pen Pal,

Everyone likes something about their school. I like my school in many ways. I like the teachers, the feild trips, the classrooms, and I like lunch and recess.

One reason I think you would like my school is the teachers. All of the teachers are nice and always teach me something new each day. They are very strict if our behavior and conduct is *awful!* They are also very catious of our grades. If our grades get out of hand they send out defishensy slips. They always want us to listen and behave.

Another reason is all the wonderful feild trips. Our school goes to parks, museums and old historical buildings. The feild trips are always fun and exciting. It is exzacly like school because we have to behave. Do we always have to obey and behave we all wonder? We always do so we will not get in humongus trouble while visiting, driving to it or back to old boring school.

The classrooms are terrific! There is always a new exciting bulletin board up. There are games, toys and blocks on the shelves. We have decorations on the walls. There are different designs on the

walls depending on the subject that teacher teaches. All classrooms have exciting bulletin boards, decorations and designs. The classrooms are the best!

The best thing is lunch and recess. At lunch we get to eat and fill our starving little or big stomachs. After a bunch of classes we are practically starving to death! At recess we all hope the weather is warm so we can play on dry, wonderful and exciting playground. When the weather is wet and cold we have to stay in the classrooms. How BORING! We have to miss playing on the playground because of the weather. Everybody hates that and we know it.

There are some advantages about some school and some have disadvantages, too. I like my school in many different and exciting ways. You like your school in some ways hopefully and you hate your school too sometimes. School is not great and hopefully everyone agrees with me. Maybe even some parents agree with me too.

Your pen pal

By Kimberley Caston, Fifth Grade — 1995

East Chambers Elementary School, Coach: Susan Henry

Constructive judges' comments: "Well organized. You focused well on your topic. Transition from one paragraph to another is smooth."

Under "Areas Needing Improvement," judges stated: "Your honesty is appreciated. However, since the paper was to be about what you like about your school, the negative statements are distracters."

FIFTH GRADE PROMPT

Vending Machines: Your school principal is thinking about placing candy and Coke machines in the school cafeteria. Write a letter to the school principal stating why this is a good idea or why this is not a good idea.

Dear principal,

Yesterday morning, while I was going to leave the attendance, I overheard some teachers studying the announcements that you were going to state on the intercome. I knew I shouldn't have been listening to their conversation, so I was just about to leave when it caught my ear. They said something about kids voting whether to have or to not have vending machines. That exact day after school I went running home from school and wrote this to tell you what I pondered about.

“Forget about the vote,” I thought. My first reason is that it will make kids work better. For example, last year we had a student that everybody thought he was dense because he would always fail. But one day, he secretly snuck into the teacher’s lounge and was able to sneak out a candy bar. Just when he had finished it, class began. The first five questions he rapidly swayed his arm around in the air and was chosen on and got them all right. Research clearly shows that people of all ages work better if they’ve eaten candy.

Another reason I had in mind is that you will get a profit of it off of the students that could really help our school. Two weeks ago in *Red Book Magazine* I read, “Vending machines are helping schools around the world.” I was flabbergasted so I kept on reading to myself, “they’ve raised money to buy very needed equipment.” That’s when I thought about our school. We need to make well needed repairs and purchase new equipment. All our equipment has been used daily for what seems by the looks of things centuries. New books and school supplies are a need because 75 percent of the pages are torn or written on.

My last, but not least, reason is that children hate eating school lunches. There is a solution to that, just don’t eat, but if you don’t eat you are going to be starving for the rest of the day. With vending machines that provide succulent snacks children chant and look what’s behind plate number one. Children could stroll to lunch feeling nonchalant about what’s for lunch, if they have money in their pockets.

Well, I’ve run out of reasons, so please take into suggestion what I said. I hope it’s enough to convince you. Don’t let children have to suffer any longer. Good bye.

Sincerely,

Your favorite student

By Victor Villarreal, Fifth Grade — 1995
Kika d la Garza Elementary School
Coach: Leticia Moreno

Constructive comments from judges were:

“Great sense of humor!”

“Advanced vocabulary.”

“Writing with a distinctive voice.”

“Examples are very convincing.”

“Interesting and unusual elaboration.”

Under “Areas Needing Improvement,” judges stated,

“Conclusion lacks strength. Avoid beginning a paragraph with ‘well,’ especially in a letter written to your principal.”

Also, “Watch spelling.”

FIFTH GRADE PROMPT

Technology in Schools: A wide range of technology is now available for home computer users. Some schools, however, have not implemented technology at the same rate as it has been introduced to the general public, mainly because of limited funds. Write a letter to the superintendent of your school district explaining why technology should receive funding priority at your campus.

April 14, 1997

Dear Mr. Gray,

Many People say that this new technology business will just be a bus load of trouble. “Why mess with all of that expensive equipment when books and pens and paper used to be just fine?” The reason that many places have computers now is because they are a big help. “Even my dry cleaners are computerized now”, say many people.

When computers first came out, they were slow and big and highly expensive. Now, people have laptop computers that they can carry around in a briefcase. Many other schools have computers and when you buy enough for a whole computer lab or school you get discounts on all of the computers.

With computers, you can get learning games for every subject. Many classrooms have “computer time” where children can get on the computer and play games for fun as a reward or for extra help on skills they’re having trouble in. Besides all of those extra games, some computers come with an encyclopedia, dictionary, and other refrence books. Then, you can find things quicker and easier. Having that could cut down on the cost of having so many big books that take up space and cost a lot of money.

Probably the biggest reason for technology yet, is the coming of the Internet and America On Line. With those systems, you can find anything and everything you would need to know about something. You can find anything from the list of the best doctors in the world to how to build a bird house out of safety pins!

With technology, children can connect with the world. Instead of reading about Mount Everest or the children of Tahiti in

their social studies books, they can actually meet the person who scaled Mount Everest and meet with a little girl of Tahiti by writing letters through e-mail or seeing a moving picture of these people who live on the other side of the earth— more than 2,000 miles away. Technology is probably the best thing that ever happened to us.

By Lauren Fitte, Fifth Grade — 1997

Sims Intermediate School, Mexia

Coaches: Ann Brown and Carol A. Dawley

Lauren’s essay was “very knowledgeable and well organized,” according to the consensus of the judges. “Your letter was very interesting. You used many good examples to support your ideas. And, your paper was informative. You used good sentence variety.”

“Excellent ideas. You sound like a reporter. Keep writing.”

SIXTH GRADE PROMPT

Skills for Careers: Your school will be hosting a Jobs Fair to help students learn about career opportunities. Although some types of work require special training, some skills are important no matter what career you choose. You have been assigned to write a paper about skills you feel are important to be successful at work.

Jobs are very important! If people didn’t have jobs there would be no way to pay bills or care for your families. Being a good worker takes a lot of practice, but if you have good skills you won’t have to worry about anything. Some skills that might come in handy are being good with people, being polite, knowing how to handle the job, and having fun.

First, before you take any job, you should be good with people. For example, if you work at a fast food place and somebody complains about getting tomatoes and not wanting them you shouldn’t bite their heads off. Just say “I’m sorry, I’ll fix it for you.” Being a teacher should mean that you like kids, not so you can give them lots of homework and make their lives miserable. In any job you want to take you should be good with other people.

Next you should always be polite. Say “ma’am” or “sir” when you are speaking, and always say “please” and “thank you.” When you’re a secretary for Sears, or a big place like that, don’t call and say, “You better send the money right now!” Say “We were wondering if we could talk about your bill, maybe we could figure something out.”

Always be polite.

Knowing how to handle the job is very important. Making mistakes all the time could be very hard on you if you were wanting a promotion. Try to get things right when first told to you. (You don't have to do everything perfect, no one can do that, but try not to make the same mistakes over and over again.) The less errors you make the better chance you've got for that promotion next month. Knowing how to handle the job comes in handy.

Liking your job is the most important thing of all. When you wake up in the morning and are mopeing around while getting ready is not a very good sign. Your job should make you JUMP out of bed and wake up all perky! Your job being torture for your customers. (Your job should be a pleasure!)

Being good with people, being polite, knowing how to handle the job, and having fun doing your work are just some of the things that help you find jobs. If you follow some of this advice finding a job that suits you should be a sinch, Besides doing your job should make the customers, and you happy. (Who knows, the customers might tell your boss how good you are and you might be getting more money on your next pay check.)

By Beth Bullock, Sixth Grade - 1995

Panhandle Junior High School • Coach: Venita Gray

About the essay, judges stated, "Very well organized and very well written. To boot—it was interesting too! Keep up the good work!"

Also, "Ideas expressed well."

Under "Areas Needing Improvement," judges stated, "less errors' should be 'fewer errors.' "

" 'You don't have to do everything perfect, no one can do that, but . . .' is a comma splice."

"It could be written, 'You don't have to do everything perfectly. No one can do that, but . . .' "

SIXTH GRADE PROMPT

Being a Good Neighbor: Your class has been studying American cities and towns, and the problems neighborhoods face in today's society. Your group's discussion topic was "the importance of being a good neighbor." Write a report that summarizes your group's opinions for the class.

Our country is facing very serious problems. Crime has become a part of people’s everyday lifestyle. Our country is living in fear.

Being a good neighbor is probably the most important step to having safe neighborhoods and cities.

For one example, say a suspicious person was seen outside your house while you were away on vacation. If a neighbor saw that person, but did nothing, your house could have been robbed. Good neighbors always take action.

Also, a big step to solving crime is to set a good example for younger children. Neighbors *must* get along with each other. Simple disputes can become serious crimes. Children follow adult’s examples.

A big step to being a good neighbor is to have respect for your neighbor’s property. Vandalism is illegal and very rude. Treat other’s the way you would like to be treated.

Inner-city neighborhoods face the biggest problems of all. Every day and night they come face to face with violence and danger. Neighbors must look out for one another all the time. Community crime watches can be started to protect each other from violence. Neighbors can enforce strict curfews for children under the age of 18.

How can it be done? Simple! Everyone has a kind heart. Show it! Neighbor helping neighbor, friend helping friend. All over the world people are finding ways to fight against crime.

By Laren Shaw, Sixth Grade — 1995

Lago Vista Middle School, Coach: Wanda England

About Laren’s essay, judges stated, “I love your bullet points! ‘...take action...set a good example.’ Good word choice and phrasing.”

“Good ideas, flows well, great introduction—beginning sentence is excellent.”

“Clear, concise closing.”

“I felt the emotion in your paper; high interest—Congratulations!”

Under “Areas Needing Improvement,” judges stated, “Carefully add a little more elaboration. Give more specific examples.”

INVITATIONAL PROMPTS

The prompt and composition which follow are from an invitational contest. While the UIL office provides sample

prompts, invitational meets may write and use their own. Sample prompts are provided elsewhere in the manual for those who would like to compose prompts for invitational meets or for student practice.

SIXTH GRADE PROMPT

My Party: You are planning a party. If you could invite only three people, living or dead, real or fictitious, who would you invite? Why? What would you do at your party? (*Absent from this prompt is a reference to the audience. The student chooses to write to the general public in the form of a story.*)

I've finally set the date for my fabulous dinner party. Only the finest are coming, and only the finest will be eaten. This will be the best dinner party ever, it will go down in history!

I started off with Reba McEntire. I invited her because she's my favorite singer. So, I called her up one evening to invite her. She said she'd be honored! It was a hard choice but finally I chose Troy Aikman. I decided on him because he is my favorite football player, and he plays for my favorite team, the Dallas Cowboys. Last but not certainly not least, Mr. Walt Disney. I picked him because, number one, I love the theme park he's created. Number two, I admire him a lot because when he was little, his dad didn't let him have any toys. Then he grew up to be a famous theme park creator. That's neat! They all accepted fervently.

Oh no! What are we going to have for dinner! I had a lot of planning to do. I decided to start with dinner. We would start with appetizers. Definitely stuffed, breaded, cheesy jalopenos. We would move on to the salad next. A toss salad with shredded ham and grated cheese. Then would come the most important part, the main course. After a long time of thinking and debating, I chose chicken ala King. Elegant, yet tasty. The side dishes to go with the main dish would be crab salad, a cornbread biscuit stuffed with homemade cheese sauce, and a baked potato with the fixin's. We would have fresh spring water with crushed ice to drink. Then, after we were all stuffed we would have dessert. It was a tough decision, but I finally rested on a chocolate moose with coconut sprinkles. That would complete dinner, but there's still more fun to come?

We would all settle in the living room for games and coffee and discussion. We would play charades first for a little while and then settle down to talk and have coffee and pastries. We would talk

about the music industry, and what Reba’s new Album was going to be called. Then, the conversation would switch and turn over to sports. Maybe what the new Dallas Cowboy uniforms would look like. Then Mr. Walt Disney would start talking about the new rides at Disney Land, and Disney World, and what Walt (Mr. Walt Disney) thought about them. Whether they were exciting and dangerous, or were they boring and slow. The evening would start coming to a close.

Pretty soon, it would be 10:30 p.m. and everything would be winding down. Reba would have an early flight for an out-of-town concert the next day. Troy would have a game to play the next day. Mr. Disney would be having problems with some of his employees, so he would have to go back to California that night. Well, what can I say, it would be a complete and wonderful success. I would have to have another one sometime.

by Kellie Hayman • Sixth Grade - 1995
Flores Elementary School • Coach: Molly Turner

Judges constructive comments:

“Great vocabulary!”

“Nice introduction.”

“Transition and adherence to tense are notable.”

“Excellent elaboration on the food items you would serve.”

Under “Areas Needing Improvement,” judges stated, “Separate into three paragraphs the discussion of the three people you would choose and the reasons for your choices.”

SIXTH GRADE PROMPT

News for New Students: Your class has decided to write a booklet about school rules and routines so that new students can read it and show it to their parents. Write a paper describing the things about your school you think would be important for a new student to know.

Getting to be the one to welcome you all to Bradshaw Jr. High School is truly an honor! Are there any butterflies jumping around inside yall’s stomachs like Mexican jumping beans? Well, if there are absolutely *do not* let them bother you because here at Bradshaw you are offered outstanding instructors (teachers), wonderful educational supplies and equipment (which all add to your learning experience), and last but certainly not least everyone is guaranteed a safe environment in which to be educated. So please allow me to say

again Welcome to Bradshaw Jr. High School!

As I stated earlier Bradshaw principals and staff have always been careful when it came to choosing high quality teachers. As a matter of fact in last month's Texas Monthly Bradshaw's teachers were rated #1 in this region of Texas. When a new student or an old student walks into the doors of this school it is as if all of the teachers make some sort of vow to make that child's interest and love for school build up and up and up. Our teachers all offer love and promise to even the most underprivileged child. Sometimes an adolescent may find that he or she is above their grade in a certain subject. If this may come true with a student then they are offered the chance to be placed with another teacher to continue their education on another level. Many times a student will find that they are behind. The teachers here at Bradshaw are all available and willing to stay after school to help by tutoring the student on the one to one basis.

Everyone knows how our world is moving on to higher technology. Bradshaw Jr. High School offers this high tech equipment to all students. In the science department there are telescopes and microscopes. Both of these instruments are frequently used in class but also are available for the students in their own spare time. In all of the English rooms there are at least 3 computers full of typing games and also areas for printing papers. In both of the 6th grade reading rooms you can find 3 huge bookshelves stocked with books. Many people are amazed at how in Bradshaw's Social Studies rooms there are at least 3 to 5 computers mainly used for the pupils to "surfe" the internet and meet people from other countries and cultures. All of our supplies and equipment, you must agree, certainly add to the learning experience.

Many parents often worry about their child's safety when they are not with them. Bradshaw's principal, Mr. Dunagon, and assistant principal, Mrs. Lloyd, are both highly committed when it comes to preparing a safe environment for the pupils to learn. All of Bradshaw's rules are always enforced under the no tolerance policy. All violators are and will be punished. Five of the main punishing systems are called ASP, AEP, Boot camp, after school detention, and as well as lunch detention. Since teachers and principals do not have eyes in the back of their heads cameras were installed just last year. To make sure that the students stay out of trouble the doors to Bradshaw Jr. High are *not* locked after school but left open until 7:00 p.m. This gives all of the students the opportunity to work on their homework in the rooms, work on the many computers, practice with the equipment

in the science labs, or go to the gym to play games. To make sure that things run smoothly during this time teachers take turns watching out for trouble. This program and all of the punishing systems help keep kids out of trouble but also punish them for doing wrong.

As you can see Bradshaw Jr. High School is a perfect example of hard work and accomplishment. I hope that your time here at Bradshaw proves to offer outstanding instructors, wonderful educational supplies and equipment, and also a safe environment for all students. Before I rap this up I would just like to remind ya'll, Go Bradshaw Bobcats!

By Brooke Williams, Sixth Grade—1997

Sweeny Junior High, Sweeny, Coach: Linda Lincecum

The UIL encourages judges to write prolific comments on all of the papers. The judge for Brooke's merely said, "Well organized." Comments concerning the introductory sentence could have been constructive had they been followed by statements concerning the great development of this paper, the writer's use of specific and pertinent examples, and the overall flow of sentence structure through the use of effective transition.

SEVENTH GRADE PROMPT

American Forces Abroad: In recent years, American military forces have served in trouble spots on several continents. Some people believe that U.S. forces should be used only when a threat to our national security exists. Others argue that as a world power, we have a responsibility to nations in need. Write a letter to President Clinton explaining when you believe the use of U.S. forces in foreign countries is appropriate.

Dear Mr. President:

The United States has always aided other countries who have been involved in disputes. We have supplied numerous troops to countries who could never return that favor to us. The American people have a right to be guaranteed protection at all times. The Constitution states it in that manner. We have no obligation to serve and protect any country but our own. If other countries have gotten themselves into trouble, why should we bail them out?

Under a liberated government, we, the United States, have dispatched soldiers into a pool of quicksand. Our soldiers have been killed and their families have wept. We should not be doing this? Troops should only be sent into battle when the well-being of Americans hangs in the balance. Other countries should be able to fend for themselves, or they shouldn't be countries at all. We cannot try, nor can we believe, that we can help everyone who is not living on easy street. The government should be conjuring up ways to fight disease or feed the homeless, not pondering the next place we can transport military forces.

In recent years, hundreds, maybe thousands of soldiers have been killed in battles overseas. We have sent troops to Somalia, Haiti, and Kuwait in the past five years. Certainly our national security had not been threatened, but the economy was in danger.

The economy is an important part of life in almost any country, but is it worth sending our soldiers blindfolded through a mine field. Europe's economy would have been threatened by the invasion of Kuwait, but how many soldiers did they send to help? None. The fact is, an economy slow down may have and may help the United States in the future. Americans have been driving in the fast lane for years, and we have been successful, but maybe it's time we took the back roads. We could then return to the moral values that have been missing from the United States for almost half a century.

America has always been the country with heart. We help other countries in their times of need, and we lend a helping hand whenever possible. Is it not the time that we need focus our attention on us for a change. A recession lies in our future and a decrease in the national debt would sure come as a breath of fresh air, or what passes for fresh air nowadays. While the cameras were focusing on the uprising in Haiti, or the Iraqi invasion, America was going nowhere fast. In fact, we still are, and until we can concentrate on America, we'll be on the losing end of the battle where there is no hope for aid from the United States. With the increasing threat of a nuclear war, our troops need to be in the United States, where they belong. We cannot afford to lose more troops in meteoric battles with third-world countries. We must put America first!

The United States has more crime than any other country in the world today. Our troops need to be patrolling America's streets, not the borders in the Middle East. Our country's security seems much more important than that of Somalia's. The United States will never

even accomplish the placement of a stop sign if we are doing battle overseas. If things continue at this present rate, America's future will be bleak and dismal. We cannot see that if we don't open our eyes.

Sincerely,

Hope For America

By Derek Dansb, Seventh Grade - 1995

Bowie Junior High School, Coach: Carmen Bratcher

Judges' constructive comments:

Great understanding of the topic; strong supporting details and sound logic

Super vocabulary; scholarly, knowledgeable tone

Clear opinion, emotional

Good sentence structure. Strong introduction

Under "Areas Needing Improvement," judges stated, "Weak conclusion —seemed to branch off onto another tangent without completing the discussion of it; built up to an extremely emotional level without concluding at a rational level. A few spelling errors."

SEVENTH GRADE PROMPT

Violent Crime: Violent crime continues to increase in American cities, and the mayors of several large cities recently met to discuss possible solutions to the problem. The mayors agreed that in addition to what they could do for their cities, they wanted President Clinton and members of Congress to pass tougher crime laws. Write a letter to the president describing the steps you think the government could take to fight crime in the United States.

Dear President Clinton,

After carefully considering the topic, I have made my conclusions on what steps I think the government could take to fight crime in the United States. The steps I have brainstormed are a harder war on drugs, more time spent on the most violent crimes, and help for troubled youths that are "would-be" criminals.

Recently, a family member was on a jury for a crime in which drugs were involved. The suspect had hurt his child and wife because he was "high" on cocaine. I believe that this could have been prevented if there was a harder war on drugs. More drug testing on employees of companies and in schools is just one way we can fight

drug abuse. If drugs can make someone hurt his own family, if drugs can make someone take a gun and shoot a perfect stranger, we don't need them. In fact, studies show that a large percentage of crimes are made when someone is under the influence of illegal substances.

Much of the time of the legal system is spent on trials over white-collar crime. I believe that there should be more time spent on the most violent crimes, so we can have dangerous people behind bars. Yes, I agree that crimes such as fraud for an example, should be dealt with, but many dangerous criminals are on the street because there is no time for them. One newspaper article stated that sometimes law officials have to ignore a certain crime because they are busy with a case on a less serious one. I believe this should not continue to happen. I don't think that I would be afraid of someone who did not pay child support, but I would be afraid of a murderer.

A chapter in a criminal justice textbook told the story of a teenage boy that burned his father to death because he wouldn't let the boy marry his girlfriend. As you can see, President Clinton, this boy needed help. Help that no one gave him. I strongly feel that youths that are showing signs of trouble should be counseled before it's too late. Family members of the boy that I referred to earlier said that he was acting strange and getting into trouble at school before he killed his father. Maybe if his family had took those things as warning signs, the boy's father would be alive today.

These are the steps that I believe the government could take to fight crime in the United States. I hope that you, President Clinton, and the Congress will consider what I have proposed.

Sincerely,

A concerned citizen

By Erin Raley, Seventh Grade – 1994

Kerens Middle School , Coach: Linda Foster

Judges' constructive comments included:

“Analytical; supported with details and examples.”

“Advanced sentence structure.”

“Advanced word choices —”conclusion prevented,”
“brainstormed.”

“Logical thinking.”

“Easy to follow and understand; well organized.”

“Keeps interest throughout paper.”

“Logical thinking and use of detail.”

Under “Areas Needing Improvement,” judges stated,

“Develop your ideas more in depth. Work on spelling — ‘recentally.’ Watch verb tense (ex: had took).”

“Try to be more imaginative. You seemed to be too controlled.”

SEVENTH GRADE PROMPT

No Pass, No Play”: The Texas “no pass, no-play” rule, which makes students who fail any class ineligible for extracurricular activities for six weeks, has been in effect for ten years. Many people feel it has been successful because it requires students to concentrate on academic achievement. Others fear that the current penalty for failing may discourage students who struggle to pass but who occasionally make a failing six-weeks grade. Write a letter to the governor or to your Texas legislator expressing your opinion of the “no-pass, no-play” rule.

Dear Sir:

The more I think about it, the more I really like the rule of making students ineligible for extracurricular activities for six weeks if they fail a class in school.

First of all, I think this rule is fair for academic achievement reasons. Many students don’t want to fail so they can still be in sports, theatre arts, music, homemaking, or whatever extracurricular activity they may be in. It’s important for students to make the best grades they can, and to try as hard as possible.

This rule and responsibility go hand-in-hand. Students have got to learn that academics come first; everything else is second. Keeping their grades up while still being in extracurricular activities teaches students responsibility. This rule also relates to when students are out of school and have a family. Most parents have a job *plus* raising a family. That’s a lot of work and responsibility! If they aren’t able to do their job, and do it right, they are going to lose their job! That’s exactly how it is for teenagers in their junior-high and high-school years of schooling. They don’t keep their grades up, they lose privileges.

As for students who struggle to pass, I think this rule motivates them. If they really want to be in an extracurricular activity, they will try their best, go in for tutoring from their teacher, and most of all, be willing to learn. Many students who fail fail only because they either do not try or do not care. If students want to be in an extracurricular

activity badly enough, they will do anything they can to pass. Students' grades during their junior high and high school years have a great impact on their college education in the future. That's why students' grades when they are younger are so vitally important.

I've always believed that students who do a good job or have done something to make someone else proud, should be rewarded. I don't mean bribery—rewards for achievement and bribery are two totally different things. Students who try hard, who *want* to learn, should be rewarded. If students can prove they are responsible and mature enough to handle it, they should be granted extracurricular activities. It's setting a goal, really. For instance, a student wants badly to be able to play basketball. But there's one problem. This student isn't passing a class. So, during the next six weeks, he or she works very hard, doing extra credit, getting tutoring, and basically doing everything possible to try to bring up that failing grade to a passing one. By the time the next grading term period rolls around, this student has worked hard enough to bring this failing grade up to a B+. This hard-working and motivated student is now able to play basketball and has reached his goal! To me, goals are a very important part of life, because it means trying to do better, to succeed more, and to live up to the potential you have.

Extracurricular activities should make students want to learn. Who says learning shouldn't be fun? Extracurricular activities are fun—while still learning. It should be exciting to learn more and excel in life. Extracurricular activities make students concentrate more on their studies. They are a fun way of learning and make school more enjoyable.

In conclusion, I think the Texas "No Pass, No Play" rule is a good one. It's fair to both the students and teachers, teaches responsibility and motivation to students, and sets goals for students. That's why I applaud the Texas government and legislature for coming up with this rule.

By Kelly Garner, Seventh Grade — 1995
Snyder Junior High School, Coach: Elaine Whitfill

Judges' constructive comments:

"Strong points made effectively."

"Convincing letter. I like how you compare the responsibilities of teenagers and their schoolwork to adults and their jobs and families."

"A variety of supporting ideas well presented."

“Global issues of goal-setting, accepting responsibility, vocational competencies, education and even parenting skills addressed.”

“Excellent concluding paragraph. You’ve summed up the letter and ended on a very positive note. I like that!

“Good job!”

“Logical and reasonable.”

“Tone displays writer’s enthusiasm and belief in the topic.”

Under “Areas Needing Improvement,” judges stated, “Your opening paragraph is just one long sentence. I wasn’t sure about the second paragraph. I think you could have left it out and still had a great letter. Be sure to proofread to catch spelling errors and sentence fragments.”

SEVENTH GRADE PROMPT

Harassment: What is harassment? Write a paper for your classmates explaining this concept, describing how you would react if you were harassed.

Harassment is a dark, depressing word. Like a nightmare come true. It means a memory or a feeling your heart needs to forget, but can’t. It is a serious topic that effects many innocent people in our world today.

You can describe harassment in many ways. When somebody is always putting you down and making you feel bad about yourself, your being harassed. If your being pushed into things you insisted that you didn’t want to do, again that’s another type of harassment. On many occasions people harass others by talking about their bodies and making those people feel uncomfortable. Although these are harassment cases, they are small compared to some. One of the most outrageous and well-known cases of harassment is when the victim is touched in places where he or she is very sensitive about. In fact, not too long ago there was a harassment article in the “Time” magazine. It was about a woman being harassed by her ex-boyfriend. It was really serious. She even took it all the way to court, which was right in her situation. There are other magazines like “Seventeen,” which is especially good for teens, and it gives advice on harassment cases. It can become very helpful and relieving.

Now if I just happened to get in a harassment situation, I’d handle it so well, nobody would lay one glance, mocking word, or hand on me again. I would react in a rather civilized way. At first I would

collect advice from magazines or trusted friends. If it was like mental harassment, I'd confront that person. I'd lecture them. I'd give them a piece of my mind. If they still didn't stop, I'd get help from teachers, parents, and other adults. If it was to go any further, I'd simply have to take drastic measures. Probably going to the school board, or even court, would be a step. As long as that individual would leave me alone. On the other hand, if it was really serious from the beginning, I'd handle it to where that person would never do it to anybody else. In other words, I'd probably end up going to court.

I hope nothing very drastic ever happens to me. Yet, there are so many people out there today experiencing this feeling of lost hope, and disgust. Still, there are googols of people out there who are willing to help stop harassment. They are willing to stop this cruelty and make our earth a more loving place to live. So fellow classmates, harassment is an uncivilized, humiliating manner. Don't let anyone get away with it. Stop and think. What does it mean to you? What if you were being harassed? What would you do?

By Britny Lehmborg, Seventh Grade – 1997

Mason Junior High School, Mason

Coach: Vickie McQueen

The judges said "good" to all of the following: introduction, explanation of topic, and examples. They noted that Britny might make shorter paragraphs and back up statistics with appropriate documentation.

EIGHTH GRADE PROMPT

Sportsmanship: At a recent basketball game, an incident occurred which led to three students from your school being called "bad sports." Write an essay which details the behaviors which would best convey good sportsmanship for the students in your school.

When playing any type of sport, both the fans and the players can get a little upset at times. Some people are able to control their emotions while others aren't. Those who can't control their emotions are sometimes labeled as "bad sports." If you are a "bad sport" who wants to know how to become a "good sport," there are many different ways to show good sportsmanship.

One way to show good sportsmanship is by being both a good winner and loser. For example, if you lose a basketball game, don't

make excuses or refuse to shake the other team's hands. Tell the other team they played a good game. Although you may be upset, don't try to place blame on someone else. As a fan, don't mouth off to other fans, whether they're for the opposing team or not. Tell one of the other team's fans that their team played a good game. If you are on the winning side of things, don't rub it in the other team's faces. Tell them they played a good game. Don't brag about winning in front of them. As a fan, be supportive of your team, but don't go on and on about them in front of the other team. Don't be a sore winner or loser.

Another way to show good sportsmanship is by being able to encourage the team. As a player, yell for your teammates, not against the other team. If someone makes a mistake, don't criticize them. Tell them that it's okay and they'll do better next time. They already know they messed up! Let the coach be the coach; you are a player. As a fan, don't yell against the players. Instead of finding the bad things that happen, concentrate on the team's good points, and say, "Nice shot," or, "Way to go!" Encouraging words can really pick up a team and get them into high gear.

As a player, one way to show good sportsmanship is by helping a player up if he or she has fallen. For example, if you foul someone in a basketball game and knock them down, say, "I'm sorry," and help them up. If you do this, other players will respect you and know you didn't intentionally try to hurt them. I know I appreciate it if someone helps me up after they knocked me down.

You can also demonstrate good sportsmanship as a fan by supporting your school's team, even if they are having a losing season. If everyone stops coming to their games or makes fun of how they play, the team's level of self confidence will drop. A team without supportive fans probably won't play as well as a team with fans that support them. A cheer from the crowd can help a team want to play to their best ability. When a team feels the crowd is backing them and supporting them 100%, they have confidence in themselves. Our team plays better when we know our fans are supporting us. This is why it shows good sportsmanship for you to be a supportive fan instead of a fan who makes fun of his or her school's team.

Another major way to show good sportsmanship is by not yelling at the official over the game. It speaks very poorly of a school that has fans or players that jump on the officials. It is the coach's job to discuss calls with the officials from time to time—everyone does—but try not to get to the point where you have to leave because of it.

These are some of the main ways to display good sportsmanship. If you are known as a "bad sport," just think of your

school and team and how you are affecting them. Remember that by being a good sport, you are helping the team, school, and yourself look better.

By Lexi Langley, Eighth Grade - 1996

Elysian Fields Middle School, Coach: Luanne Riggs

Judges' constructive comments:

"Examples and explanations good."

"Great understanding of sportsmanship."

"Well organized."

"Well developed without being wordy."

"Elaboration very effective."

"Correctness of style is top notch!"

Under "Areas Needing Improvement," judges stated, "Minor sentence structure improvements could be made. In paragraph two, make the phrase 'both a good winner and loser' parallel by including like elements after the word 'both' — 'both a good winner and a good loser.' "

" '. . . shake other team's hands' would be better written, 'shake other team members' hands.' "

" 'embarass' is spelled 'embarrass.' "

EIGHTH GRADE PROMPT

Good Schools: Newspapers often report what is bad about schools. Write a letter to the editor listing what's good about your school.

Dear Editor:

As I glance over previous local newspapers, I am very disappointed to see all the negative critique said about our schools. It seems to me like everyone is dwelling on the downfalls of our school and forgetting the good. I, for one, find it very easy to see the positive things about our schools.

First of all, our advanced placement classes are a true benefit. These programs are helpful to both the teacher and the student. As you already know, every student's work habits are different. Some may work faster than others in a particular subject and learn the material at a quicker rate than their peers. My cousin, who is a very high achiever in school, has experienced both ways of education programs; first, without advanced classes, then later, with the classes. Which program did she favor? You guessed it—she liked the advanced classes the best. She said that before advanced classes

entered the picture, she'd sit in the class room, bored to tears because she had already finished the assignment and had to wait until the others were through as well in order to continue on to the next lesson. Like I said, everyone's mind moves at a different pace, and it's so much easier to learn and pay attention in class if you're pretty much on the same level of learning as others in your class. It's easier on the teacher to have advanced programs because the discipline problems in their classes usually decrease. When everyone is in one classroom, there will most likely be some excess discipline problems. Sometimes advanced students grow bored and become restless and disruptive because he or she has finished their work and have nothing else to do. Teachers are forced to discipline the student while still keeping the rest of the class quiet and focused on their work. Advanced classes for those who are placed in them is a stress-reliever for both the teacher and student, and I see it as a very beneficial program.

Another strong area of our school is an area that which many people tend to overlook or ignore: the leadership many students display. Sure, there are the trouble-makers who don't care about school and are only there by force, but let's not forget those students who *do* care and actually *want* to learn! They are the leaders of our school and often help make decisions affecting the school and the students. These kids are good kids, never discipline problems, and someone you know you can depend upon. The leaders are well-liked by their peers because they care about the school and the students. Anyone can be a leader. All it takes is concern for the school, a positive attitude, and the ability to "take charge" of a situation. Without these students, our school would not be in as good shape as it is in now. These leaders are often forgotten, but in my opinion, deserve a big round of applause.

My final—and perhaps strongest—point on the good side of our school is all the buzz of activity going on throughout the year. All year round there are different events happening: drama plays, band and choir contests, and of course, sports! All of these activities are ones I can proudly announce as winners. In February, our school's band and choir went to contests with a solo or ensemble prepared to be judged. The results > Fifty-nine medals in band, and sixty-four medals in choir. Winners. All of us. Even if you didn't participate or win a medal, you won. You're a winner to even be a part of such a strong, hard-working group of kids.

Our drama department is outstanding. We performed an amazing play in the fall, and, in the spring took our one-act play to

UIL contest, receiving first place! That's something to be proud of.

Sports? Where do I start? Let's see, there's football, basketball, tennis, golf, track... I could go on forever! There are so many good athletes throughout our school who work their hardest preparing for the sports season. The results are incredible: an outstanding football season, winning all the games but one, and undefeated basketball team, the tennis team winning second place, in the Regional tournament, golf having the honor to go to state championships, and our track stars placing first in District. After all that, who can't help but be proud of our school?!?

Anytime you hear or see negative comments concerning our school, think back to all the medals won, the advanced placement classes we have, and the strong leadership ability among the students. Knowing these qualities, I think to myself 'On a scale from one to ten, how would I rate my school?' That's an easy question. Ten.

By Kelley Garner, Eighth Grade - 1996
Snyder Junior High School, Coach: Elaine Whitfill

Judges' constructive comments:

"Detailed well."

"Unique, but effective reasoning and examples."

"Wonderful use of examples—they really fit nicely into the paper."

"Great variety of sentence structure."

"Enthusiastic tone."

"Excellent writing skills."

"Excellent conclusion — strong use of question at end!"

Under "Areas Needing Improvement," judges stated, "Don't restate a point too many times. Your paper is a little wordy. Too many details detract from your main idea."

"Indent a little more when changing paragraphs."

"Since your audience is a newspaper editor, it is best to watch the overuse of the vernacular 'kids.' Use 'students' or 'teenagers.'"

EIGHTH GRADE PROMPT

No Pass, No Play. The Texas "no pass, no-play" rule, which makes students who fail any class ineligible for extracurricular activities for six weeks, has been in effect for ten years. Many people feel it has been successful because it requires students to concentrate on academic achievement.

Others fear that the current penalty for failing may discourage students who struggle to pass but who occasionally make a failing six-weeks grade. Write a letter to the governor or to your Texas legislator expressing your opinion of the “no-pass, no-play” rule.

Dear Governor Bush,

As a student and an athlete I see and experience the effects of the six-week ineligibility consequence for students who fail a class. Luckily, I am a good student and have no problems passing my classes, but there are many people that I know personally, who do have difficulties. I am sympathetic towards some of these people, but I strongly believe that the six-weeks consequence rule should not be changed.

A student, no matter if he or she is involved in extra-curricular activities or not, should work hard in all of their classes. If a student is failing and comes to the teacher for help, I know all the teachers at my school and I'm sure all others, would be more than willing to help the student in any way they possibly can. If the teacher knows that you work hard, try to do your best, and come to him or her when you need help that really makes a difference. If you do not want to be helped then there is nothing the teacher can do. Most teachers will not fail a student who gives everything they have everyday. They will probably not give you an eighty when you only earned a sixty, but most will find make-up or extra-credit work or let you re-take a test you did not do to well on. This is an important trait to have in school and will carry right on over into life.

Students who excel at basketball, football, one-act play or whatever need to have the self-motivation to work hard and pass their classes or not be able to play or participate. Youth today need to try their hardest to achieve their goals in all areas of school. If they learn to do this now, this too will help them in the future. For example, if you are a real good police officer and had caught more criminals than anyone else at your station, but you just did not like to do paper work, so you never filled out any reports or complaints, there won't be many people jumping at the chance to employ you or keep you employed.

Last, but probably the most important reason the six week consequence rule should not be changed, is that students need to take responsibility for their own actions. You can try and blame someone else for you failing, but sooner or later the finger points straight

back at you. You are the person who didn't turn in that homework, you are the person who did not study for that major test, not your mom or your teacher or your coach, but you. Sometimes it just takes failing math and not getting to play baseball or you to U.I.L. for you to realize that you need to straighten up and fly right. Eventhough it may seem unfair at the moment of the kick-off of that football game you were supposed to be in you have to remember that you are the reason your not.

The six week consequence rule should be left just as it is because students learn to concentrate on academic achievement instead of only athletics.

Thanks for taking time out of your busy schedule to read this letter and I hope you take it to heart.

Sincerely,

A concerned student athlete

By Molly Deweber, Eighth Grade - 1995
Bowie Junior High School, Coach: Jan Gibson

Judges' constructive comments:

"Good introduction."

"Effective reasoning and examples."

"Smooth flow due to use of transitions."

"Logical and well organized."

"Enthusiastic, but sympathetic tone."

Under "Areas Needing Improvement," judges stated, "Proofreading could perhaps eliminate many accidental errors. Sentence structure needs a little work. Example: 'If the teacher knows that you work hard, try to do your best, and come to him or her when you need help that really makes a difference' is a sentence fragment. A comma after help could have made the difference. Try revising the sentence to express this thought more completely."

EIGHTH GRADE PROMPT

Outstanding Citizen: Your school is planning to present an "Outstanding Citizen Award" to one junior high and one senior high student each month. Write a letter to the editor of your school newspaper explaining what qualities should be considered for this award.

Dear Editor,

Recently, I heard that the "Outstanding Citizenship Awards" were going to be presented each month, and while determining the recipients, I believe considering certain qualities will help with the decision-making process. For both the junior and senior high, the Outstanding Citizen needs to be one who represents the epitome of students. Our school will be greatly awarded by the representation of the Outstanding Citizens, and the following qualities will ensure that the chosen students truly are outstanding.

To begin with, the character, leadership, service and citizenship of all students needs to be reviewed. Character is a show of pride in a person that tells how much you respect yourself, your family, and your school. It also takes strong character to do what is right in difficult situations. Leadership shows the confidence, poise, control, and strength in students. As a student, I know it takes a lot of leadership to have confidence in my work, poise in unvoiced situations, control in the classroom, and strength in athletics. When a student shows these abilities, true leadership is seen by misdirected teenagers who are trying to find a way to walk the straight and narrow path to success. What kind of service does a student do for his or her school? Service is important to have a strong well-supported school, and it definitely should be considered. When I think of an outstanding citizen, I see an active, involved student who participates in school athletics, UIL, band, and excetera. Participation in those activities shows service in a student. Finally, citizenship is a quality that requires strong school respect and excellent behavior on the part of the student. A good citizen needs to show strong school respect by supporting their school and treating it appropriately. I believe that excellent role-model behavior is mandatory in an outstanding citizen. If a student showed exceptional character, leadership, and service, but they had unruly behavior then the other qualities should be overlooked. The four qualities of character, leadership, service, and citizenship combined make a true outstanding citizen.

Next, I will discuss how important a good attitude is in an outstanding citizen. A person's attitude is their overall behavior and, also the denoting factor that other people base their opinions of a particular person. Attitude is relevant every day in the classroom because students are faced with many pressures, and good citizens keep a good, positive attitude through them all. It is fairly

simple to determine a good citizen through their attitude, but I do strongly believe that a good attitude should be highly considered.

Last, but not least, the junior and senior high Outstanding Citizens must have strong work ethics. The school work that students are faced with is unyielding, but with strong work ethics good citizens stand out in the crowd. The work ethic of a student determines how high their grades are, and how much they really even care. For example, it is obvious that a student with a 58 average has no work ethic and probably does not care much about his or her grades. I am sure that you will include a strong work ethic when you determine the outstanding citizens because it is a key ingredient to being a good student.

As you can see, the qualities of being a good citizen are all very key in importance. The results of choosing the "Outstanding Citizens" each month, using these qualities will greatly benefit the school. By the way, I want to give a great accolade to our school for planning the "Outstanding Student Award." Both the junior high and senior high will flourish from outstanding citizens being rewarded for all of their hard work. The choices of recipients will not be easy, but with consideration of those very important qualities, the best choice will be made.

Thank-you for your time,
Suzie-Q

By Jacqueline Dickerson, Eighth Grade - 1997
Farmersville Middle School, Coach: Kailyn Tedford

Judges' constructive comments included: "High interest level—good style—good ideas and supporting statements—well organized.

"Paper needs to be shortened," judges noted. "Try to use fewer words to make your points. Avoid repetition of words and phrases."

Sample ready writing prompts

The following list consists of prompts that have been used in invitational and district competitions within past years. Making your own prompts, or perhaps having students compose prompts, will provide a wider range of interesting topics to respond to, as well as emphasize the components of a prompt. Let's take the first prompt listed below as an example. The UIL ready writing prompt consists of the following:

Title: "Question and Answer Time"

General statement or statements to establish a situation:
"Some students are shy about raising their hands in class, even when they know the answer to a question. (*Note a contrasting statement is given, implying that the student will be making a choice.*) Others are always eager to show what they know."

Writing format: "Write a letter"

Audience: "to your teacher"

Purpose: "explaining how you feel during question and answer period in class."

THIRD & FOURTH GRADE PROMPTS

Question and Answer Time: Some students are shy about raising their hands in class, even when they know the answer to a question. Others are always eager to show what they know. Write a letter to your teacher explaining how you feel during question and answer periods in class.

A Collection: Some people collect things as a hobby, including rocks and shells, stamps and coins, model trains, and many other things. Write a paper about what you think would be fun to collect, and how you could create an interesting display of your collection.

Daydreaming: Sometimes students daydream in class and then can't answer the question when they are called on. Write a paper for your teacher explaining when you forget to pay attention in class.

Moving: One of your friends has written you a letter saying that her family may be moving from the small town where they live to a big city. Write a letter to your friend explaining whether you would like to live in a small town or large city and why you feel that way.

The School Playground: Parents in your town have collected money to improve the school playground, and they have asked for suggestions from students. Write a paper describing what you would like to have changed or added to the playground that would make it more fun.

Travel: Your class is creating a travel book about interesting places around the world. Write a paper about where you would like to visit if you could go anywhere in the world.

Careers: Your class is studying careers and the types of jobs that you and your friends may have when you're older. Write a paper about the kind of job you would like to have and why you think it would be interesting.

A Hero: Heroes are people we respect and admire because they are special in some way. A hero may be a famous person or someone we know very well. Write a paper about someone you think is a hero and explain why this person is special.

Field Day: Your principal has promised a special Field Day at the end of school as a reward for the hard work students have done throughout the year. Write a letter to the principal describing what you would like to do that day and why you think it would be fun.

2016 Ready Writing DISTRICT

INSTRUCTIONS

Select only one of the two topics which follow. Write the topic you have chosen at the top of your paper. Remember not to use your name or any reference to your school in your composition.

THIRD AND FOURTH GRADES

TOPIC: *Activity I Love*

People love to do many different activities.

Think about what you really enjoy doing such as reading, singing, building something, or riding your bike. Write an essay convincing readers to try the activity you love most.

TOPIC: *An Achievement*

Throughout your life, you will achieve many things. Think of something you have already achieved and write an essay about your experience.

This is a sample prompt as it appeared in the 2016 district contest packet.

Watching TV: Your parents are deciding how much you should be allowed to watch television each week, and which shows you should be allowed to watch. Write a letter to your parents to let them know what you would like them to decide.

Favorite Holidays: Most people enjoy holidays, and almost everybody has a favorite one. Write a letter to a friend or relative that lives in another town, describing your favorite holiday and what makes it special.

News for New Students: Your class has decided to write a booklet about school rules and routines so that new students can read it and show it to their parents. Write a paper describing the things about your school you think would be important for a new student to know.

What to do this Summer: Summers can be very long if you don't have some activities planned to keep you busy. If you could do anything this summer, what would it be? Write a paper about what you would like to do this summer.

A Special Pet: Think of either a special pet that you own or would like to own. Write a paper describing the pet and telling what makes it special to you.

A Special Relative: Think of a member of your family — a brother, sister, cousin, aunt, uncle — who is very special to you. Write a description of this special person and tell why you think he or she is special.

Magical Powers: If you could have one magical power, what would you want it to be? What kind of things would you do with your magical power? Write a story about having this special magical power.

FIFTH & SIXTH GRADE PROMPTS

Earth Day: The theme for your school's Earth Day is, "We All Must Help to Save Our Environment." Each person in your class has been asked to write a paper titled "Changes My Family Can Make to Become Earth Friendly."

A Community Activity: A group of parents has asked that your school building be used for community activities two afternoons each week after school. Your principal has asked for suggestions from students. Write a paper describing what activity you would like to have offered and why you feel others would participate.

Americans Helping Others: Your pen pal from Europe has been reading about how the U.S. helps needy people around the world. He asks you in a letter why America spends so much time and money helping other people in other countries. Write him a letter explaining why it's important to Americans to help people outside our borders.

The School Year: Some people feel that too many students are not learning enough in American schools and that these students would do better if they spent more days in class. They recommend short vacation breaks throughout the year, and a much shorter summer vacation. Write a paper explaining whether or not you believe this would be a good idea.

Competition: Students enjoy competing in sports and other activities, but sometimes winning seems to be the only important thing. Your teacher has asked you to write a paper explaining how you benefit from competition when you don't win.

Recycling: As Americans become better and better about recycling glass, metals, plastics and paper, new ways are being developed to create products from these recycled materials. Write a paper explaining how recycled material is being used now and how it might be used in the future.

A TV Comedy: In a class discussion, your teacher claimed that no comedy show on TV was really worth watching. When some of the students disagreed, the teacher offered a challenge. If every student could convince her that their favorite comedy was really valuable, the class could have a class period to watch and discuss the most popular show. Write a paper about a TV comedy you think is worth watching.

School News: Your class is creating a program to present to parents when they visit your school for Open House. The program will be a videotaped news show about your school. Write a letter to your principal explaining what you would like to have included in the news report.

Service Project: You belong to a club that is selecting a volunteer service project for the year. Write a letter to the adult sponsor of your club describing the project you would like to have selected. Explain how the project would benefit the community or someone living there.

Description of a Hero: Your class is creating a program to present to parents when they visit your school for Open House. Students will share information about someone they consider a hero or an excellent role model. Write a paper describing the person you have chosen and explaining why you admire or respect them.

Being a Good Neighbor: Your class has been studying American cities and towns, and the problems neighborhoods face in today's society. Your group's discussion topic was "the importance of being a good neighbor." Write a report that summarizes your group's opinions for the class.

Skills for Careers: Your school will be hosting a Jobs Fair to help students learn about career opportunities. Although some types of work require special training, some skills are important no matter what career you choose. You have been assigned to write a paper about skills you feel are important to be successful at work.

Dress Code: Some schools restrict what students may wear and the way they may cut their hair. Dress codes are usually made on the basis of the behavior that is expected of the student. Consider whether your school should have a dress code, and write a letter to your principal describing the reasons for your choice.

Smoking: Statistics show that some young people are beginning to smoke at an earlier age than ever before. You have been asked to lead a campaign to prevent smoking among students at your school. Write a report for your class telling what you would do to conduct the anti-smoking campaign.

Immigrants to America: From its beginning, the United States of America has been a country of immigrants. The Statue of Liberty is recognized around the world as a welcoming symbol to people arriving on American shores. Write an paper for your social studies class telling how immigrants made and continue to make America what it is today.

Benefits of TV: Many people have said that watching TV is “bad” for young people. Sometimes parents limit the time that their children may watch TV because they think it could be harmful for them. Write a letter to your parents telling them about some of the benefits of watching TV.

SEVENTH & EIGHTH GRADE PROMPTS

Important Skills: Education officials are reviewing requirements for the skills that should be taught in Texas schools. You have been asked to write a paper explaining what skills you think will be most important to people when they leave school and begin working.

Texas Prisons: Each year Texas spends more and more money to care for more and more prisoners. Write a letter to the governor describing your ideas for the best ways to solve this growing problem.

Letter to the President: President Clinton has promised to significantly reduce military spending. Because he asked all Americans to let him know what they thought, you’re writing a letter to tell him your ideas. Explain your views on the best way the money saved could be used to help America.

“No Pass, No Play”: The Texas “no pass, no-play” rule, which makes students who fail any class ineligible for extracurricular activities for six weeks, has been in effect for ten years. Many people feel it has been successful because it requires students to concentrate on academic achievement. Others fear that the current penalty for failing may discourage students who struggle to pass but who occasionally make a failing six-weeks grade. Write a letter to the governor or to your Texas legislator expressing your opinion of the “no-pass, no-play” rule.

TV Violence: Some people believe that violence on television programs contributes to increased crime by teenagers in America. They would like stricter regulation of programs that contain violence. Others argue that teenagers understand the difference between television and real life, and TV programs that are entertainment should not be censored except by parents. Write a paper that expresses your opinion on this issue.

An Outstanding Citizen: A service club in your community has decided to present an award to an adult who has provided outstanding service and leadership to youth in the area. Write a letter of recommendation to the club for the adult you would like to be selected, explaining why this person would be a good choice.

Time Capsule: Your class is creating a time capsule that will be buried on the school grounds. Your group has been instructed to choose items to be included in the buried container. Choose things that would help someone opening the time capsule fifty years from now to understand something about how teenagers live in your community today. Write a report for your group explaining what you would include and why.

Violent Crime: Violent crime continues to increase in American cities, and the mayors of several large cities recently met to discuss possible solutions to the problem. The mayors agreed that in addition to what they could do for their cities, they wanted President Clinton and members of Congress to pass tougher crime laws. Write a letter to the President describing steps you think the government could take to fight crime in the United States.

American Forces Abroad: In recent years, American military forces have served in trouble spots on several continents. Some people believe that U.S. forces should be used only when a threat to our national security exists. Others argue that as a world power, we have a responsibility to respond to nations in need. Write a letter to President Clinton explaining when you believe the use of U.S. forces in foreign countries is appropriate.

Protecting Our Planet: While running for president, Bill Clinton assured Americans that environmental issues would be very important to his administration. Write a letter to President Clinton describing the environmental problems you would like to receive the most attention.

Smoking Bans: More and more cities are passing laws that ban cigarette smoking in public places, including restaurants and places of entertainment. Some people feel that a federal law is needed to ban smoking in all workplaces. Write an essay supporting your opinion about whether or not such a law should be passed.

Curbing Teenage Violence: As teenage violence and crime increases, citizens search for ways to solve these problems. Some lawmakers believe the solution lies in tougher penalties, longer sentences, and such things as boot camps for juvenile offenders. Others think that crime prevention programs, such as job training, community education, and recreation programs for teens would be more effective. Write a paper explaining your position on the best way to reduce teenage crime.

Financial Responsibility: Managing money, saving, and making decisions are essential life skills. Many students learn how difficult these things are when they begin working for the first time. Write a paper describing the ways you would use the salary you make from your first job.

Crime Reduction: While some types of crime are decreasing in America, the number of crimes committed by teenagers continues to grow. Experts have different opinions about the most effective ways to treat or punish youthful offenders. Write a paper explaining what approaches you think would work best to reduce crime by teenagers.

Good Schools: Newspapers often report what is bad about schools. Write a letter to the editor explaining what's good about your school.

Sportsmanship: At a recent basketball game, an incident occurred which led to three students from your school being called "bad sports." Write an essay which details the behaviors which would best convey good sportsmanship for the students in your school.



CONSTITUTION & CONTEST *Rules*

Section 1462: READY WRITING

(a) THE CONTEST.

(1) Summary. Texas has put a great emphasis on writing skills at all levels of school and all levels of statewide testing. Ready Writing builds upon those skills and helps students refine their writing abilities. In particular, this contest helps them learn to write clearly and correctly a paper that is interesting and original.

(2) Contest Format.

Contestants are given a choice between two prompts, each of which defines the audience and provides the purpose for writing. Students should be encouraged to analyze the prompts for purpose, format, audience and point of view. The format may be, for example, a letter, an article for the newspaper or an essay for the principal. Various writing strategies may be stated or implied in the prompt. Some of these include:

- (A) Description to inform- describe the happening or person/object from imagination or memory.
- (B) Narration- write a story
- (C) Persuasion- describe and argue just one side of an issue; describe both sides of an issue then argue only one side; write an editorial; write a letter to persuade, etc. There is no minimum or maximum number of words the contestants may write.

Two hours are allowed for writing the composition. The District Executive Committee may shorten the length of the contest period to conform to the needs of the grade level.

(b) REPRESENTATION

- (1) Contestants. Students in officially prescribed grade levels below 9th grade who are eligible under Sections 1400 and 1405 may enter this contest.
- (2) Divisions. Districts shall offer either a separate division for each participating grade level or

combined grade level divisions as specified in official contest procedures.

(3) Individual Competition. For each division, each participant school may enter as many as three contestants in the district meet.

(4) Team Competition. There is no team competition in this contest.

(c) CONTEST ADMINISTRATION

(l) Personnel.

(A) Contest Director. The contest director may be the coach of a participating student. A single or an odd number of judges should be selected. Judge(s) shall not be coaches of participating students.

(2) Options for Writing. Contestants may hand-write their essays or may bring and use their own computers. If contestants choose to use their own computers, they shall bring their own printers, associated hardware, software and paper. Spell check and thesaurus functions may be used. Students who opt to compose their entries on computers accept

the risk of computer malfunction. In case of computer malfunction, the contestant may use the remaining allotted time to complete the composition in handwriting.

Contestants may use electronic or printed dictionaries and thesauruses.

(3) Viewing Period. An optional period of time not to exceed 15 minutes may be arranged for coaches and contestants to review their own evaluations and compositions.

(4) Ties and Points. There can be no ties in this contest. Points are awarded as specified in Section 1408 (i).

(5) Official Results. After the optional viewing period has ended and all compositions have been collected, the contest director shall announce the official winners. Official results, once announced, are final.

(6) Returning Materials. No materials from district contests may be returned to contestants prior to official release dates.

Please refer to the current *A+ Handbook for additional contest procedures and frequently asked questions for each contest.* for the current year.



Ready Writing

ELEMENTARY AND JUNIOR HIGH EVALUATION SHEET

INSTRUCTIONS

Please read from the *Constitution and Contest Rules* or the *A+ Handbook* the instructions for evaluating the ready writing essays. Judges should read the paragraph prompts that are given to the contestants.

Reminders:

- The compositions are to be evaluated as to relative excellence in interest (50%), organization (35%) and correctness of style (15%). While judges are to consider all three elements in selecting the most effective compositions, they should weigh interest more than organization and organization more than correctness of style.

CONTESTANT NUMBER _____ TITLE OF COMPOSITION _____

CONSTRUCTIVE COMMENTS FOR THE CONTESTANT:

AREAS NEEDING IMPROVEMENT:

Judge's signature _____

EVALUATION

UIL provides this evaluation sheet for use at any ready writing competition. This form places the emphasis on written comments for the student and judges should endeavor to give constructive criticism to all contestants. Notice the three categories for evaluation: interest (50%), organization (35%) and style (15%).



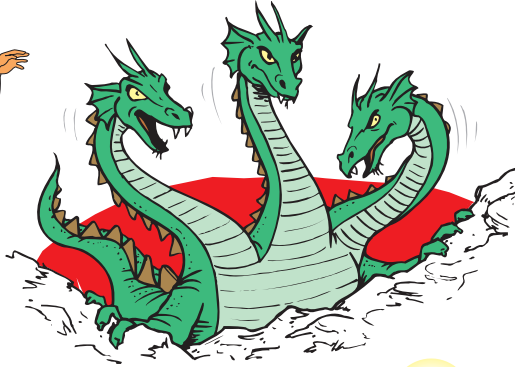
The Creative Writing Contest

Students in grade two may enter the creative writing contest. While it is similar to the ready writing contest, the prompt is visual rather than written and students have more flexibility in topics. Still, the creative writing contest is designed to promote creativity and encourage writing skills in young students. Contestants are given a page of pictures with captions. They may select as many pictures as they wish and create an original story based on their selections. The stories are evaluated as to relative excellence in creativity (60 percent), organization (30 percent), and grammatical correctness of style (10 percent).

Writing samples are reproduced in the students' exact words, spellings, and punctuation.



Wizard



Dragon



Candle



Mouse



Castle

THE DRAGON THAT CAN'T FLY

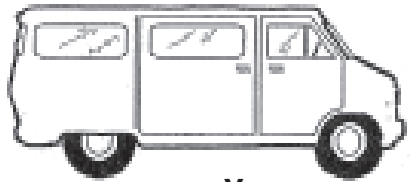
One day a dragon was by a lake. he saw a bird fly. "Wooden it be to fly", he said. So he tried to fly. He jumped off a tree and started flaping. All he did was fall into the water. Nere by a snake said you have to be a bird to fly. So the dragon canged his name to bird. A mouse came by and said, "dradon you look wet."

Dragan said, "Don't call me dragon, my name is bird. A wizard came by and said, "dragon you look wet." Dragon said, Don't call me dragon, my name is bird. Let me see if I can fly now. He went up a tree and jumped. All he did this time was fall on some rocks. The wizard said, "you need wings to fly." So he made his metel name wings. The dragon said 'now let's see if I can fly.' The mouse said you need to be ready fly. He made his last name ready. This time jump from a tree. He could fly. So his name was Bird Wings Ready.

*By Patrick Schwab,
Sweet Home School.
Coach:
Nancy Hale
1995*



Girl



Van



Tree



**Ice Cream
Cone**



Lion

LION

Once there lived this lion and he and he always liked to bang his tail on something but then one day his tail got loose and the lion felt so sad so he went to a doctor and said Oh doctor please help me! My tail have come off and I don't know what to do! But then the doctor said Look I will give you some medicene take 3 hours a day. So the lion listened to the doctor but the medicene didn't work

So the lion went back to the doctors room and said why did I have to waiste all my money on this ugly, dum medicene that didn't work so the lion went home and went to go look for someone else to go help him with his tail then he found a mouse so the mouse got the lions tail and got some glue and stuck the tail to the lion but the tail came off but then the lion got very mad and just ate the mouse. But now when the lion got the tail and stuck the tail on to him it worked because when the lion ate the mouse it just turned into magic. And now the lion was happy now he cheered and jumped up and down and he was very sleepy or if not he stayed up late like 1:00 in the morning.

By
*Alexandra
Villarreal,
Kika de la
Garza*
Elementary
School.
Coach:
Leticia
Moreno
1993



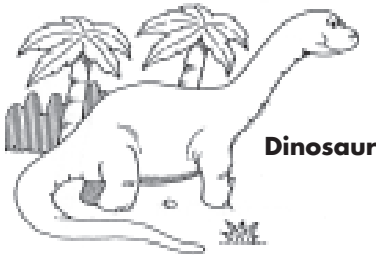
Flower



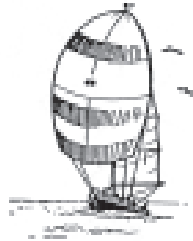
Computer



Tent



Dinosaur



Boat

THE DINSOUR THAT ONLY ATE FLOWERS

Once there was a dinosaur named flower. His name was flower because he loved to eat flowers. All flower ate was flowers. And if there weren't any flowers flower didn't eat anything! His mother and father worried about him. Pretty soon they wouldn't be any more flowers to eat and he'd starve because all he ate was flowers. Then they came up with a plan. The next day they told flower that flowers were poisonous and if he ate one more he'd die. So flower always ate grass and leaves instead. He thought to himself these are wonderful. After that his mother and father told him the truth about flowers. From then on flower ate leaves and grass. But sometimes just sometimes he'd eat a flower or two.

Years later scientists found flower dead. And they put him in the museum. Somebody wrote a book about him but they didn't know it wasn't true. It said, he never ate flowers. But he did. Scientists believe it's true though. And people who weren't scientists did too.

The judges said: "Wonderful introduction, good organization, super conclusion!"

*By Hannah
Wilson,
Whitesboro
Elementary
School.
Coaches:
Sondra
Pelzel and
Kay Price
1997*



CONSTITUTION & CONTEST *Rules*

Section 1418: CREATIVELITERATURE

(a) THE CONTEST.

- (1) **Summary.** This contest is designed to promote creativity in an academic format and to encourage writing skills at an early grade level. Through preparation for the contest, students will be able to evaluate their own writing and the writing of others.
- (2) **Contest Format.** Contestants will be given a prompt with several captioned pictures. From these pictures, the students will create an original story based on their selections. The stories shall contain at least one of the pictured items, but it is not required that all items on the page be included. Thirty minutes will be allotted for writing exclusive of time required for instructions.

(b) REPRESENTATION

- (1) **Contestants.** Students in the second grade who are eligible under Section 1405 may enter this contest.
- (2) **Divisions.** This contest will consist of only one division.
- (3) **Individual Competition.** Each participant school may enter as many as three contestants in the district meet.
- (4) **Team Competition.** There is no team competition in creative writing.

(c) CONTEST ADMINISTRATION

- (1) **Personnel.** The contest director may be the coach of a participating student.
- (2) **Viewing Period.** An optional period not to exceed 15 minutes may be arranged for coaches and contestants to review their own evaluations, stories and verify identification.
- (3) **Official Results.** After the viewing period has ended and all contest papers have been collected, the contest director shall announce the official results. Official results, once announced, are final.
- (4) **Returning Materials.** No materials from the district contests may be returned to contestants prior to official release dates.

Please refer to the current A+ Handbook for additional contest procedures and frequently asked questions for each contest for the current year.

Word Use

The alphabetical list which follows includes words which are often misused by beginning writers. Portions are adapted from Dr. John R. Trimble's *Writing with style: Conversations on the art of writing*, and the rest from *The American Heritage Dictionary of the English Language* and personal resources.

accept / except Accept (to receive): Please accept my gift .

Except (to exclude, but): Everyone came to the party except Marguerite.

affect / effect Affect (verb - to influence): The bad news didn't affect him at all. Effect (noun - use when you can substitute *result*): The effect of several hours of study was a high grade in the course.

all ready / already All ready (use when you can substitute *prepared*): The girls were all ready for the camping trip. Already (before this time): We had already packed for the trip.

all right / alright *all right* is preferred, although *alright* has become popular in the past decade.

a lot It is written as two words, not one, but many readers would prefer you to remember not to write it at all—it's slangy. Oddly, though, its slanginess seems to vanish in certain contexts: it will be so appropriate that you won't even notice it, and if by chance you did, it would defy criticism.

and / or *And/or* is, to many readers, an unwieldy monstrosity associated with income-tax prose. Its sole virtue is brevity. Without it one would have to say "X or Y, or both"—itself something of an unwieldy monstrosity, in John Trimble's opinion.

assure / ensure / insure All three words mean "to make certain or safe." Use *assure* with persons, *ensure* with things, and *insure* when talking about money and guarantees (e.g., life insurance).

bad / badly Bad (used with the verbs *feel* and *look*): I feel bad about Tommy's injury. Badly (used with all other verbs): I did badly on the statistics exam.

between / among When speaking of just two persons or things, use *between*; of three or more, use *among*. If a tight relationship is implied, though, use *between* regardless of the number. Examples:

"The quarrel between Mike, Jim, and Larry is still raging"; "The flights between London, Geneva, and Berlin have been canceled."

complement / compliment Complement (to complete or perfect): This wallpaper will complement the furnishings in the room. Compliment (to praise): She complimented her student on the quality of his work.

cannot *Cannot* is the preferred way to write *can not*. Experienced writers save *can not* for those rare situations where they want to put special emphasis on the word *not*.

consensus The word means "collective opinion" or "general agreement." Since it already includes the idea of opinion, the phrase *consensus of opinion* is redundant. Likewise with *the general consensus*. Simply say, for example, "The consensus is that the bill will pass the Senate."

different from / different than Since one thing differs *from* another, say *different from* except where it creates a cumbersome or wordy clause after it, in which case *different than* is not only acceptable but preferable.

disinterested / uninterested If you are *disinterested*, you are unbiased or impartial. If you are *uninterested*, you are not interested. The difference in meaning between the two words is so radical that it's worth making a special point of remembering which is which.

factor Better words to use in writing are *component*, *ingredient*; *element*

famous / notorious If a person is widely known and acclaimed, he is *famous*. But if a person is widely known because he is disreputable, he is *notorious* (infamous).

first / firstly In enumerating several items, say *first*, not *firstly*. The reasons: *first* is as genuine an adverb as *firstly*, is a simpler form, and is much more natural to the ear. The same applies to *second*, *third*, *fourth*, etc. Occasionally you may decide that the numerals themselves are preferable to the words, as in this example from Twain: "To be a writer, one must observe three rules: (1) write, (2) write, and (3) write." Note that the numerals are enclosed on both sides by parentheses. Note, too, that a comma plus *and* precedes the final numeral. When the enumerated items are each quite lengthy, substitute semicolons for the commas to enhance readability.

imply / infer These words are commonly confused. If someone (such as an author) has *implied* something, he has hinted it or intimated it instead of saying it outright; if someone else (such as a reader) gets the hint, he has *inferred* it—that is, deduced the veiled point. The difference is thus analogous to that between giving and receiving something.

irregardless If you use the word, you actually mean *regardless*. Technically we can't call *irregardless* a nonword, for there it is, but it deserves to be a nonword since the suffix *less* makes the prefix *ir* plainly redundant. In any case, it's "nonstandard."

its / it's Here's another pair of commonly confused words, *It's* is the contraction of *it is*, whereas *its* is the possessive form of *it*. Normally, of course, possession is indicated by the apostrophe. In this case it isn't, because *its* belongs to a special class of words known as prenominal or "pure" possessives. Other words like it include *hers*, *theirs*, *yours*, *ours*. None of these uses the apostrophe.

like / as If there's a verb following it, use *as*. If not, use *like*. Example: I feel as you do about vegetarian food. Like any cat, Garfield wants prompt service.

loathe / loath You may *loathe* (dislike) a bad habit, yet still be *loath* (unwilling) to give it up.

loose / lose If a button is *loose*, you are apt to *lose* it.

neither It's followed by *nor*, not *or*. Example: "Neither Bill nor his father washed the dog." Use *or* only with *either*.

none *None* confuses most people. Is it singular or plural? The answer is that it can be either. If it is followed by a singular noun, it is construed as singular; if by a plural noun, it is construed as plural. Thus: none of the building was painted. None of the guests were here when I arrived. If no noun follows it, simply decide whether you are talking about more than one and pick your verb accordingly. If you wish to give special emphasis to the fact of singleness, though, substitute *no one* or *not one*. Thus: "Not one of his shots touched the rim."

only Make sure you put it immediately before the word it actually modifies. Compare these two sentences: Sam only plays golf on weekends. Sam plays golf only on weekends. The first version implies that Sam does nothing each weekend except play golf—he doesn't mow the lawn, take the family on an outing, come home to eat, nothing. The second version implies that the only time Sam plays golf is on weekends.

passed / past *Passed* (to go by; circulate): She passed the plate of cinnamon rolls to her brother. *Past* (time gone by): In past centuries, students memorized Greek classical literature.

precede *Precede* ("to come before") is perhaps the most commonly misspelled word in student writing. It apparently gets confused with *proceed* and comes out misspelled as *preceed*.

principal / principle If you're referring to a rule or basic truth, say *principle*. This word functions only as a noun. Its sound-alike, *principal*, denotes "chief" and can be used as either a noun or an adjective: e.g., "the principal of the school," "the principal witness."

reason is because This is a redundancy. The reason is that *because* means *for the reason that*. Say one or the other, not both. Examples: He double-parked because he was rushed. The reason he double-parked is that he was rushed.

revert / regress Both mean “to go back.” Thus the colloquialisms “revert back” and “regress back” are redundancies. Simply say, for example, “He reverted to his old ways.”

shall / will When your grandfather was in school, he was taught the vital difference in usage between these two words. But he forgot that difference along with nearly everybody else—apparently it wasn’t so vital after all—and now the words are interchangeable. *Shall*, though, sounds slightly fussier and more bookish to the average ear, so if you’re aiming at a conversational style, use *will* in stead. The exception would be a first-person interrogative: “Shall we dance?” “Shall I pick her up at the station or will you?”

so — Many people believe that *so* is an intensifier synonymous with *very* (“This coffee is so strong”). It is not, however. Observe that when you write a sentence such as the one just illustrated, your reader will unconsciously—and properly—expect a *that* clause to follow: “This coffee is so strong that I can’t drink it.”

there is / there are Both are dead phrases and should be used as a last resort. Eliminating them through revising usually results in sentences that are more vivid, concrete, and terse. There are many exceptions, though, and this sentence is one of them.

thus *Thus* is an adverb. Many students, not realizing this, think they must attach to it the regular adverbial suffix *-ly* to have it function as an adverb. *Thusly*, however, is an illiteracy.

unique If a thing is *unique*, it’s the only one of its kind. The condition is an absolute one, like perfection. Thus you can’t logically talk about *unique* in terms of degree. You can’t say, for example, “rather unique” or “very unique.” A thing is either unique or it is not unique, just as a woman is either pregnant or she is not pregnant. When writers misuse *unique*, Word Use

unique *continued*: they usually mean *unusual* or *rare*. “A rather unique invitation,” for example should read “a rather unusual invitation.”

used to In conversation it’s hard to hear that final *d*, but it’s there—or should be, since it’s the past participle of the verb *use* (“to be accustomed to”). Thus, say “I used to work there,” not “I use to work there.”

whether Use it alone. Don’t tack on the redundancy *or not* as in the sentence, “He doesn’t know whether or not to go.” The *or not* is necessary only when you mean to convey the idea of *regardless of whether*. Example: “We’re going to play golf today whether it rains or not.”

STAAR, TEKS, & UIL Writing Contests

Ready writing and creative writing in classroom activities help build on state writing assessment objectives as well as provide opportunities for students to go beyond the curriculum in developing writing skills.

STAAR Writing at Grades 4 and 7

(from the STAAR Performance Level Descriptors)

Students achieving at Level III: Advanced Academic Performance in **Grade 4 of Writing** can:

- Write thoughtful and engaging expository essays with sustained focus on a clear central idea, an organizing structure that is well suited to the expository task, and development that adds substance to the essay
- Choose sentences that are purposeful, varied and well controlled

Students achieving at Level III: Advanced Academic Performance in **Grade 7 of Writing** can:

- Write skillfully crafted expository essays with a sustained focus, substantial development, and an organizing structure that clearly shows the relationship among ideas
- Choose purposeful, varied, and well-controlled sentences when writing or revising texts

The fourth-grade and seventh-grade writing tests align with STAAR reporting categories, which are listed below.

Reporting Category 1: The student will demonstrate an ability to compose a variety of written texts with a clear, central idea; coherent organization; sufficient development; and effective use of language and conventions.

Reporting Category 2: The student will demonstrate an ability to revise a variety of texts.

Reporting Category 3: The student will demonstrate an ability to edit a variety of texts.

TEKS

Below is a correlation of UIL elementary/junior high competitions with the Texas Essential Knowledge and Skills (TEKS). This is, by no means, complete. For example, if a topic were related to science, the student may be addressing some of the TEKS listed under science as well. This is only a list of some obvious correlations.

Creative Writing

2 ELAR §110.13 • 18(A), 19(A), 21(A), 21(B), 21(C), 22(A), 22(B), 22(C), 23(A), 23(B), 23(C), 23(D),

Ready Writing

3 ELAR §110.14 • 18(A), 19(A), 20(A), 20(B), 21(A), 22(B), 22(C), 23(B), 23(C), 23(D), 24 (A), 24(B), 24(C), 24(D), 24(E), 24(G)

4 ELAR §110.15 • 16(A), 17(A), 18(A), 18(B), 19 (A), 20(A), 20(B), 20(C), 21(A), 21(B), 21 (C), 22(A), 22(B), 22(C), 22(D)

5 ELAR §110.16 • 16(A), 17(A), 18(A), 18(B), 19 (A), 20(A), 20(B), 20(C), 21(A), 21(B), 21 (C), 22(A), 22(B), 22(C), 22(D), 22(E)

6 ELAR §110.18 • 15(A), 16(A), 17(A), 17(B), 18(A), 19(A), 19(C), 20(A), 20(B), 20(C), 21(A),

7 ELAR §110.19 • 15(A), 16(A), 17(A), 17(B), 18(A), 18(B), 18(C), 19(A), 19(C), 20(A), 20(B), 21(A)

8 ELAR §110.20 • 15(A), 16(A), 17(A), 17(B), 18(A), 18(B), 18(C), 19(A), 19(C), 20(A), 20(B), 21(A)