



Before Papers Come Paragraphs Introductory Letter

The Denim Beret:
a writing school
for teens

Dear Parent and Student,

Welcome to *The Denim Beret Writing Program*! This course, *Before Papers Come Paragraphs* is the first of the program's three levels that will culminate in complex projects that you may not be able to imagine writing at this point. The program is designed to help you build a solid foundation of writing skills that you will use your entire life in many different ways for academic, career, family, and creative purposes. As you work through it, you will establish habits common to dedicated writers, and you will learn how to combine creativity and originality with techniques and rules.

This program is not a complete English/language arts program. Its focus is on the art and craft of writing. It also includes "mini-lessons" and practice in basic grammar, mechanics and style. It does not include spelling or vocabulary lessons, and it does not replace a formal grammar and mechanics program. That does *not* mean that those disciplines aren't important, though. Far from it! All of them are important to good oral and written communication, and I encourage you to work through other programs to develop your skills in those areas.

In addition, a study of literature is also important. Not only does it have its own intrinsic value as an art, it is also necessary to becoming a strong writer. Just as you could not become the best football player, dancer, or singer you could be without lots of exposure to great players, dancers, and singers, you cannot become an excellent writer without lots of exposure to great authors. For that reason it is essential that you read a lot as you develop your writing skills. Read the best literature you can find for your age group, and try to avoid "junky" books. That doesn't mean you have to read Shakespeare all the time, nor does it mean you can never read comic books. It does mean that you should spend most of your reading hours on books and poetry that are written by critically-acclaimed writers, whether they won awards or have been highly recommended or have been labeled "classic." You will learn a lot about writing unconsciously just by absorbing what you read, and you want to make sure you're learning from the best authors. Remember, what goes into your brain will come out somehow!

Many people feel that writing is a complex and difficult subject and that if they are not naturally talented, they “just can’t write.” If this includes you, don’t worry. This program begins at the very beginning, and it doesn’t assume you’re talented, creative, or even interested in writing. All you need to know how to do before you begin is to create a document using a program such as Word or Google Docs and to compose fluent sentences. As you progress, I will break down writing into its basic parts, so that you can learn the skills you’ll need to write with clarity, confidence, and flair. Will this program make you an award-winning scholar or published author? No, that is something you’ll have to pull off all on your own if you want to. But it will give you what you’ll need to do so.

Finally, it’s important to know that one of the defining features of this program is efficiency. Every skill and concept you learn is one that all writers need to master, and there is a reason for every activity and assignment. You won’t find busy work or enrichment activities here. My goal is to help you learn how to write essays and papers with clarity and style in the shortest time possible, so you can move on to more interesting things, like real-life writing and papers for which you’ll receive an important grade. I want you to feel confident and free to write whatever you want and to do it well.

Each lesson will have four parts, which you should complete within the suggested number of sessions. You will find this number in the general information box that precedes every lesson. The four parts are as follows:

- warm-up exercise
- grammar or style mini-lesson
- writing lesson
- worksheet

Sometimes the lessons will also include handouts and ungraded practice activities. Because everything in every lesson is important to becoming a good writer, please complete all the parts and don’t progress to the next lesson until your parent passes you. This is a mastery-learning program, so if you progress to the next lesson before your parent determines that you have mastered the previous lesson, you will struggle. But if you stick with me and don’t take shortcuts, you will do just fine.

And with that, let’s get started. Please jump right into lesson 1 when you’re ready. It will explain the supplies you’ll need and set you up for the lessons to come. I’m glad you’re here!

Sincerely,

Mrs. Cheri Blomquist