



## *Before Papers Come Paragraphs*

### Introductory Unit

#### Lesson 3: Why Writing Well Matters (In the Real World)

##### The Denim *Beret* Writing Program

Supplies: lesson 2, writing notebook, pen/pencil, timer, lesson 2-3 quiz

Goal: to understand the value in mastering writing skills.

Suggested time: 2 sessions

## SESSION 1

### Warm-up: History of a Name

Names can be interesting, so thinking about the history behind a name can be a great way to get your pen moving across the page. For this exercise choose the name of something familiar to you. It can be your own name or the name of someone you know, or it can be the name of a place or thing. Just be sure that it's a proper name (i.e., "Mississippi," instead of "state").

Write the name at the top of a page in your notebook, and set your timer for at least 10 minutes. Then write about the origins of the name and how it was given. If you don't know its history, feel free to speculate. For instance, Scotland has a village called Elvanfoot. I would love to know how the citizens came up with that name! The reason could be very mundane, but maybe not! Were elf foot-prints once spotted there? Since I don't know, nothing is stopping me from creating a fun, fictional history for the name. For this exercise try using your best storyteller voice, as if you were sharing a piece of history with a group of museum patrons.

### Introduction

It's possible that at this point you might be thinking, "Well, Mrs. Blomquist, all that's just great about learning writing as art and contributing something to the world, blah, blah, blah--except

for one minor problem. I am not interested in that. Like at all. I hate writing, and all I care about is learning what I have to know to graduate from high school. So let's cut to the chase. What's in all this drudgery for someone like *me*?"

A lot, actually—because remember, writing is not just a fine art, it's also a *practical* art. It has a multitude of purposes that span from the mundane to the sublime. It is unfortunate that one of the most important life skills tends to be so unpleasant for many students. Believe me, I can relate! Although I am on the other side of the desk now, I was also once a student who usually disliked academic writing.

Like most of my peers, I plodded my way through years of grueling English classes and papers with a single purpose in mind: to get good grades, so that I could go to college. When I finally got to college, I again plodded my way through classes and endless papers with a single purpose in mind: to get good grades, so that I could graduate from college. Although I wanted to be an author someday, seldom did I consider that these classes might help me with that. My mind just didn't connect the two ideas.

Before you embark on your study of writing, a subject you may not have chosen to learn, I want you to spend a few minutes answering the question, "What's the point?" Any time people invest a major part of their lives in learning something, they should understand its value! Doing so may help you come to your lessons and assignments with a greater sense of purpose and a deeper commitment to doing your best work—or at least it may convince you that you are not just wasting your time! So before we continue, I will ask you to pause and complete an exercise. Please don't read ahead until you are finished. Your parent should see it and discuss it with you before you continue with the lesson.

## Exercise

For this exercise you will complete a two-paragraph essay in your writing notebook in the "Writing Exercises" section. In the first paragraph I want you reflect on your feelings about writing. Do you hate it? Enjoy it? Find it frustrating? Are you convinced that you are terrible at it...and if so, why? What do you think about creative writing? Do you dread writing compositions and other papers? Does it intimidate you or interest you? Sharing your thoughts on writing will both help your parent understand your unspoken feelings and experiences with writing and will give you a starting point from which to grow as a writer. Your paragraph should be a minimum of 6 sentences.

The second paragraph will describe what you think is the value of learning how to write well. In other words, what might be some purposes for it other than helping you get a diploma? What are ways in which you might need or want to use your writing skills in the future? How do you

observe other people putting their writing skills to good use? This paragraph should be a minimum of 6 sentences, as well.

When you are finished with your essay, share it with your parent. Discuss it as needed. Then continue with the lesson.

## SESSION 2

### Lesson—More Reasons for Learning to Write Well

Now that you have given some thought to the value of having strong writing skills, here is my own list:

- Strong writing skills allow you to communicate confidently with all kinds of people in various situations.
- Knowing how to write well not only boosts your self-confidence, it also increases your credibility with those you want to influence or impress. Your credibility is important because it is about how believable and trustworthy you are.
- You will not be dependent on other people when you are in situations that require strong writing.
- Good writing skills are not something only authors need. Many careers require them. In fact, in a competitive job market such skills may give you the edge you need just to get the job you want, let alone keep it.
- Much of today's communication is done via email, letters, and other written documents. The better your skills are, the faster and easier this communication will be for you.
- You may not be able to get into certain educational programs without knowing how to write reasonably well. Many adults pursue further education years after they have completed their formal schooling, either to advance in their career or to switch careers altogether. Writing skills are life skills and thus remain useful and valuable long after you enter the adult world.
- Besides being a practical skill, knowing how to write well is also valuable for its own sake. It is no less a fine art than is painting or playing the violin; therefore, it is often more enjoyable to experience the writing of others when you understand its underlying principles. This is true of any art.
- Being able to produce your own beautiful writing can be fun, meaningful, and deeply satisfying.
- You can rest assured that mastering the art of writing well will never be a waste of your time.

While even one of these reasons is enough to warrant a writing course, maybe you are still wondering if you can learn how to write well enough in a single year. Is one thorough course enough? Here are three reasons you need to study and practice writing every year of grade school:

- First, remember that I said above that writing is an art form, not just a set of skills to master. Perhaps the basics of any art can be learned in one or two courses, but that isn't enough to truly master it. Even masters usually train for years. You may not want to become a great author, but again, remember that writing is a practical art, as well as a fine art. It is as practical as cooking, sewing, and gardening and will be useful your whole life. Learning how to do it well is worth your time and effort.
- Second, writing is an art form that is particularly tied to mental and emotional maturity. Your ability to express ideas in stylish, rich, and meaningful ways grows as you grow. In other words, the more life experiences you have and the more you mature, the better writer you will become. This, of course, takes time, practice, and guidance.
- Third, learning how to write well might seem pretty simple; after all, most people can speak well enough, so surely there can't be a great leap to writing just as well. Oddly enough, it doesn't work that way. The truth is that there is a great deal more to learn about writing than just transferring speech to paper and organizing it into grammatical paragraphs. In fact, there is so much to learn that my local Barnes & Noble has five shelves of books just on creative and professional writing alone, never mind the books on academic writing, grammar, style, and vocabulary! You can even earn college degrees in writing.

Although I hope these reasons are enough for you also hope you will discover that you enjoy expressing yourself on the page as you become more comfortable with it. It is possible, though, that you may never find writing anything but unpleasant. That's okay, but stick with it. Once you are on the other side of your schooling someday, you will be glad you did!

## Exercises

- 1) Review lesson 2.
- 2) Complete the lesson 2-3, open-note quiz.