

Discovering Language Arts

Intermediate Writing

Teacher's Guide

Grade Level: 6–8

Curriculum Focus: Language Arts

Lesson Duration: 2–3 class periods

Program Description

Ready to Write (8 min.) – The first step in writing is to brainstorm ideas you might want to write about. Then, you can research your topic and make an outline. **Writing & Revising** (6 min.) – As a writer it is important to check your work for grammar and punctuation errors, clarity of meaning, descriptive details, and sentence variety. **Editing and Publishing** (7 min.) – Editing your work before publishing it allows readers to focus on your ideas instead of your errors. **Constructive Criticism** (6 min.) – When giving criticism you should read with a set of criteria, or standards, in mind. When you receive criticism from others, remember that the comments are intended to improve your writing. **Consider Your Audience** (7 min.) – It's helpful to consider your audience when you write and change the writing style and language you use accordingly. **Consider Your Purpose** (7 min.) – Before you begin writing it is helpful to identify your purpose. You may be writing to inform, to persuade, or even to entertain your readers. **Expository Writing** (4 min.) – Expository writing informs your readers. Everyday examples of this kind of writing can be found in newspapers and in nonfiction books and magazines. **A Titanic Short Story** (7 min.) – Narrative accounts tell a story and have plots that are driven by some sort of conflict and resolution. **Writing an Autobiography** (7 min.) – An autobiography is a biography in which the author writes about

his or her own life. This type of story is told from the first person point of view. **Writing a Biography** (7 min.) – When you write a biography it should include a description of the person, background information about their life, and specific actions that person took, as well as quotes. **Persuasive Ideas** (6 min.) – Persuasive writing tries to influence a person to think a certain way or take a certain action. **Problems and Solutions** (6 min.) – Writers follow certain steps in order to address solutions to problems in their writing. First, they define the problem. Then, they offer possible solutions. Finally, writers present logical reasoning to explain the benefits of these solutions. **Responding to Edgar Allan Poe** (6 min.) – When you respond to and analyze literature you need to take a position on how a writer did something or made you feel. Then you make a case to support your position based on things you pull from the story. **Taking Care of Business Letters** (6 min.) – Writing a business letter involves following a certain form. The body of the letter should begin with the writer's purpose and stay focused. **The Writing's on the Wall** (6 min.) – Technical writing explains specific information in understandable terms. This kind of writing may be instructional, list materials and equipment that is to be used, and should be formatted in a logical order.

Onscreen Questions

- Choose a book you have recently read. Brainstorm the main ideas of the book by asking the questions: Who, what, when, where, and why?
 - Next time you write, remember to check your work for clarity and add details.
 - Write a short paragraph about a place where you have traveled. Then prepare it for publishing by editing it carefully.
 - Write a paragraph about a book you have recently read. Swap papers with a classmate and give each other constructive criticism.
 - Write a paragraph to your teacher and one to your friend about the Space Shuttle. Consider your audience as you write each one.
 - Write an imaginative story about space for a small child. Use a writing style that fits your purpose.
 - Write an expository paragraph about you and a friend. Use the compare and contrast method. Explain which characteristics about you are the same and which are different.
 - Write a narrative account from the point of view of a character who might have traveled on the Titanic. Move the plot forward by creating a conflict.
 - Write a short autobiography. Include the major events in your life and explain why they are important to you.
 - Write a biography about a classmate. Include a description, background information, actions, and quotes.
 - Write a persuasive article about environmental concerns in the Galápagos Islands.
 - Choose an environmental issue that concerns you. Write an informational pamphlet that defines the problem and offers at least one well-reasoned solution.
 - Write an essay in response to Poe's short story. How did the story make you feel?
 - Practice writing a business letter to an expert requesting information on a subject that interests you.
 - Write a booklet outlining the rules at your school. Explain why they are important.
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Lesson Plan

Student Objectives

- Identify the purpose of technical writing.
- Describe the differences between technical and other kinds of writing.

- Write a technical manual with instructions on how to assemble something or complete a specific task.

Materials

- *Intermediate Writing* video
- Writing paper
- Drawing paper
- Pencils and erasers
- Rulers
- Crayons, markers, or colored pencils
- Reference books
- Computer with Internet access (optional)

Procedures

1. Watch *Intermediate Writing* with your students and discuss the different kinds of writing featured. What is expository writing? How would you describe the differences between narrative and expository writing? What are some differences between biographies and autobiographies?

Then focus the discussion on technical writing. How does technical writing differ from narrative and expository writing? What is its purpose? (*To explain specific information in understandable terms*) What kind of language do technical writers use? Why? What three components are found in technical writing? (*It is instructional, includes equipment and materials, and written in a logical order.*)

2. Tell students that they will use technical writing to create individual instructional manuals. Create a quick class example on the board using an idea such as “how to make a peanut butter and jelly sandwich.” First, ask students to list the necessary equipment and materials. Write the items on the board. Ask volunteers to write on the board the steps it takes to make a sandwich. Ask students: What should you do first? What comes next? Is there a proper way to spread the jelly? Discuss the steps that students have written. Is the language clear and concise? If not, edit as necessary. Have volunteers draw simple illustrations for each step. How might illustrations help a person make a peanut butter and jelly sandwich? What must be considered when creating illustrations for an instructional manual?
3. Explain to your class that each student will write an instructional manual about a task, project, skill, or activity. Each manual must include a list of necessary materials and equipment, at least five instructional steps, and an illustration or diagram for each step.
4. Help students come up with ideas for their manuals by asking them questions about their favorite sports and hobbies or their unique talents, skills, or trips they have taken. Whatever the

topic, remind students that their instruction manuals should use simple, clear, and concise language and all instructions should be written in a logical order.

5. Give students time to work on their manuals in class and as a homework assignment. Allow them to use reference books and Internet resources to learn more about the task or activity they are writing about and to help them in creating their illustrations.
6. Once students have finished writing their manuals, divide them into groups of three or four and have each member of the group read all the manuals. Then have student groups discuss them. Were the instructions written in logical order? Was the language clear and concise? Was anything missing in a set of instructions? Could you follow the instructions to do the activity or task being described? Walk around the classroom as the groups are working and assess student understanding of the lesson.
7. Keep the class manuals on display in the classroom so that students can look through them another time.

Assessment

Use the following three-point rubric to evaluate students' work during this lesson.

- **3 points:** Students clearly and easily identified the purpose of technical writing; accurately described the differences between technical writing and other writing; and wrote creative manuals that consisted of at least five instructional steps, used concise language to present information in logical order, included a complete list of all necessary equipment and materials, and included easy-to-follow illustrations for each step.
- **2 points:** Students adequately identified the purpose of technical writing; described the differences between technical writing and other writing; wrote somewhat creative manuals that consisted of at least three instructional steps, used mostly concise language to present the step-by-step information in a generally logical order, included a list of most necessary equipment and materials, and included somewhat easy-to-follow diagrams or illustrations for most of the steps.
- **1 point:** Students were unable to identify the purpose of technical writing without assistance; and wrote incomplete manuals that consisted of two or fewer instructional steps, did not use concise language, did not present the step-by-step information in a logical order, included a list of most necessary equipment and materials, and included two or fewer unrelated or complicated diagrams or illustrations.

Vocabulary

concise

Definition: Expressing much in few words; clear and succinct

Context: It is formatted in a logical order and always uses clear, concise language.

information

Definition: Knowledge derived from study, experience, or instruction

Context: Technical writing explains specific information in understandable terms.

instructions

Definition: Detailed directions about a procedure

Context: Technical writing in safety manuals often provides instructions and other useful information.

manual

Definition: A small reference book, especially one giving instructions

Context: Use technical writing to create a safety manual for construction workers.

technical

Definition: Used in or peculiar to a specific field or profession

Context: In some cases, technical information deals with highly specialized or dangerous equipment.

Academic Standards

Mid-continent Research for Education and Learning (McREL)

McREL's Content Knowledge: A Compendium of Standards and Benchmarks for K-12 Education addresses 14 content areas. To view the standards and benchmarks, visit

<http://www.mcrel.org/compendium/browse.asp>

This lesson plan addresses the following national standards:

- Language Arts – Writing: Uses the general skills and strategies of the writing process; Uses the stylistic and rhetorical aspects of writing; Uses grammatical and mechanical conventions in written compositions
- Language Arts – Viewing: Uses viewing skills and strategies to understand and interpret visual media

The National Council of Teachers of English (NCTE)

The National Council of Teachers of English and the International Reading Association have developed national standards to provide guidelines for teaching the English language arts. To view the standards online, go to <http://www.ncte.org/about/over/standards/110846.htm>

This lesson plan addresses the following English standards:

- Students employ a wide range of strategies as they write and use different writing process elements appropriately to communicate with different audiences for a variety of purposes
- Students use spoken, written and visual language to accomplish their own purposes

- Students apply knowledge of language structure, language conventions (e.g., spelling and punctuation), media techniques, figurative language, and genre to create, critique, and discuss print and non-print texts.
 - Students adjust their use of spoken, written, and visual language (e.g., conventions, style, vocabulary) to communicate effectively with a variety of audiences and for different purposes.
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Support Materials

Develop custom worksheets, educational puzzles, online quizzes, and more with the free teaching tools offered on the [Discoveryschool.com](http://www.discoveryschool.com) Web site. Create and print support materials, or save them to a Custom Classroom account for future use. To learn more, visit

- <http://school.discovery.com/teachingtools/teachingtools.html>
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DVD Content

This program is available in an interactive DVD format. The following information and activities are specific to the DVD version.

How To Use the DVD

The DVD starting screen has the following options:

Play Video—This plays the video from start to finish. There are no programmed stops, except by using a remote control. With a computer, depending on the particular software player, a pause button is included with the other video controls.

Video Index—Here the video is divided into sections indicated by video thumbnail icons; brief descriptions are noted for each one. Watching all parts in sequence is similar to watching the video from start to finish. To play a particular segment, press Enter on the remote for TV playback; on a computer, click once to highlight a thumbnail and read the accompanying text description and click again to start the video.

Curriculum Units—These are specially edited video segments pulled from different sections of the video (see below). These nonlinear segments align with key ideas in the unit of instruction. They include onscreen pre- and post-viewing questions, reproduced below in this Teacher's Guide. Total running times for these segments are noted. To play a particular segment, press Enter on the TV remote or click once on the Curriculum Unit title on a computer.

Standards Link—Selecting this option displays a single screen that lists the national academic standards the video addresses.



Teacher Resources — This screen gives the technical support number and Web site address.

Video Index

I. Ready to Write

Prewriting is the work that takes place before writing. Explore the steps you should follow during prewriting to create better work.

II. Writing and Revising

Revise your work to make it clearer and more interesting: check for clarity, descriptive details, and sentence variety.

III. Editing and Publishing

Discuss editing methods that will help readers focus on ideas instead of errors in your work.

IV. Constructive Criticism

Learn how to give constructive criticism to others and how to evaluate your own work.

V. Consider Your Audience

Writers change the style of their writing based on the audience. Compare the writing styles of a letter to a friend and of a school research report.

VI. Consider Your Purpose

Explore the differences between writing to inform, to persuade, and to entertain.

VII. Expository Writing

Learn about writing an expository thesis and how to compare and contrast effectively.

VIII. A Titanic Short Story

Discuss the importance of narrative elements, including plot, complex characters, and conflict and resolution.

IX. Writing an Autobiography

Explore the elements usually described in an autobiography.

X. Writing a Biography

Discover the kinds of information described in a biography.

XI. Persuasive Ideas

Learn how persuasive writing conveys ideas and how to write a good, persuasive argument.

XII. Problems and Solutions

Examine the steps involved in identifying and solving a problem through writing.

XIII. Responding to Edgar Allan Poe

Discuss stories by Edgar Allan Poe and explore how readers respond to literature.

XIV. Taking Care of Business Letters

Learn how to properly organize and write a formal business letter.

XV. The Writing's on the Wall

Discover how safety manuals and other technical writing differ from expository and creative texts.

Curriculum Units

1. The Prewriting Process

Pre-viewing question

Q: How do you prepare to write a story or report?

A: Answers will vary.

Post-viewing question

Q: What are the three stages of the prewriting process?

A: Brainstorming a topic, researching it, and making an outline to organize what to write.

2. Revising Your Work

Pre-viewing question

Q: Why is editing and revising helpful in writing?

A: Answers will vary.

Post-viewing question

Q: Why is it important to vary sentence structure?

A: Variety helps keep readers engaged because the writing is clearer and more interesting.

3. Checking for Errors

Pre-viewing question

Q: What kinds of errors or mistakes might writers make?

A: Answers will vary.

Post-viewing question

Q: What should you look for when editing written work?

A: Check it for spelling and grammatical errors, correct capitalization and punctuation, and appropriate vocabulary and verb tense.

4. Evaluate Your Writing

Pre-viewing question

Q: Have you ever offered constructive criticism?

A: Answers will vary.

Post-viewing question

Q: What is a helpful way to offer constructive criticism about written work?

A: Read the work with criteria in mind: presentation, organization, grammar, spelling, and knowledge of the subject matter.

5. Changing Writing Style

Pre-viewing question

Q: Do you speak differently with your friends, parents, and teachers?

A: Answers will vary.

Post-viewing question

Q: How do school reports, stories for children, and letters to friends differ structurally and stylistically?

A: A report provides information clearly and accurately; it should be written in complete sentences and use appropriate vocabulary. Writing for children requires using vocabulary they can understand and often illustrations. A letter to a friend can use slang words and does not require any formal structure.

6. Purposes for Writing

Pre-viewing question

Q: What topics have you written about in reports or essays?

A: Answers will vary.

Post-viewing question

Q: What are the differences between informative, persuasive, and entertaining writing?

A: Informative writing – found in textbooks, newspapers, magazines, and nonfiction books – presents facts without opinions.

Writing to entertain may inform or teach something, but does so in an entertaining way through things like jokes and puns. You can find this style in fiction books, jokes, satires, limericks, and creative stories.

Found in advertisements and in letters asking for donations or favors, persuasive writing tries to persuade the reader to behave in a certain way.

7. Organizing an Expository Paper

Pre-viewing question

Q: Have you ever written an expository paper?

A: Answers will vary.

Post-viewing question

Q: What is a thesis?

A: A thesis is a statement that tells the reader the major points of the paper. An expository paper begins with an introduction, which includes a sentence called a thesis.

8. Telling a Narrative Story

Pre-viewing question

Q: Have you ever written a short story?

A: Answers will vary.

Post-viewing question

Q: What are the story elements that make a narrative account interesting?

A: An engaging plot and complex characters pull readers in. Conflict and resolution drive the storyline.

9. Organizing an Autobiography

Pre-viewing question

Q: What would you include in your autobiography?

A: Answers will vary.

Post-viewing question

Q: How does an autobiography differ from other biographies?

A: An autobiography tells a story from the writer's perspective, using first person.

10. Information in a Biography

Pre-viewing question

Q: What would you like to learn from reading a biography?

A: Answers will vary.

Post-viewing question

Q: What information often appears in a biography?

A: A biography includes details about the writer, including personal descriptions and impressions, background information, important events, and quotations.

11. Write to Persuade

Pre-viewing question

Q: Have you ever written a persuasive paper?

A: Answers will vary.

Post-viewing question

Q: Why should you include details cited from specific sources when writing a persuasive report or essay?

A: In trying to write a compelling, persuasive argument by presenting facts, it is important to cite reliable sources.

12. Finding Solutions to Problems

Pre-viewing question

Q: How do you try to solve problems?

A: Answers will vary.

Post-viewing question

Q: Describe how to identify and solve a problem through writing.

A: State the problem clearly; then write solutions and offer logical reasons that support them.

13. Writing a Response to Literature

Pre-viewing question

Q: What have you ever written about a story or book?

A: Answers will vary.

Post-viewing question

Q: What is required before writing a response to literature?

A: Writing a response requires interpreting its meaning; understanding the plot, events, and characters; and making connections between the reading and existing knowledge. Take a position on how the work made you feel, and use examples to support your position.

14. Writing a Business Letter

Pre-viewing question

Q: Have you ever written a formal letter?

A: Answers will vary.

Post-viewing question

Q: Describe the standard form of a business letter.

A: While business letters can accomplish different tasks, they all share the same standard form. From top to bottom a business letter includes the return address, date, address of the recipient, greeting, body, close, and signature. The body of the letter should begin with the writer's purpose or request and stay focused.

15. Technical Writing

Pre-viewing question

Q: What kinds of activities, tasks, or objects require safety or instructional manuals?

A: Answers will vary.

Post-viewing question

Q: How is technical writing different from creative or expository writing?

A: Technical writing explains specific information that may be instructional or may list necessary materials and equipment, and it is always formatted in a logical order.