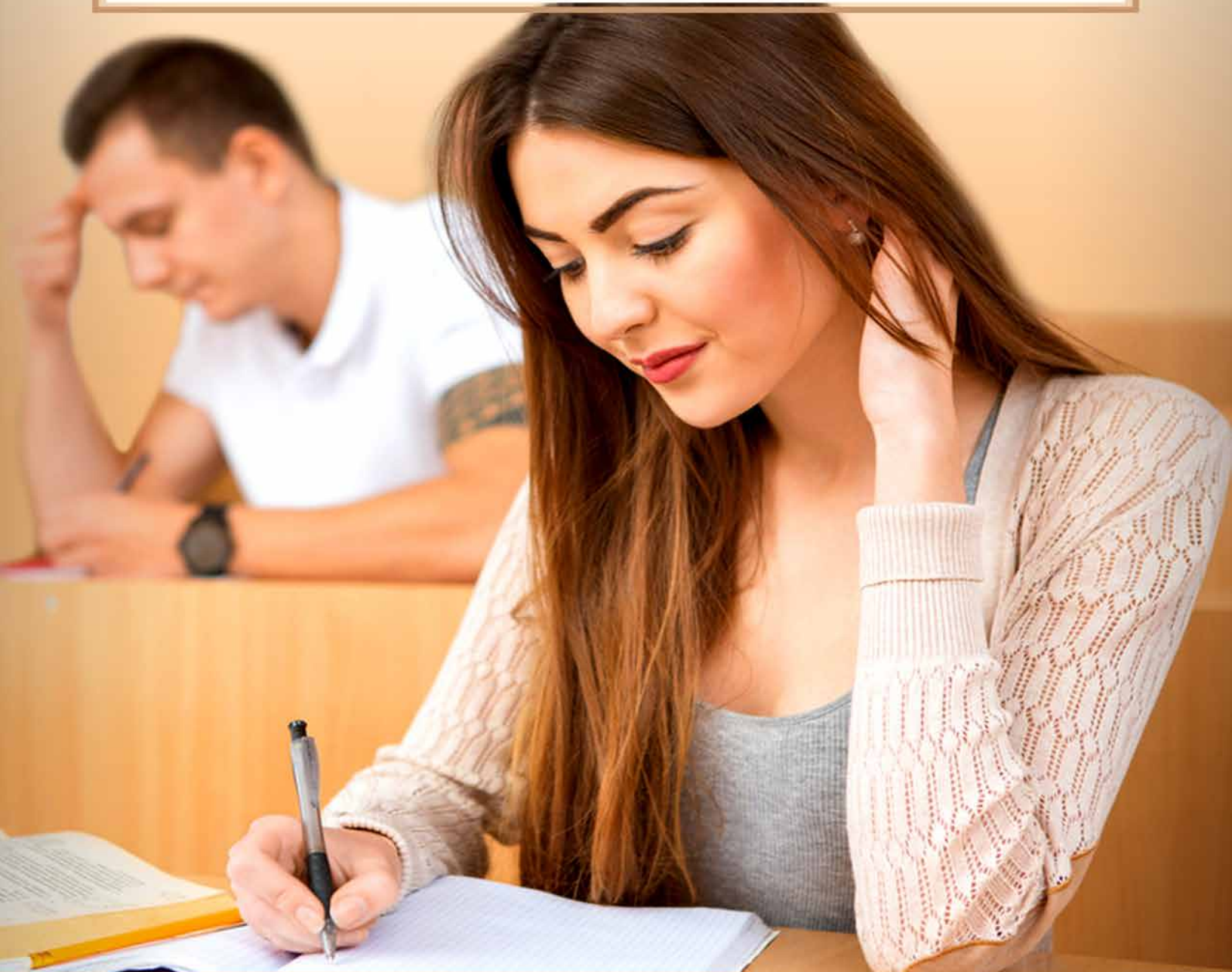


TEACH WRITING THINKINGLY

20 CLASSROOM READY LESSONS



ROB WHYTE BA, M.SC.

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INTRODUCTION

Teach Writing Thinkingly is admittedly a quirky title, but it does neatly capture the two-pronged cognitive aim of this ebook:

To provide teachers with resources to help intermediate+ level non-native English speaking students *learn to write* and *write to learn*.

The 20 writing activities, divided into two sections, are designed to help students notice and learn the skills required to write coherent and cogent passages, anything from a paragraph to a two-page text.

Although essays are not the focus of this ebook, the skills developed in these lessons could benefit learners hoping to do well on the written portion of a high-stakes test.

Approach

Each activity has a set of learning outcomes which are in line with the 6+1 Writing Traits. These include clear ideas, organisational flow, sentence fluency, writer's voice and overall proficiency.

That's quite a list of skills for students to think about. That's also what makes this teacher's resource a little different from mainstream writing books. You know, the ones promising to guide students from sentences to paragraphs. Or the ones that place a heavy emphasis on five paragraph essay templates.

Their singular message, in my humble opinion, prevents students from approaching the task of writing from a global perspective.

That's why I find the 6+1 traits so useful and compelling. On the one hand, they collectively answer the essential question: what is good writing?

On the other hand, they help teachers design lessons by highlighting learning outcomes students need to notice, think about and grapple with as they meander down the path towards good writing.

Table I-1 lists the 6+1 traits. While designing the lessons for this ebook, I've tried to ensure learning outcomes connect with these traits. The one exception is presentation, which I assume most teachers discuss with students on the first day of classes.

Learn to Write What?

The first aim is to get students thinking about writing with style. In this context, style is an aggregation of techniques which, when used in tandem, can transform a bland, incomprehensible text into a readable piece.

The ability to write with style is a skill that can be taught. In my experience, a good number of students are capable of producing very readable and, on occasion, delightful passages by learning a few simple tricks in the classroom.

William Zinsser in his classic, *On Writing Well*, compared writing to carpentry. Both are crafts that can be learned, but require an understanding of basic methods before something worthwhile, or even beautiful, can be created.

The writing skills developed in this ebook are unabashedly modest by Zinsser's standards, but you might be surprised by the quality of work students can pound out when their writer's tool kit includes a hammer and some nails.

Providing students with a few nails is the purpose of Section 1. After completing these lessons, students will be able to:

- engage the reader by writing captivating first sentences;
- define voice and describe its relevance to writing by completing one classroom activity;
- compose with style by using a mix of sentence structures;
- produce detail-rich text by using strategies to identify information gaps and generate ideas;
- demonstrate an ability to correct basic errors by practicing proofreading skills.

Writing to Learn What?

Building on the foundation of knowledge, skills and strategies set out in the previous section, the learning outcomes in Section 2 nudge students into the world of ideas and critical thinking.

The intent here is to construct a nuts and bolts understanding of arguments. That is to say, students use writing as a vehicle to learn how to create, express and critique ideas with reason.

What is critical thinking?

Good question. Spend some time reading the literature and you're apt to find a befuddling array of answers.

Here's a definition that closely matches my thoughts about the needs of my students, and hopefully yours, too.

“Critical thinking is the ability to analyze, synthesize, interpret and evaluate ideas, information, situations and texts.”¹

¹ Florida State University, *College Composition Teachers' Guide*. (Tallahassee, FL: Florida State University, 2016), p.8.

When students think critically about the text they read, the advertisements they watch and the images they look at, they are able to identify the arguments, evaluate the claims, and question the premises. With that knowledge, they can make smart, informed decisions.

Lofty expectations to be sure, especially for a writing class designed for non-native English speakers.

That's why Section 2 activities focus on a narrow range of learning outcomes.




They introduce students to sentence patterns and thinking strategies that can help them engage in the process of critical thinking in English, not master it.

After completing these lessons, students will be able to:

- define argument, claim and premise by completing assignments that involve a panoply of media and authentic materials;
- identify and evaluate arguments by analyzing inferences, hypotheses and analogies;
- differentiate correlation from causation by interpreting and analyzing charts and table data.

Lesson Organisation

Each lesson has three sections. The first is a small box with three icons, as shown in the box below. It provides a quick overview of the lesson.

	estimated lesson time
	resources (i.e. exhibits or images)
	general lesson description

The second is a description of the lesson's objectives.

The third section is a task description. This includes suggested instructions, exhibits which can be used in class to aid student comprehension (or teacher's notes) and links to online resources.

FAIR USE

With your purchase of this ebook, you are free to use the content for non-commercial educational purposes. As a professional courtesy, I would kindly ask you not to redistribute this ebook out of respect for the hundreds of hours required to research, write and produce this product.

In this age of sharing, I know that's a huge request. But, after examining *Teach Writing Thinkingly*, I hope that you'll appreciate the amount of time required to complete this project.

And teachers, if nothing else, respect other people's time.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Originally from Canada, Rob is a long-time resident of South Korea. He teaches at a university where his course work includes English composition and conversation; occasionally he leads courses in political science, cross cultural communication and teaching methodology.

A veteran teacher trainer, he has created and lead modules in composition, extensive reading, English conversation and critical thinking for elementary and secondary school teachers.

Outside the classroom, he runs a small ebook publishing firm specializing in teacher support material, and sometimes writes about Korean travel and food for Lonely Planet.

Table I-1
6+1 Writing Traits ²

1. IDEA

- The message, an argument. Stimulating, interesting, surprising.

2. ORGANISATION

- The structure of writing. Good paragraphs. There is a beginning and an end. The story unfolds with ease.

3. VOICE

- The writer's opinion and experience are easy to see. The writing does not come from a template. There is feeling, humor, and personality.

4. WORD CHOICE

- Descriptive, evocative vocabulary. Great words create images in the reader's mind. Show me, don't tell me.

5. SENTENCE FLUENCY

- Sentences have rhythm, just like music. They have beats. Playing with long and short sentences creates rhythm.

6. CONVENTIONS

- The mechanics of writing, which includes spelling, punctuation, capitalization, grammar and paragraphing.

7. PRESENTATION

- It looks good on paper. It's easy to read. Words follow the lines and stay inside the margins.

² Education Northwest, *Trait Definitions*. <http://educationnorthwest.org/traits/trait-definitions>

6. UFO Story



20-40
min



Storyboard 1



sentence fluency, organisation

What is it?

It's a creative writing activity that demands attention to detail and a good deal of imagination. This activity builds on writing and thinking skills developed in the two previous lessons.

Objectives

By the end of this lesson, students should be able to:

- identify information gaps in the story by using the questioning strategy outlined in Lesson 4;
- demonstrate elements of writing style by using complex sentences as reviewed in Lesson 5;
- create a strong sense of place by vividly describing the inside of a UFO.

Flow

Step 1 Introduction

Copy or display Storyboard 1.

Explain objectives of exercise. Students will write a creative story based on a picture prompt.

Step 2 Review Complex Sentences

Optional:

- review some of the Exhibits in

Lesson 5 before starting this creative writing assignment, so that students remember how to write a complex sentence.

Step 3 Introduce Prompt

Students will write creative story about a boy, a UFO and a journey.

In my experience, the first draft produced by students tends to be light on details when describing the inside of the UFO.

To avoid that problem, point out that students can write a much more interesting story if they fill in the gaps by using a questioning strategy.

They might, for example, ask these questions:

- Why did the boy go inside?
- What does the interior look like?
- Who or what is inside the UFO?
- What did the boy do inside the space ship?
- How did the boy react?

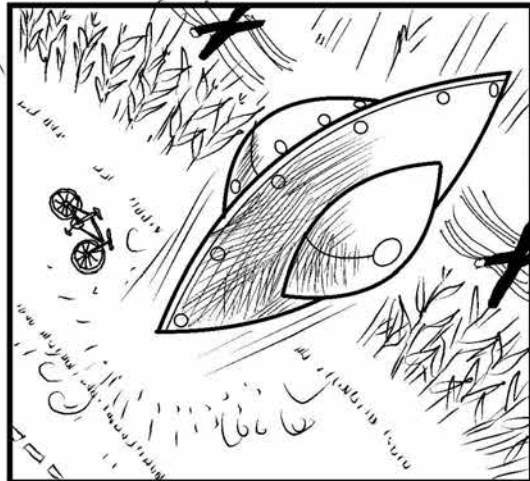
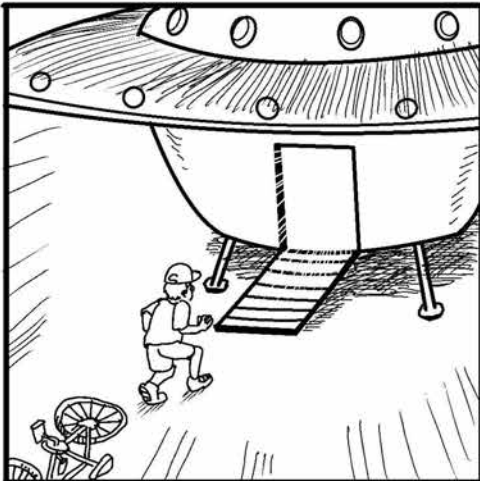
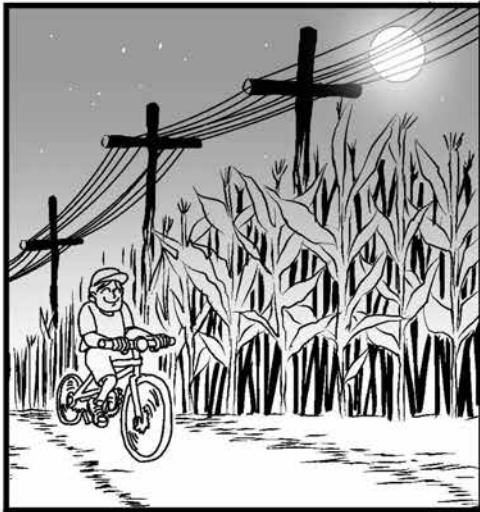
Step 4 Writing

Students write a 1 to 2 page creative story with a strong beginning, middle and end.

Optional:

- require students to write at least one complex sentence per picture in the storyboard.

Storyboard 1
The Ride



17. Thinking About Life



20-60
min



Exhibits 17-1 to 17-3



cubing, summarise, evaluate

What is it?

Is life a journey, or something else? That's the question students will tackle with a simple framework to develop a thoughtful answer.

Objectives

By the end of this lesson, students should be able to:

- demonstrate an ability to listen for gist by answering comprehension questions about an oral presentation;
- organize ideas by changing an analogy into an argument;
- develop a thoughtful understanding of a presentation's message by using a cubing framework.
- write an effective summary by filtering out unnecessary information;
- compose a well organized report by integrating various kinds of information into a text that summarizes, analyzes and evaluates an argument.

Flow

Step 1 Assign Homework

One week before running this lesson in class, assign homework:

- watch a video (about 3 minutes)
- answer questions on Exhibit 17-1

Student success in this lesson depends on their ability to understand the argument. I assign homework because they usually need to listen to the video several times in order to get it.

► Point Out

The video is called "Alan Watts & David Lindberg - Why Your Life Is Not A Journey."

It's hosted on Vimeo and YouTube. The Vimeo url is:

- <https://vimeo.com/176370337>.

The video's background images are not relevant. The spoken words are important. The video has closed captions.

Step 2 Comprehension Check

One week later, copy or display Exhibits 17-1 and 17-2. Review answers on Exhibit 17-1 in class. Suggested answers are on Exhibit 17-2.

Step 3 Writing

Copy or display Exhibit 17-3. It provides students with a writing guide. The guide is based on the Cubing framework presented in Lesson 7.

Students should write a 1 to 2 page report that:

- summarises the speaker's main ideas
- analyzes the argument
- evaluates the ideas

► Point Out

The report includes a summary, so students should avoid retelling the whole story. Filtering unnecessary information is a key component of this challenge.

Exhibit 17-1
Is Life a Journey or Something Else?

Instructions

Use this Exhibit to deepen your understanding of the speaker's story in the video, Alan Watts & David Lindberg - Why Your Life Is Not A Journey.

- <https://vimeo.com/176370337>

Part 1. Vocabulary

Before watching the video, write a brief definition for these words and phrases.

1. physical universe
2. necessity
3. destination
4. an analogy with music
5. composer
6. a racket
7. a quota
8. senior citizens' community

Part 2. Comprehension

While listening to the speaker, take notes and answer these questions.

1. Why or how is the universe playful?
2. How are music and dance different from travel?
3. Summarize the speaker's description of the way education works.
4. What does the speaker mean when he says, "I've arrived"?
5. What does the speaker mean when he says, "We simply cheated ourselves the whole way down the line"?
6. Explain the meaning of this sentence: "It was a musical thing, and you were supposed to sing or to dance while the music was being played."

Exhibit 17-2
Is Life a Journey or Something Else? - Suggested Answers

Part 1. Vocabulary

1. physical universe - everything in space
2. necessity - something required, must have
3. destination - the place you want to be or go
4. an analogy with music - understand the idea by comparing it with music
5. composer - the person who writes or creates music
6. a racket - a dishonest business to make money
7. a quota - a target that must be achieved, usually in sales
8. senior citizens' community - an apartment building where retired people live

Part 2. Comprehension

1. Why or how is the universe playful?
 - The universe isn't necessary. It doesn't have a specific purpose or final destination.
2. How are music and dance different from travel?
 - They are playful and the end is not the most important part. In contrast, the end is the most important part of travel.
3. Summarize the speaker's description of the way education works.
 - Schools push students to a future destination through a series of steps. It's a journey with grades and tests from kindergarten to university.
4. What does the speaker mean when he says, "I've arrived"?
 - After years of work, a person notices that he/she has reached the final destination, usually defined by some level of success or achievement.
5. What does the speaker mean when he says, "We simply cheated ourselves the whole way down the line"?
 - We forgot to enjoy ourselves. We were told work and sacrifice would produce a big benefit later in life, but that benefit doesn't actually exist. We sacrificed happiness and joy today for some future benefit.
6. Explain the meaning of this sentence: "It was a musical thing, and you were supposed to sing or to dance while the music was being played."
 - Life has a beginning and an end, like music. For the short time we are alive we are supposed to enjoy ourselves. When the music is over, life is over and there is no chance to experience joy.

Exhibit 17-3
The Analogy of Life: Write a Report

Instructions

Write a report which summarizes, analyzes and evaluates the argument presented in the video, *Why Your Life Is Not A Journey*.

Here are some general suggestions to guide your thinking and writing. These questions use a cubing framework which helps us understand something by asking many different kinds of questions.

1. DESCRIBE: What is the speaker's main argument?
2. COMPARE: Is it similar to another idea or thing?
3. CONTRAST: How is it different from others? What makes it unique?
4. ANALYZE: Divide his argument into smaller parts so that it's easier to understand.
5. APPLY: What can we learn from the speaker's message?
6. ARGUE: What do you think about it? What are the consequences of living a life suggested by the speaker. Is it possible? Is it a good idea? Explain your decision with reasons.