



# Tips for Using Daily Writing Prompts

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## Creating a Writing Culture in the Classroom

Our monthly writing competitions are just one way to make writing (in a variety of genres) part of your course curriculum. We hope Write the World's global platform, creative prompts, private groups for classrooms, peer reviews, and monthly competitions will help promote a culture of writing in your classroom. Belonging to a writing community, as opposed to a class that includes writing assignments, creates more buy-in, participation, and joy in the writing process. (Ralph Fletcher discusses the importance of low-stakes writing and creating a writing flow in his book [Joy Write](#).) Daily writing prompts and other tools can help to create a culture of writing in every classroom.

When every class begins with a writing prompt, the familiarity of this activity brings everyone together into the calm, focused mindset required for working together. It also emphasizes that writing and sharing ideas are the basis of your class. Of course, these are skills that can enrich any subject area—we invite teachers of all subject areas to try daily writing prompts to support metacognition, content acquisition, and social emotional learning! (Read more about the value of short writing assignments on [Edutopia](#).) Additionally, opening “quick writes” are a great way to create space and time for pre-assessments or formative assessments throughout the progression of a unit, creating opportunities to gauge students' prior knowledge, learn about their passions, and boost intrinsic motivation by connecting those passions to curricular content.

## Tips for Using Daily Writing Prompts

Here are our tips for getting the most from Daily Writing Prompts:

### **Mix up the types of prompts**

Have your students respond to a one-line prompt daily; keep it simple so it's not a burden to think of new prompts. Some prompts might introduce a theme that will become evident in the piece of literature you're studying; others might relate to a reading from the night before or to a current event in the news. Varying the prompts, and how (or if) they connect to your curriculum, means that the act of writing and the ideas students share have value on their own, even aside from the main goal of that day's lesson. Similar to our monthly “Grab Bag” prompt (available on our [“Start Writing”](#) page), you might ask your students to submit prompt ideas that you can intersperse with prompts of your own creation.

### **Always leave time for sharing two responses aloud**

Setting the expectation that two people will share their responses aloud each day accomplishes a few things: It creates an environment where sharing your work is the norm, helping to translate this practice to longer assignments; it encourages all students to speak up as everyone shares over the course of a month; and it limits the number of “shares,” keeping some level of novelty to the practice—and not overwhelming your allotted class time. You might rotate who shares rather than asking for volunteers to ensure that all students develop their sharing voice.

### **Write when the students write**

This is an opportunity to be present in the moment and to resist taking care of other responsibilities. When everyone in the room writes together, it’s a physical reminder that this is something the community values and is important enough to warrant five minutes of attention—even if it’s only reflecting on the day’s weather or a poem that was assigned for homework. (Read Penny Kittle’s thoughts on teachers as writers in [“On Joy, Teaching, and the Deep Satisfaction of Writing.”](#))

### **Provide opportunities for revisiting entries**

The school year can become its own time warp: the same routine day after day, week after week, leads to months passing in a flash. When students have the opportunity to polish something they wrote earlier in the year, they can reflect on how they have developed as writers, or how their thinking on a particular subject has evolved, promoting metacognition. Research shows that the most effective learning environments make, not only content, but the very process of learning visible ([Tomlinson & Moon, 2013](#); [Morrison, Church & Ritchhart, 2011](#)); in other words, students may be exploring symbolism in Hamlet during ELA or catalysis during science, but they are also, equally and explicitly, thinking about thinking—and learning, inquiry, knowledge building, etc. Asking students to revisit an entry and reflect on whether/how their thinking has changed, and why, promotes this powerful practice.

### **Keep it brief**

Prompts should be short and easy to understand so there’s no extra time spent on instructions. Further, as tempting as it is to allow students to continue writing when the whole class is engaged and even asking for more time, it’s important to set a time limit and to stick to it. This allows those five minutes to remain sacred—and not something that needs to be cut from the class period because it turns into ten or fifteen minutes in practice. For more on the value of time-limited free writes, you might explore the books and resources of author and writing scholar [Natalie Goldberg](#).

### **Embrace humor**

Some students might choose to write a funny response to a prompt and read it aloud. Rather than seeing these responses as derailing the activity, allow the humor to be enjoyed...before nudging everyone back on course and toward the next part of the lesson.

### **Demonstrate kindness, and also neutrality**

When a student shares a response, model for your class how to respond with kind, specific compliments on the writing or an idea the writer expressed. At the same time, consider keeping a casual tone and general level of neutrality as you respond to each piece, so that writers do not feel they need to compete with each other for your reactions to their work.

### **Share your own writing on occasion**

To further emphasize this idea of your class as a writing community, share your writing on occasion. Also, consider sharing what you find enjoyable or challenging about writing, or your favorite practices for revising your work—anything that shows that you are always evolving as a writer, just as your students are, too! The practice of modeling our own curiosities, processes, and creativity aligns with inquiry-based learning pedagogies in which teachers model the act of organic, authentic wondering, iterative engagement, and lifelong learning ([Harvey & Daniels 2015](#)).

## **Other Pre-writing Tools**

Sometimes “getting started” is the most challenging part of writing. For students who feel insecure about their writing ability or their ideas, the challenge of beginning a new assignment can be even greater.

### **Lists**

A great pre-writing strategy to keep returning to is bulleted lists. By removing the pressure of sentences and paragraphs and changing the form to a list, students can focus on the keywords of their ideas. They can circle or star the most important ideas to build their writing on, or number the ideas in the list to indicate the order in which they should be used in their writing. Lists are also a great jumping off point for writing poetry as well—every word counts in a poem, so beginning with a bare bones list of action verbs, brief descriptions, or concrete nouns helps to establish this idea from the beginning.

### **Charts**

For students who need a more visual approach to getting started, we suggest reformatting any of the suggested writing activities into chart form. Sometimes having different tasks isolated in different boxes on a page makes an activity more approachable than a paragraph of instructions. [Here are a few sample charts.](#)

### **Conversation**

To help students generate ideas at the beginning of an activity, consider having a large group discussion in which students can brainstorm ideas, ask questions, and make suggestions to one another. Beginning with a conversation can be a low stakes way to further develop an idea before writing so that the writing will flow more easily when the students begin.