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# 1 No-Brainers and Bosses: Laying the Foundation

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**I**t is the beginning of a new school year. The interior decorator in you emerges as you hang posters and arrange desks. You practice your mean face for the first day as you obsess over discipline, books, curriculum, and county mandates. And, if you're like most teachers, you worry about your kids achieving state and national benchmarks.

You're probably confident your kids will reach their reading and math goals—at least you have a curriculum. But what about writing? Chances are your teaching arsenal for writing is full of grammar lessons, spelling words, journal activities, and prompts. However, your students need more than ingenious prompts and well-executed grammar lessons to learn to write and to become lifelong writers.

Your students need structured lessons that build on what they already know and continuously add to their knowledge. They need easy-to-use writing tools that take them through the writing process. They need to watch you write and listen to you think as you write. And they need to write with support before tackling the task on their own. What your students need is explicit writing instruction.

## **CURRICULUM OVERVIEW**

This book's writing curriculum allows you to control what your students learn and the order in which they learn it. Carefully crafted, unscripted lessons cover a scope and follow a sequence that aims for success.

The lessons begin with the assumption that your students have rudimentary grammar knowledge and can construct sentences and paragraphs. Students first study prompts and two basic types of writing—expository and narrative. Next they learn to use graphic organizers to organize their thoughts. Through modeling, you will teach them how to draft essays and stories, then how to edit and revise their work. Finally you will guide your students' work to foster independence.

## 2 180 DAYS TO SUCCESSFUL WRITERS

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The curriculum focuses strongly on growth and accountability. You will continually assess your instruction, diagnose student problems, conference with students, and reteach. As such, we discuss writing assessments, including standardized writing tests, in detail. You may amend lessons or deviate from the curriculum to accommodate your teaching philosophy, students' needs, and state's guidelines.

### **Goals**

All instruction plans must be based on clearly defined goals. The scope and sequence of this curriculum were designed to help you achieve the following five goals with your third- through sixth-grade students.

1. Become a confident writing teacher.
2. Prepare your students for all practical applications of writing.
3. Prepare your students to succeed on standardized writing tests.
4. Accommodate your students' strengths and weaknesses.
5. Create confident writers of your most reluctant students.

### **Instruction Framework**

Throughout the school year, you will follow five steps to achieve your instruction goals.

1. Plan. Review lessons before instructing to streamline them for your students' needs. We recommend collaborating with a team of teachers if possible.
2. Teach. Model every new skill and guide students closely. Promote independence slowly.
3. Test. Assess students after they have worked independently.
4. Analyze results. Grade and analyze student work with a rubric. Document students' strengths and weaknesses and establish areas to reteach.
5. Teach again. Reteach according to weaknesses.

### **PREPARING TO TEACH**

1. Schedule a specific writing instruction time.
  - Ideally, this is a daily forty-five minute block. But you can accomplish the same goals with two twenty to twenty-five minute blocks each day.
2. Research language arts benchmarks and your students' writing strengths and needs.

- Review your county and state benchmarks.
  - Review your state's writing rubric (guidelines for grading writing) and compare it to the generic rubric and rubric posters provided as Resources B and C. Do the rubrics assess required benchmarks?
  - Meet with teachers in grades above and below yours to discuss their views of students' strengths, weaknesses, and writing needs. Ask for writing samples.
3. Familiarize yourself with the types of writing, the lessons, and this book's general plan.
- Review the two main types of writing taught. For the first terms, lessons focus on expository essays (a subset of informational) and narrative stories (both fantastical and realistic). After that time, students learn poetry and the practical aspects of exposition and narration (e.g., autobiographies, plays, and newspaper writing).
    - a. *Informational*: Usually in the form of expository, persuasive, or descriptive essays. Expository essays, the type taught in this book, offer detailed fictional or factual explanations regarding a topic. Expository essays often include aspects of persuasive and descriptive writing. An expository essay prompt: How would you spend a million dollars? Persuasive essays offer opinions with supporting reasons; they also discredit opposing opinions. A persuasive essay prompt: Convince me to buy a dog. Descriptive essays impart sensory experiences. Writers are expected to evoke an emotional response from readers, using smell, sound, sight, touch, and taste, as applicable. A descriptive essay prompt: Describe your dream house. None of these essay types require strict time sequences in the prose.
    - b. *Narrative*: A story, factual or fictional, told with a definite time sequence and containing a conflict. Examples: Tell about your most embarrassing moment (realistic); you awake to find you're an inch tall (imaginary).
  - Note that this writing curriculum discusses spelling, grammar, and vocabulary but does not offer regular lessons. We recommend teaching vocabulary as part of your reading program. Provide daily grammar practice and mini lessons to address the following important grammar skills: capitalization; periods; commas; contractions and apostrophes; homonyms; conjunctions, run-ons, and fragments; and subject-verb agreement. Spelling and handwriting may be assigned for homework and tested weekly outside the curriculum.
4. Address writing assessments and make necessary amendments to the general structure.
- If your state does not test writing, skip Chapters 7 and 8 and reduce the amount of time spent alternating between the two types of prompts in Chapter 6. Plan to administer a posttest after Chapter 6. Determine your student goals and how you will measure student gains, and decide how and when you will use time limits. Finally,

determine how you will use or extend projects in Chapters 9 and 10 and incorporate advanced strategies from Chapter 11.

- If your state tests writing, review its demands and address test preparation. Note that Chapters 7 and 8 assume that state tests are timed, are given approximately two-thirds of the way through the traditional school year, and ask students to write to either an expository or narrative prompt. Adapt the structure to fit your guidelines and consider administering your own posttest after Chapter 8, before teaching applications.
  - If you would like to focus on persuasive or descriptive writing, adapt the expository prompts (using Resource A), the sample writings, and the expository lessons. Adaptation notes are provided during Weeks 1 and 2, in Chapters 1 and 2.
  - If you would like to focus only on one type of narrative writing, realistic or imaginary (sometimes called fantastical), rewrite narrative prompts using Resource A.
  - If your state tests only one type of writing, teach that type of writing first and focus on its applications. Then teach the other modes of writing. Note that all modes of writing have important applications.
  - If you want to create themes, reorganize or rewrite the prompts and sample writings. Choose prompts to coincide with reading, science, or social studies.
5. Learn special terms and aspects associated with this book.
- Notes for daily plans indicate ways to prepare for lessons before class.
  - If a day is designated as a “Copy Day,” it is important for your students to copy your writing model.
  - If a day is designated as a “No Help Day,” your students are expected to write without your help. Offer close assistance any other day.
  - If a day is designated as a “Pair Day,” prepare for student collaboration, paired or grouped.
  - Figures are numbered as they appear in chapters.
  - Each week has a focus. Use this to help plan when you need to reteach skills.
  - Certain lessons call for previously modeled papers. Be sure to save all models you write.
  - Certain lessons call for previously written student papers. Students should store all written papers and handouts in their binders (see materials list in Step 8).
  - All weeks consist of five daily plans, except for Week 14. Week 14 is a three-day week with two timed writings and a lesson on friendly letters.
6. Review in detail the lesson plans for Week 1.
- Consider the pretest prompts. If you need to change or reformat them, do so.
  - Determine the time limit you would like to set if you aren’t in a state that tests writing.
  - Review the notes for Days 4 and 5. Follow recommendations.

7. Determine regular and special methods of student publication.
  - Ideally, students should publish all of their writing. However, you might not be able to afford instructional time for this task, especially if preparing students for standardized tests. We recommend providing class time at least once a month for publication. Otherwise, routinely allow students to rewrite final drafts and publish their work as homework. Display works in the room.
  - An easy publication idea is to provide each student with report folders that contain title-page inserts on the cover. Allow students to illustrate blank paper to accompany their writings and place in the cover. Students will secure completed final drafts inside. To publish new works, students simply replace the cover sheet and change out the essay or story inside. Provide a method to display the “reports”—students should be able to read each other’s work and change their own work easily.
  - Offer different ways to publish occasionally. Students may transfer final drafts to construction paper and decorate; students may write and illustrate paragraphs on separate pages to create small books; students may enter contests or publish with trusted online sites; you may put together “classroom books” by binding illustrated final drafts.
8. Gather general materials. These should be on hand for every lesson.
  - Overhead projector, blank transparencies, and overhead markers for daily use. If these aren’t available, determine a reliable method to model and display writing.
  - Chart paper, basic markers, various sized construction paper, poster boards, notebook paper and pencils for students, and materials for student publication.
  - Student binders. To save instructional time, consider putting these together now. Otherwise request students to purchase materials and set aside class time during the first week for students to put their binders together. Students will need one 3-ring binder and five dividers each. Dividers should be labeled as follows: expository; narrative; reference; conferences; other writing. Students will place written work and handouts in appropriate sections.
9. Make posters. We suggest making posters of figures and other resources to supplement the lessons. Consider making these posters now, while you have the time. Some require 22- by 28-inch poster board, while others require several pieces of 12- by 18-inch construction paper or 24- by 32-inch chart paper. A list of posters, their locations, and their recommended materials follow in the order they are used.
  - Figure 1.1. Page 9. Prompt Differentiation. Chart paper.
  - Figure 1.2. Page 11. Prompt Dissection. Chart paper.
  - Figure 2.1. Page 18. Pickle Sandwich With Hints. Poster board.
  - Figure 2.2. Page 19. Expository Transition Words. Chart paper.

## 6 180 DAYS TO SUCCESSFUL WRITERS

- Figures 2.3 and 2.4. Pages 20–23. TCUPSS. Poster board and colored construction paper.
  - Resources B and C. Pages 261–263. Rubric and Rubric Posters. Use these or your state’s rubric. Construction Paper. Use your own or Resources B and C.
  - Figure 3.2. Page 33. Rainbow Words. Eight pieces of colored construction paper.
  - Figure 3.3. Page 36. Awe-Inspiring Adjectives. Ten pieces of construction paper.
  - Figure 4.1. Page 47. Tier Cake With Hints. Poster board.
  - Figure 4.2. Page 50. Narrative Transition Words. Chart paper.
  - Figure 5.2. Page 64. Vivacious Verbs. Ten pieces of construction paper.
  - Figure 5.3. Page 67. ASK fOR LIKELY Similes. Chart paper.
  - Figure 6.1. Page 73. Mind-Bending Metaphors. Chart paper.
  - Figure 6.4. Page 84. Sensory Details. Chart paper.
  - Figure 6.5. Page 88. Street Talk. Chart paper.
  - Figures 7.13 and 7.14. Page 123. Dress Me Up Doll. Poster board and four pieces of construction paper.
10. If you’re working with a team, agree on regular meeting times.
- Informal meetings should occur weekly for fifteen to twenty minutes. During this time you will review lessons, make amendments, and discuss progress and problems.
  - Formal meetings should occur monthly or every term when you will grade each other’s student work and analyze graded work for growth and weaknesses. You may also address systematic classroom problems and ways to reteach skills.

## WEEK 1 LESSON PLANS

### *Focus: Pretests and Prompt Differentiation*

It is important to begin with an assessment of your students’ skills and knowledge. This week’s testing will help you determine your students’ strengths and weaknesses. Students will also learn to tell the difference between expository and narrative writing.

### **Day 1**

**Objectives:** Students will write and illustrate poems to decorate the room.

**Materials:** Varies according to your chosen project.

**Note:** Before class, prepare to implement your behavior management program and get your students used to your scheduled writing time.

1. At your scheduled writing time, tell students they will write every day at this time.

2. Describe the assignment. If you have a favorite “first day” writing assignment, do it. Otherwise, choose one of the two examples that follow: name poems under self-portraits or “I am” poems with illustrations.
  - *Name poems*: Students write their names vertically and come up with descriptions of themselves for each letter in their name. Start with scrap paper to generate ideas, then transpose to construction paper. Students could write single words, phrases, or complete sentences—you set the rules. Students should illustrate the final product with portraits or according to what they’ve written.
  - *“I am” poems*: Students will write poems with three stanzas, each containing five sentences. The first two words of the sentences in the stanzas follow:
    - a. Stanza 1: I am, I live, I love, I hope, I believe.
    - b. Stanza 2: I am, I can, I want, I won’t, I wonder.
    - c. Stanza 3: I am, I say, I wish, I cherish, I dream.
    - d. Discuss the following “I am” lines to prompt creativity: I am not ever going to win the lottery; I am the luckiest kid in the world; I am (name); I am forgetful (or other adjective); I am the middle child in my family; I am a basketball player (any hobby or sport); I am a daydreamer; I am going to be a star, etc.
    - e. Students should write final drafts of their poems on large construction paper, then illustrate.
3. Allow students to share their final, illustrated work with each other.

## **Day 2 (No Help Day)**

Objective: Students will complete an expository writing pretest.

Materials: Expository prompt.

Note: Before class, choose an expository (or other informational) prompt that will be applicable for an end-of-year posttest. If your state assesses, mimic the format of your state’s test when writing the prompt and consider printing the prompt along with planning and answer sheets as presented by your state. Examples of all three informational prompts follow.

- Expository: Everyone does different things on weekends. Think about how you normally spend your weekends. Now write to explain how you spend your weekends.
  - Persuasive: Your school wants to get a class pet. What would your choice be? Write an essay convincing your teacher to get the pet of your choice.
  - Descriptive: Everyone has a strong memory. Think of your strongest memory. Describe that memory to your readers.
1. Begin by telling students you will be testing them to see how well they write.
  2. Discuss the genre of the prompt students will write to. Describe the length of time students will have to write, and, if appropriate, begin discussing how this test relates to your state’s standardized test. Tell

students they will have to answer the prompt by writing an essay without your help.

3. Set a timer for your designated time limit. Pass out the test and begin timing students.
4. Students will probably get done early, but stick firmly to the time limit. Do not reward fast workers by allowing them to read or draw in the time that remains. Students need to get used to using all of their time.

### **Day 3 (No Help Day)**

Objective: Students will complete a narrative writing pretest.

Materials: Narrative prompt.

Note: Before class, choose either a realistic or an imaginary narrative prompt that will be applicable for the end-of-year posttest. Format and present the prompt similar to the expository pretest. Examples follow.

- Realistic: Everyone has had a bad day. Think about the worst day of your life. Now write a story about a day you would hate to relive.
  - Imaginary: Imagine finding yourself locked in a supermarket. Think about how this could happen and what you would do. Now write a story about being locked in a supermarket.
1. Briefly discuss that there are two main kinds of prompts, expository and narrative, and that students are getting the second kind today, the narrative. If your state tests only one mode of writing, discuss briefly which of those modes will be tested. However, tell students they will learn both types of writing.
  2. Administer the test as described above for the expository pretest.
  3. After administering both tests, assess them according to your state's rubric or use Resource B. Use student scores to indicate beginning writing levels and to assess growth over the year.

### **Day 4**

Objective: Students will differentiate expository and narrative prompts, and they will organize writing resource binders.

Materials: Figure 1.1.

Note: Before class, prepare a display of the pretest prompts and prompts listed following Step 4. If your state formats its prompts differently, make the necessary changes. Also, use chart paper to make a poster of Figure 1.1. If you are focusing on persuasive or descriptive writing, create new prompts and new key words using Resource A as a guide. For persuasive essays, key words might be "convince," "persuade," and "prove". For descriptive essays, key words might be "sensory details," "describe" and illustrate. Finally, plan to pass out or prepare student binders.



**Figure 1.1** Prompt Differentiation

<b>Expository</b>	<b>Narrative</b>
Tells you to <b>explain</b> .	Asks you to tell a <b>story</b> .
Usually asks you to discuss <b>real life</b> .	Often asks you to <b>make-believe</b> .
Sometimes asks you to <b>tell what you would do</b> .	Sometimes asks you to <b>remember a time</b> .
Needs you to <b>list information or reasons in any order; you choose the order</b> .	Needs you to <b>tell something in the order it happened</b> .

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1. Display and read the pretest prompts. Label the prompts expository or narrative.
2. Draw a simple t-chart labeled expository and narrative. Ask students to study the two prompts for differences and list these on the chart. Guide students to include the following key phrases for expository: about real life, asks for a list of different things, wants you to give reasons or explain something; and the following for narrative: can be made up; imaginary things can happen, asks about one main event, wants to hear about something in the order it happened.
3. After the most important differences have been highlighted, review them. Then tell students to take out scrap pieces of paper and number from one to five.
4. Display and read the following five prompts. Ask students to write E for expository or N for narrative next to their numbers after you read each prompt, based on the key phrases listed on the t-chart. Key words in the following prompts are italicized.
  - *Imagine* that you've won a million dollars. Think of *all the things you can do* with a million dollars. Now *explain* what you would do with your million dollars.
  - You wake up from a nap and find that you are three inches tall. *Imagine* what life would be like if you had to stay three inches tall for a whole day. Write a *story about a time* you were three inches tall *for a whole day*.
  - Everyone has a favorite day of the week. Think about your favorite day and the *reasons* you like it. Now *write to explain* what your favorite day is and why.
  - Everyone has had embarrassing moments. Think about your most embarrassing moment. Now *tell about a time* you were embarrassed.

- Think about your first day back to school. *What did you like about returning to school after summer vacation. Now explain what you like about going back to school.*
5. After allowing students to differentiate, review each prompt and provide the following correct answers. Discuss each prompt's key words and why certain prompts might have been difficult to differentiate. Key words and phrases are italicized.
    - Expository. This is difficult. It uses the word "imagine" and asks you to make believe something. But you have to *explain and make a list*.
    - Narrative. This is easy. It uses the word "story" and asks you to imagine and *tell something in the order* that it happened.
    - Expository. This is easy. This asks you to *explain and make a list of reasons*.
    - Narrative. This is difficult. This asks for a real life event and does not use the words "story" and "imagine." However, you have to *tell events in order*.
    - Expository. This is difficult. The first sentence may make kids think of a sequence of events on the first day of school. The key is students need to *list and explain the reasons* they like going back to school.
  6. Discuss why clues like "real life" and "make believe" aren't always good indicators of prompt type. Cross out these items on your t-chart. Discuss that students may make up or imagine answers for expository prompts. For example, if they had trouble thinking up interesting things they like to do during the weekend, they could have made them up during the pretest. Also some people have had very strange things happen to them, for example being stuck in a supermarket, so they may be telling the truth when writing "imaginary" stories. Furthermore, all good essays and stories will have truthful and made-up elements. Cross out other items on the t-chart that led your students astray as they differentiated prompts.
  7. Help students see that the main key words for narrative prompts are "story" and "tell about a time," while key words for expository prompts are "explain," "list," and "reasons."
  8. Display and read Figure 1.1, the prompt differentiation poster. Discuss that the best way to differentiate prompts is to determine if the prompt wants students to tell events in order (narrative) or list things in any order (expository).
  9. Following directions in the preplanning section, address writing binders.

### Day 5

Objective: Students will dissect expository and narrative prompts.

Materials: Five prompts; Figures 1.2 and 1.3.

Note: Before class, choose or create five prompts (three expository, two narrative) using Resource A as your guide. Use chart paper to make a poster of Figure 1.2. Make a teacher display and student copies of Figure 1.3, and use this figure as a template if you decide to make a quiz. Make necessary amendments to accommodate your state's format.

**Figure 1.2** Prompt Dissection

<b>Type of Prompt:</b>	
Everyone has a favorite holiday.	<b>No-Brainer.</b> The topic is holidays.
Think about your favorite holiday.	<b>Brain.</b> I have to think about holidays and choose one favorite.
Now write to explain what your favorite holiday is and why.	<b>Boss.</b> I have to name my favorite holiday and tell all the reasons I like it.
Most people have gotten lost at least once.	<b>No-Brainer.</b> The topic is being lost.
Think about a time you were lost or imagine being lost.	<b>Brain.</b> I have to remember being lost or make it up, imagine being lost somewhere.
Now tell a story about a time you got lost.	<b>Boss.</b> I need to write a story about getting lost and what happened to me.

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1. Review Figure 1.1, the prompt differentiation poster.
2. Display the five prompts you've written or collected. Allow students to differentiate. Put aside for Steps 5 and 6.
3. Display Figure 1.2, the prompt dissection poster. Discuss that prompts usually have three parts. The first part tells the topic: the No-Brainer. The second part asks you to think: the Brain. The last part tells you exactly what to do: the Boss.
4. Review the example prompts and ask students to differentiate the prompts before you begin dissecting. Write in the prompt types and discuss.
5. Pass out student copies of Figure 1.3, the prompt dissection worksheet, and redisplay the five prompts from Step 2. Model the dissection process with two prompts, one expository and one narrative. Discuss what each sentence of the prompt directs you to think or do as you dissect. Students should copy your work.

**Figure 1.3** Prompt Dissection Worksheet

1. Teacher will dissect one expository prompt.

	<b>No-Brainer.</b> The topic is
	<b>Brain.</b> I have to . . .
	<b>Boss.</b> I need to . . .

2. Teacher will dissect one narrative prompt.

	<b>No-Brainer.</b> The topic is
	<b>Brain.</b> I have to . . .
	<b>Boss.</b> I need to . . .

3. Class will dissect one expository prompt.

	<b>No-Brainer.</b> The topic is
	<b>Brain.</b> I have to . . .
	<b>Boss.</b> I need to . . .

4. Class will dissect one narrative prompt.

	<b>No-Brainer.</b> The topic is
	<b>Brain.</b> I have to . . .
	<b>Boss.</b> I need to . . .

5. Students will dissect one narrative or expository prompt alone.

	<b>No-Brainer.</b> The topic is
	<b>Brain.</b> I have to . . .
	<b>Boss.</b> I need to . . .

6. Class will make up an expository prompt.

	<b>No-Brainer.</b> The topic is
	<b>Brain.</b> I have to . . .
	<b>Boss.</b> I need to . . .

7. Class will make up a narrative prompt.

	<b>No-Brainer.</b> The topic is
	<b>Brain.</b> I have to . . .
	<b>Boss.</b> I need to . . .

6. Allow students to lead the dissection of another expository and narrative prompt, identifying the No-Brainer topic sentence, the Brain sentence, and the Boss sentence. Have students describe exactly what each sentence of the prompt forces them to do or think.
7. Ask students to dissect the fifth prompt on their own, then share their answers.
8. Help students create their own expository and narrative prompts using the last two blank charts. Allow students to volunteer ideas to create the No-Brainer, Brain, and Boss sentences. Dissect both prompts as you write them.
9. If desired, end this lesson with a short quiz. Provide prompts for differentiation and give students blank charts to dissect those prompts. Students may create prompts for extra credit.