

In Service

FOR ADULT EDUCATION STAFF DEVELOPMENT PROFESSIONALS

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Prompting Your Students to Write

BY NAN PHIFER

Nan Phifer is the author of *Easing into Essays: Getting Ready to Write the GED Test Essay*, published by New Readers Press. She taught for twenty years in the Adult High School at Lane Community College in Eugene, Oregon. Currently, Nan is the Associate Director of the Oregon Writing Project at the University of Oregon.

...a crumpled paper shoots toward the wastebasket. ...a student slumps over a blank page, erasing, writing, stopping. ...someone smiles apologetically, saying, "I don't know what to say." Do your students have a hard time starting their writing?

FIRST DRAFT

We can liberate some of our students from fear of writing by convincing them that it's right to write wrong...on the first draft, that is. Most students assume that they should try to avoid making mistakes. They become fixated on correctness, knowing they're certain to produce errors. No wonder they're frozen, unable to focus on content, to relax and let the words flow. They're sure they'll embarrass themselves.

To persuade students they can ignore spelling and punctuation while they formulate what they're

writing is a challenge. Most of our students are unfamiliar with the steps of the writing process, so it's helpful to let them know that they'll first scrawl a quick rough draft that is supposed to be error-packed, misspelled, and messy. Pass around examples of impressively mistake-filled, crossed-out rough drafts with "excellent rough draft!" written at the top. Praise rough drafts with circled words and added text squeezed in. "This one is the most messy and gets an A."

Tell students explicitly what the steps of the writing process are:

- rough drafting
- sharing
- revising
- checking sentences
- using proofreaders
- repairing
- writing final drafts

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In-Service Tips

BRAINSTORMING

To get team members familiar with brainstorming practices, ask student groups of five to six to pick a four-or-five letter word. Any word will do.

Once a word is chosen by each group, give them three minutes to create sentences using each letter of their word, in sequence, as the first letter of a word in the sentence.

Sentences must have proper structure, but they don't have to make sense—which adds a few laughs to the exercise. For example, a team might create a sentence from the word MOLD—Moldy Oranges Like Drinking.

The team creating the most sentences from its one word is awarded a small prize.

(Adapted from *Creative Training Techniques*, Lakewood Publications)

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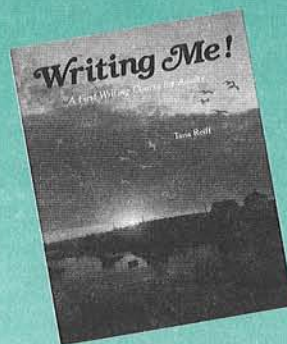
“Your purpose is to tap your students’ fluency, not to force puzzled responses to prompts.”

conventions of standard English, and form for final drafts. Students will enjoy selecting their favorite final drafts to collect in a portfolio or to “bind” between plastic covers, and you can post copies of their selected final drafts on the

walls of your classroom. If, on a designated date, you celebrate with readings and refreshments, you and your students will bask in well-deserved pride!

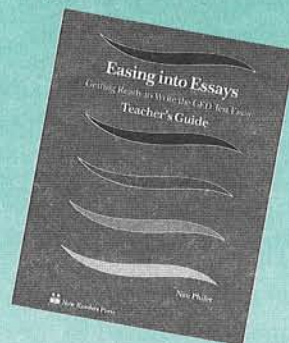
Special thanks to Keith Caldwell of the Bay Area Writing Project for essential ideas that inspired this article.

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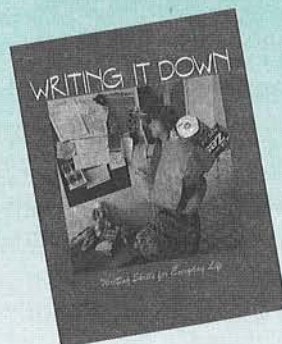


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