

Writing Prompts

Schoolwide has compiled a list of writing prompts meant to assess students' ability to independently write for various purposes, gauge their familiarity with features of different genres and text types (narrative, informative/explanatory, and opinion/argumentative), and evaluate their knowledge of the qualities of good writing (idea development, purpose, organization, conventions, craft, and style). On-demand writing assessments allow teachers to observe and evaluate students' strengths and weaknesses and, consequently, plan meaningful instruction that meets students' needs and supports their development as confident, effective writers.

There is a menu of prompts organized by grade levels and text types for teachers to choose from. The prompts provide a context for student writing that includes an audience, a purpose, and a form or genre of writing. We imagine that teachers will use these prompts with their students before, during, and/or after a unit of study for both formative and summative assessments:

- Before and/or during your unit of study: Identify what students already know about genre features and writing for a specific purpose and audience. Then build on what they know, clarify misconceptions, and plan for whole-class instruction that meets students' needs. Additionally, begin to group students with similar needs and prepare for individual and group conferences and differentiation opportunities.
- After a unit of study: Assess what students have learned about genre-specific features, author's purpose, and audience awareness. The on-demand writing assessment can be another lens to look at students' writing in order to better understand how your students have improved as writers after an in-depth writing unit.

OTHER THINGS TO CONSIDER

- Let your students know what they will be doing and why. Tell them the purpose of the on-demand writing task so they will understand your motives and try their best.
- Support your students in feeling comfortable about writing, and encourage them to remember all the things they know and have learned about writing.
- You may choose to have students write in response to the prompt in a single timeframe (approximately 20–40 minutes, depending on the grade you teach) or over the course of a couple of days. To get a better idea of how students go through the writing process independently, you might have students brainstorm, plan, and draft on the first day and revise and edit their writing on the second day.
- Use Schoolwide’s digital assessment tool (EVAL). This will assist you in scoring students’ writing using standards-based criteria.
- Have students score their own writing by using student-friendly rubrics.
- Provide time for student reflection following on-demand writing. Students can write an entry about the experience in their Writers’ Notebooks. They can also share their thoughts and ask questions through peer and teacher conferences.
- Provide students with specific feedback about their writing. Let them know what they are doing well and how you will help them improve their writing.

Grades 3–5 Writing Prompts

Narrative	Informative/Explanatory	Opinion
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Most people remember times when they had a strong feeling or emotion. Think about a time when you felt really happy, angry, nervous, scared, or any other strong emotion. Write a story telling what happened so that your readers understand the experience and can feel the emotion, too. • One of the fun experiences in life is visiting interesting places. When we visit an interesting place, we get to experience and learn about new things. Think about a time when you visited a special place. Think about the people who were with you, what you saw, and what you did during the visit. Write a story about this visit. Describe where you went, and include your personal thoughts and feelings about the visit. • The school newspaper is collecting personal stories about people helping one another. Tell a true story about a time when you helped someone or when someone helped you. • An “adventure” can be any new experience that has some challenges. An adventure can happen someplace close to home or far from home. Tell a story about an adventure you have had by yourself, with your family, or with a friend. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • There are many different kinds of entertainment, such as music, games, books, and movies. Describe your favorite type of entertainment, and explain why you like it. • Suppose you could choose one thing to do this weekend. Explain to your teacher something that you would choose to do this weekend and why. • We can learn about all kinds of interesting people by reading biographies. Write about an interesting person you know or have learned about. Explain what attributes or traits make this person an interesting subject for a biography. • Weather is all around us and happens every day. There are some kinds of weather that people like, and there are other kinds of weather that can make people miserable. Write an informative text that tells about a type of weather. Be sure to describe the type of weather in detail, explain why this weather is good and/or bad, and describe what people do in this type of weather. • A new student has just joined your class. Think about what things will be important for this new student to know. Explain some things that will help him or 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • To increase student achievement, district officials have proposed making the school year 1 month longer. Take a position on this proposal. Write a letter to persuade district officials to support your position. • The student council has proposed that every classroom have a class pet. Do you agree or disagree? Write a persuasive paper that provides at least three reasons to support your position. • Your newspaper is offering a prize for the “Best Relative of the Year.” Think about which one of your relatives should win this prize. The relative could be a parent, grandparent, sister, brother, aunt, uncle, or cousin. Think about the reasons why your relative should win the prize and why he or she is the best. Write a persuasive paper telling the judges why your relative is qualified to be the winner. • The mayor of your town recently made the following statement: “It always strikes me as a terrible shame to see young people spending so much time staring at the television. If we could unplug all the TV sets in America, our children would grow up to be healthier, better educated, and more independent.” The newspaper wants to print the four best

Grades 3–5 Writing Prompts (continued)

Narrative	Informative/Explanatory	Opinion
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Life offers many opportunities to try new things. Sometimes people are afraid to try something new. Write a story about a time when you tried something new, or write a story about a time when someone you know tried something new. We all have special times in our lives that we remember. Tell a story about a special memory you have. Include the people involved, and describe the experience or event from beginning to end. Think about a day in school that stands out as being one of the best you have had. Write a story for a friend that tells him or her about this “best” day. Describe who was there, what happened, and what you thought and felt that made this day so special. Be sure to include narrative techniques such as descriptive language and a sequence of events. Imagine or remember something exciting that happened at school. It could be something that really happened or something you make up. Write a story that tells about this exciting school event. Be sure to include all of the qualities that narrative writers use. Make sure your story has a beginning, middle, and end. 	<p>her get used to a new school and new class.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Your class has been talking about what it means to be a good friend. Your teacher has asked all students to write an essay about being a good friend. Before you begin to write, think about what it means to be a good friend. What are some of the things a person does to show that he or she is a good friend? Write about what it means to be a good friend, and include enough details to support your explanation. You have been chosen to plan a field trip for your class. Think about one place that your class would like to visit. Where would you go, and what would you do while you were there? Describe the field trip you have planned by writing a letter to your class. Scientists are curious when they get an idea, so they begin to investigate. Think about some inventions that scientists have made. Write an explanation about your favorite inventions and why they are your favorites. Think about something you know how to do really well. It could be making an ice cream sundae or playing a sport. It could be making a bed or building something. Write a how-to text that explains how to do this activity. Describe the steps to follow so that readers can do it, too! 	<p>student responses to the mayor’s statement. Write a persuasive paper telling whether or not you agree with the mayor about whether people watch too much TV. Give specific reasons to support your opinion.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Most kids have a favorite TV show or movie. What is your favorite TV show or movie? Write a review to persuade other kids to watch the show or see the movie. Don’t forget to include specific reasons and examples that support your opinion. You have seen trash on the side of the road and want to form a student group to clean up the trash. Write a speech to convince the students at your school to join the clean-up group. Your class is discussing items that people use every day. Think about one item that you use every day. What would your life be like without it? Write a speech to convince your class that the item is important. Imagine that you have 30 minutes of free time in school each week. Your teacher has asked your class to suggest ways to use this free time. Think of a way to use this free time. Why should your teacher choose your idea? Write a persuasive letter to your teacher convincing him or her to accept your idea for how this free time should be spent.