

Sharpen Your Writing Skills

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When we get lazy with our writing, we produce weak sentences and paragraphs that fail to communicate effectively and fail to keep the interest of our readers. Sharpen your writing skills with these quick steps to help you strengthen your content and enhance your works.

Verbs

- Make a list of at least ten active verbs that describe your activities for the day. Examples: eat, sat, watched, walked, pretended.
- Make a list of at least ten active verbs that describe something your favorite historical character would have done in a day (or a week). Examples: marched, fought, swam, campaigned, delivered, launched, rode, won.
- Make a list of at least ten active verbs that describe something your favorite character in the last book you read would have done in a week. Examples: flew, danced, created, morphed, jumped, hid.
- Choose five of the verbs from the lists above and write a paragraph on any topic using these verbs. This exercise helps writers break the habit of using too many passive verbs.

Adverbs

- Make a list of four adverbs that describe how an Olympic athlete runs or swims.
- Make a list of three adverbs that describes how a surgeon works.
- Fill in these blanks with adverbs: snores _____, walks _____, studies _____, cooks _____, eats _____, writes _____.
- In 20 seconds, write as many adverbs as you can. When you are done, write sentences using at least half of your list.

Adjectives

- Make a list of five adjectives that describe a frog.
- Make a list of five to ten adjectives that describe your room.
- Make a list of five adjectives that describe the season of the year we are in.
- Fill in these blanks with adjectives: _____ mountain, _____ dog, _____ blanket, _____ apple, _____ store, _____ rabbit, _____ fish, _____ candy, _____ tree. Now use the same nouns but fill in the blanks with different adjectives.

In 20 seconds, write as many adjectives as you can. When you are done, write sentences using at least half of your list. If you have trouble completing these tasks, find a book and make a list of the active verbs, the adverbs and the adjectives you find in the first three or four pages.

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These writing prompts and assignments will vary. Some writing challenges may seem difficult for certain writers, while others may seem ridiculously easy. Each assignment has a purpose, however. If a student is asked to write a poem one week, that doesn't mean every student will go on to be a poet. However, practicing a variety of writing styles helps students think through creative options for other assignments and strengthens their overall writing skills.

For students:

- If you get stuck, try timed free writing exercises. What does that involve? Set a clock alarm or timer for 30 or 45 seconds. Write about your subject in pencil without stopping for the entire time. If you are writing about birds, for example, your writing may look like this:

Birds are colorful and musical. They live in my backyard. I saw an owl when I was hiking last week. My grandmother had a pet bird that was yellow. Some birds migrate depending on the season. Big Bird lives on Sesame Street. Robins live in our backyard. Our birdfeeder attracts hummingbirds. I can't think of anything else to say. I don't know how to identify bird calls. I saw a pelican by a pier on vacation. It ate a flounder.

Notice that I kept writing even when I had no thoughts on birds. The topics change frequently—some thoughts are about food while others are about children’s TV shows. But now I have some thoughts down on paper that may lead to paper ideas, poetry ideas, story ideas or ideas for an ad.