**10 Writing Warm-Ups to Engage Your Students in the Middle School ELA or High School English Classroom**

<https://www.thedaringenglishteacher.com/2020/01/10-writing-warm-ups-to-engage-your.html>

In the public education setting, timed-writes are a required part of many standardized tests. Rather than try to cloak that reality, embrace it! Show your students that timed writing can be a fun challenge, and develop their expository and analytical prowess by beginning every class with a writing warm-up. These warm-ups should take only five to ten minutes, and you can easily implement them into your daily bell-ringer routine.

Here are ten exercises to build your students' writing confidence:

**1 Minute Story**

Get your students in the habit of writing from the word "go." Set the time for 60 seconds and task them with writing a complete short story with a beginning, middle, and end in that time. The first time, many of them will probably find themselves caught up in the pressure or struggle over what to write. That's okay! The more they practice, the better they will become at thinking quickly and excluding any unnecessary information. By the end of the school year, an essay in forty-five minutes will seem like a piece of cake! It's best not to score these short stories. Instead, work on progress. If a student has trouble with this, encourage them to keep adding to their story with the one-minute you give them in class.

**A Picture is Worth A Thousand Words**

Put an image up on the board, and have your students write a short paragraph about it. You can have them pen a short story, a long-form poem, or an explanation of what a student perceives the situation depicted to be. This exercise will encourage creative and critical thinking skills, both of which are essential in rhetorical analysis.   
  
Note: the image should have as much or as little visual information as is appropriate for the type of response you are seeking. For example, for a poem, a picture of an apple would suffice; whereas, a stock photo of a couple might better suit a short story or analysis.

Teaching Resource: [Descriptive Writing](https://www.teacherspayteachers.com/Product/Descriptive-Writing-Mini-Unit-Writing-with-Strong-Verbs-Adjective-and-Adverbs-1330317).

**Musical Manuscripts**

Using instrumental music is a great way to activate your students' creativity and ability to write intuitively. Play the piece once in its entirety, and allow your students to make notes along the way. Then have them determine the mood of the song in a single word, and write a paragraph about why the song is "sad", "happy", "romantic", etc. Because most of your students probably won't yet have written a master's thesis in music theory, this activity will force them to think analytically to get their point across. Plus they'll get to listen to music in class!

**Everyone's A Critic**

Have your students write a short review of a book, television show, or movie they recently read or watched! Reviews have a clear, if highly subjective, prompt: Was it good or bad? This warm-up is a wonderful practice for plot analysis, critical thinking, and supporting claims with evidence from the source. Plus, you may be able to avoid a bad film or two yourself. Kids are notoriously harsh critics, after all.

**Alphabetical Order**

This activity will make your students groan, but it will undoubtedly get them focused. This exercise will require your students to write a 26 line account of their day so far, each line beginning with the corresponding letter of the alphabet. For example: "**A** bird flew by my window this morning. **B**irds are nice. "**C**aw," the bird said…" Students may experience frustration, but the structure will help them become used to producing fantastic work while working with strict guidelines. Furthermore, this activity will get them thinking about the process of writing.

**Reverse! Reverse!**

If you enjoy nonsensical fun, look no further! In this exercise, you will select any word out of the English language and present it to your students. Then reverse all the letters, creating an entirely new word. Each of your students will decide the meaning of this new word, and provide a dictionary entry for it, complete with a definition and an example sentence. This is a fun little exercise that gets the creative juices flowing and lets students feel more in control of language.   
  
Tip: To make the activity more challenging, place specific guidelines on how the word fits into the English language, i.e., "this word is a verb," etc.

**Dear New Me,**

Letters are a great, low-stress activity that still helps your students practice communicating their thoughts effectively in writing. In this exercise, students will write a short message to their future selves, detailing personal goals or worries about the near future. I recommend doing this at the beginning of a new unit or even before an extended assignment/project so that students can go into the next learning experience with a more focused mindset. Self check-ins are necessary and important!

**Dear Old Me,**

Here's a fun mirror of the above warm-up, in which your students will write to their past selves! This can work in a broader sense, such as writing a letter full of things they'd wish they had known when they were six. They can also use this as a reflection upon the ending of a unit or project. It can even pair with the "Dear New Me" project, resulting in a constant stream of conversation that marks each student's progress. It's a great way to remind students that we are all learning and growing every day.

**Dear Alter Ego,**

Yet another twist on letter writing: This activity is one students can engage with every day and one that allows them a snippet of fantasy to liven up the classroom. Ask your students to create an alter ego for themselves. Then set aside a few minutes at the beginning of each class for your students to write to their alter egos. Not only is this an exercise in writing, but it's also an exercise in self-esteem. Often alter egos are who we imagine ourselves as, but fear we are too plain or weak to be. The more acquainted your students become with their alter egos, the more they will realize that they are exalting themselves and their own potential.

**Passion**

Everything comes out better when love is added to the mix. When you ask someone about a subject they love, it seems as if they could talk for hours. Ask your students to write down a list of things they are passionate about: This can be anything from food to a sport to a stuffed animal they always keep on their bed. Have them choose one, set the timer, and let them write! They'll surprise themselves with how much they have to say. Some more specific questions you can use to prompt them are: Why is \_\_\_ special to you personally? When did you first become interested in \_\_\_? What are 3 facts you know about \_\_\_?