# Unit 2 Writing: Personal Essay

Content Area: **English Language Arts**
Course(s):
Time Period: **Trimester 1**
Length: **3-4 Weeks**
Status: **Published**

## Brief Summary of Unit

Students will write a personal essay that is focused on a purpose, communicates with an audience, has evidence of choice and/or suitable tone, shows depth of idea development supported by elaborated, relevant details, has logical, coherent organization, has controlled and varied sentence structure, employs acceptable, effective language, and has few errors in spelling, punctuation, and capitalization relative to length and complexity.

This unit is designed to be part of a developmental progression across grade levels and make interdisciplinary connections across content areas including physical and social sciences, technology, career readiness, cultural awareness, and global citizenship. In this course, students are provided with opportunities to develop skills that pertain to a variety of careers.

Revision date: July 2023

## Standards

The identified standards reflect a developmental progression across grades/ levels and make interdisciplinary connections across content areas including social sciences, technology, career readiness, cultural awareness and global citizenship. The standards that follow are relevant to this course in addition to the associated content-based standards listed below.

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| LA.W.8.2 | Write informative/explanatory texts to examine a topic and convey ideas, concepts, and information through the selection, organization, and analysis of relevant content. |
| LA.W.8.3 | Write narratives to develop real or imagined experiences or events using effective technique, relevant descriptive details, and well-structured event sequences. |
| LA.W.8.4 | Produce clear and coherent writing in which the development, organization, voice and style are appropriate to task, purpose, and audience. (Grade-specific expectations for writing types are defined in standards 1–3 above.) |
| LA.W.8.5 | With some guidance and support from peers and adults, develop and strengthen writing as needed by planning, revising, editing, rewriting, or trying a new approach, focusing on how well purpose and audience have been addressed. |
| LA.W.8.6 | Use technology, including the Internet, to produce and publish writing and present the relationships between information and ideas efficiently as well as to interact and collaborate with others. |
| LA.W.8.9.B | Apply grade 8 Reading standards to literary nonfiction (e.g., “Delineate and evaluate the argument and specific claims in a text, assessing whether the reasoning is sound and the evidence is relevant and sufficient; recognize when irrelevant evidence is introduced”). |
| LA.W.8.10 | Write routinely over extended time frames (time for research, reflection, metacognition/self correction, and revision) and shorter time frames (a single sitting or a |

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| | day or two) for a range of discipline-specific tasks, purposes, and audiences. |
| LA.L.8.1 | Demonstrate command of the conventions of standard English grammar and usage when writing or speaking. |
| LA.L.8.2 | Demonstrate command of the conventions of standard English capitalization, punctuation, and spelling when writing. |
| LA.L.8.3 | Use knowledge of language and its conventions when writing, speaking, reading, or listening. |
| LA.L.8.3.A | Use verbs in the active and passive voice and in the conditional and subjunctive mood to achieve particular effects (e.g., emphasizing the actor or the action; expressing uncertainty or describing a state contrary to fact). |

## Essential Questions

- How can do writers capture a small moment in time to tell an impactful story?
- How can I use storytelling to engage an audience to see life through my perspective?
- How do I develop my writing stamina and volume through drafting, revision, editing, and publishing my work?
- What experiences have shaped you into the person you are today?
- What strategies do writers use to enhance their work?
- What types of decisions do writers make when developing a well-written product?

## Students Will Know/Be Skilled At

- Connecting the significance of an event in the writer's life to a central topic or message
- Developing an individual voice appropriate to the topic
- Discussing writing with the teacher and others, and using their questions, comments, and suggestions to aid revision and editing.
- Effectively incorporating narrative elements such as leads, dialogue (when appropriate), and sensory details
- Noticing the qualities of a personal essay (narrative elements, central message, small moments, etc)
- Revising their writing to improve organization and support, sharpen focus, achieve clarity, and refine language and sentences.
- Selecting language appropriate for the audience and purpose of a writing piece
- Transitioning between ideas
- Using prewriting strategies e.g. brainstorm, visualize, draw, free-write, web, cluster, and other graphic aids
- Writing with reflection and purpose appropriate to the task at hand

## Evidence/Performance Tasks

Developmental progression across years in both reading and writing is evidenced by multiple benchmark assessment screeners, administered three times per year. Follow up diagnostic assessments are used to target skill remediation. Student proficiency allows for additional or alternative assessment based on demonstration

or absence of skill.

Students demonstrate differentiated proficiency through both formative and summative assessments in the classroom. Based on individual student readiness and performance, assessments can be implemented as formative and/or summative.

The performance tasks listed below are examples of the types of assessments teachers may use in the classroom and the data collected by the district to track student progress.

**Formative:**

- Answer essential questions
- Teacher observations/conferring notes
- Turn and talks
- Peer Conferences/Partnership Discussion
- Writer's Notebook (quick writes/drafts/prewrites)
- Teacher checklists using mini-lessons for measurable skills
- Writing Conferences: Individual and small group
- Writing folders with student work
- Writing pieces to note the growth need of the writer
- Observations
- Drafts online (Google Docs)
- Writing Club work and discussions

**Summative including Alternative Assessments:**

- Students should have 1-2 final pieces.
- Published pieces
- Score grammar and spelling in final drafts only
- Student portfolios
- Teachers College Reading and Writing Project Learning Progressions
- Teachers College Reading and Writing Project Rubrics and Student Samples
- Rubrics: created for the standards-based report card as well as teacher-created.
- On-demand Writing Assessments
- Standards should be addressed
- Students will include personal essay or essays in an anthology or a class anthology
- **Authentic Audience:** Students may enter their personal essay in various writing competitions (Ex. VFW-sponsored Patriot's Pen)
- Students will orally present their personal essays to teacher/classmates. recite personal presentation in some format (poster, Prezi, etc.) to showcase all of the above and will deliver presentation to their peers

- **Select pieces can be showcased at the annual Union County Teen Arts Festival.

**Benchmark Assessments:**

- Benchmark reading and writing assessments, scored using rubrics, district-created and standards-aligned; based on NJSLA, reported twice per year
- Grade-level Standards-based Rubrics
- Fountas and Pinnell Benchmark Assessment System, grades 3-8, Levels L-Z, Heinemann (part 3, Writing about Reading section)
- New Jersey Student Learning Assessment (NJSLA)

## Learning Plan

Middle School Writing instruction follows a balanced literacy approach including a number of strategies and techniques in Writing Workshop. These include mini-lessons, shared writing, independent writing, small group strategy instruction, one-to-one conferencing, partnerships and/or writing clubs. Writing Workshop emphasizes immersion, independence, and choice. Individual conferences with each student will address specific needs of the writer. Each unit ends with a celebration of learning where writers share their work with others in the school community.

Lessons should follow the mini-lesson format:

- Teaching point(s) for each lesson
- Connection: Connects new learning to previous learning/lessons
- Teach/Modeling: Uses 'think alouds' when modeling what you expect students to do
- Guided Practice/Active Engagement: Guides students through practice of the teaching point
- Link to Independent Practice: Helps writers understand the purpose for the writing they are about to do and the skills/craft they will be practicing/applying independently as good writers
- Independent Writing/Student Conferences: Provides time for students to do independent writing while teacher confers with individual students, works with small groups, or writing clubs.
- Closure/Sharing: Pull students back together and recognize the work they have done relating to the teaching point.

The architecture of a writing conference includes:

- Research
- Decide
- Teach and Coach with guided practice
- Link

Throughout the year, students write in all modes of rhetoric including narration/description, argument/persuasion, and exposition. A variety of writing forms, including digital writing, are emphasized. Grammar lessons are embedded in writing instruction, holding students accountable for skills taught and practiced; modeling is done through published and student-crafted mentor texts. Teachers focus equally on process and product with an emphasis on synthesizing across texts for nuanced understandings; teacher-created multi-modal text sets will be used as materials. High-and low-stakes writing and timed and untimed assignments will be used throughout the unit.

Sentence study teaches syntax, diction, grammar, and punctuation. Students will learn how to write like an author by mimicking specific sentence patterns and applying it to their own writing. Please see this grade level folder for details.

Teachers may personalize instruction during this unit and address the distinct learning needs, interests, aspirations, or cultural backgrounds of individual students.

## Materials

The materials used in this course integrate a variety of leveled instructional, enrichment, and intervention materials that support student learners at all levels in the school and home environments. Associated web content and media sources are infused into the unit as applicable and available.

For additional materials, please see this folder in the Middle School ELA folder, grade 8.

## Instructional Materials

- “Mrs. Flowers” by Maya Angelou
- "Principals and Principles" by Daniel Handler
- “The Last Kiss” by Ralph Fletcher
- “Why You Should Always Skip Your Kids’ Baseball Games” by Daniel Pink
- Big Russ and Me by Tim Russer

- Chicken Soup for the Soul: Inspiration for Writers
- Chicken Soup for the Writer's Soul by Canfield, Hansen, and Gardner
- Crow Call by Lois Lowry
- Excerpt from Black Boy by Richard Wright
- Excerpts from Boy by Roald Dahl
- Excerpts from House on Mango Street by Sandra Cisneros
- Great Essayists' Writings by Joan Didion, Malcolm Gladwell, Barbara Kingsolver
- Growing Up by Russell Baker
- List of Strategies for Leads, Conclusions, and Transitions, from Know How: Researching and Writing Nonfiction 3-8, by M. McMackin & B. Siegel
- Memoir Excerpts: Marshfield Dreams: When I Was a Kid, etc.
- NPR - This I Believe Series www.thisibelieve.com
- Short stories from Elements of Literature
- Viewpoints Non-fiction selections
- Walking on the Boundaries of Change by Sara Holbrook
- Writing Down the Bones Freeing the Writer Within by Natalie Goldberg

## Teacher Resources

- 50 Tools for Writers by Roy Peter Clark
- Boy Writers by Ralph Fletcher
- Crafting Authentic Voice by Tom Romano
- How Writers Work, Grade 8 Published by Writing Fundamentals
- If…Then… Curriculum by Lucy Calkins pgs. 44-58
- Memoir: The Art of Writing Well by Lucy Calkins and Mary Chiarella
- Shaping Texts From Essay and Narrative to Memoir by Lucy Calkins
- Write Like This by Kelly Gallagher
- Writing a Life by Katherine Bomer

## Suggested Strategies for Accommodations and Modifications

Content specific accommodations and modifications as well as Career Ready Practices are listed here for all students, including: Special Education, English Language Learners, At Risk of School Failure, Gifted and Talented, Students with 504.

The structure of writing workshop is designed to differentiate and address specific goals and learning for each writer:

- The unit includes presentation of material through multiple modalities such as visual, auditory, and kinesthetic to address the unique learning styles of all students.

- The teacher will assign, assess and modify if necessary to address the specific needs of the learner.
- Students have individualized choice of topics within each unit.
- Instruction provides focused small-group strategy lessons.
- Individual conferences with each student will address specific needs of the writer.

Possible accommodations during writing workshop include, but are not limited to:

- Access speech-to-text function on computer
- Use visual presentations of all materials to include organizers, charts, word walls.
- Allow students to set individual goals for writing.
- Offer graphic organizaers, note-taking models, strategies for summarizing, and questioning techniques.
- Offer oral assessments
- Work in partnerships
- Give responses in a form (verbal or written) that is easier for the student
- Take additional time to compete a task or project
- Scaffold by chunking material and texts.
- Take frequent breaks
- Use an alarm to help with time management
- Mark text with a highlighter or other manipulative such as a post-it
- Receive help coordinating assignments
- Answering fewer questions or completing shorter tasks
- Modify the length and quantity of assignments to fit individual
- Use digital technology, eBooks, audio version of printed text
- Create alternate assignments or homework
- Provide distinct steps in a process; eliminate unnecessary steps, as needed.
- Manage executive function by scaffolding process and amending deadlines

Adhere to all modifications and accommodations as prescribed in IEP and 504 plan