

Don't Forget!

Start your year with these quick writing assessments



Active Reading Webinar

Register now for our upcoming Active Reading Webinar. During this free 60 minute webinar, we will examine three active reading strategies: highlighting, annotating text, and note taking. Improve your students' comprehension and their retention of informational text.

Dates and Times:
[October 7th at 4:00 PM Pacific Time](#)

and

[October 15th at 4:00 PM Pacific Time](#)

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Dear Dorothy,

It's important to assess student writing at the beginning of the year. In the first month of school, be sure to include these informal assessments. Date, keep, and repeat the assessments in the last month of school to see your students' growth.

Assess Understanding of a Paragraph (Grades 2 & Up)

Ask your students to write a paragraph explaining how to write a good paragraph or what makes a good paragraph. Be sure to give them an audience - a student one grade below them. Don't give them any vocabulary to use. It will be tempting to do this, but resist the urge! Cross your heart! Collect, date stamp, and read them. If there are serious misconceptions, consider making a chart on big paper with two headings: true and not true. Pull quotes from student work to fill in the columns, making time to clear up the misconceptions via discussion.

Assess Writing Vocabulary (Grades 2 & Up)

Make an overhead of a typed page of nonfiction text with at least four paragraphs in it, but no pictures or charts. Be sure the paragraphs are indented. Make a second overhead of the longest paragraph on the page. Be sure it has at least eight or nine lines, including several sentences.

Have students number a clean sheet of paper, 1-4. Using your overhead of the full page, ask these questions, and have students silently write their answers:

Question 1: How many paragraphs are on this page?

Question 2: How do you know?

Now put up the overhead of the single paragraph. Be sure the font is big enough to be easily read. Ask these questions:

Question 3: How many sentences are in this paragraph?

Question 4: How do you know?

You may discover some interesting misunderstandings, especially with Question 1. Several students at the beginning of the year can't identify how many paragraphs are on a page. Question 3 will help you identify students who confuse sentences with lines.

Assess Planning without Nagging (Grades 2 & up)

Give students a writing prompt. It could be as simple as: "Write a paragraph explaining what you want to learn this year;" or "Write a paragraph about what you would like me to know about you."

DO NOT tell, remind, or nag them to plan. While they write, cruise the room with your class roster, making anecdotal notes about who is planning or, more likely, who isn't planning. If a student asks, "Should we make a plan?" answer with "You decide."



Finally, compute the percentage of students who planned. If it is low or zero, don't despair! Step by step, day by day, through your consistent modeling, students will begin to plan independently. Reminding them to plan will be necessary for quite a while, but 100% independent student planning is your goal for the year.

Repeat these student assessments in the last month of school. You'll be amazed at their growth! Our next e-mail will address assessment strategies for the primary grades.

Sincerely,

The Write Tools, LLC

Give us your feedback!

Send us an email telling us how these assessments worked in your class. Be sure to include your name, school, grade level and address. If we use your comments in a future email, you'll receive a small prize. If you'd prefer to not have your name included on the email, tell us that and we will create a clever pen name for you.

Send your feedback to:
training@thewritetools.net