

# Three narrative writing prompts on guy-friendly authentic ELA topics

from You-Can-Teach-writing.com

Requiring narrative as part of the support for a thesis on an impersonal topic is the best way to accustom teen-age boys to writing narrative. They don't typically enjoy being put on the spot to share personal experiences and feelings.

The simplest way for you to engage boys in narrative is to ask them to describe processes. It's no more boring to write/read about the process for developing a thesis statement than to write/read about the process for tying one's shoes — and it is far more useful in your ELA classroom. Moreover, when students get out in the workforce, they will find the description of nonfiction processes is a staple in most businesses.

If you wish to use any of these writing prompts in your classes, you may cut and paste from a [text file](#) I prepared so you don't have to retype. Please confine your uses to your classroom and do not publish copies on blogs, web pages, etc. I would appreciate a credit to you-can-teach-writing.com. Thanks!

## Prompt #1: "Reality"

Many people today enjoy reality TV shows in which people who aren't professional actors talk about the unusual and exciting adventures they are having.

Long before television was invented, people read "reality novels." Stories like *Treasure Island*, *Robinson Crusoe* and *David Copperfield* written as first person accounts of ordinary folks' exciting adventures.

How is reality TV similar to reality novels? In your answer use one reality TV show and one reality novel to illustrate points about how they are alike.

Be sure you describe the plot of both the reality TV show you choose and the reality book you choose. You aren't limited to the three old novels I mentioned.

Be careful to keep your body paragraphs focused on similarities between the two mediums. Don't wander off and start discussing differences!

## Discussion

All three of the narrative writing prompts on this page require narration within a piece of writing organized by some predictable expository format. Here the overall organization is comparison.

This particular prompt has two purposes in addition to giving younger students and beginning writers something to write about. One is to tie students' experience to the literary tradition. The other is to force writers to do something vaguely resembling literary analysis.

Narrative writing prompts like this are not going to produce either great writing or great literary insights. They merely ease students toward reflective writing some time in the future.

Students would not find this essay hard to organize, but finding appropriate novels at suitable reading levels is tough. There is not much male-oriented, young adult, first-person adventure fiction being written today.

## Prompt #2: How to

When you gather information from the Internet for a research paper, you need to be sure the information you are using is trustworthy. How do you make that determination?

Take any subject you know a little about. Write directions explaining 3 to 5 techniques for determining whether a website on that topic is suitable to use for a school research paper.

Be sure that to explain how to go about doing each of the things you suggest. For example, if you recommend a person looking for information on raising tadpoles look up the website's sponsor in the *Directory of Amphibious Americans*, you would need to tell explain how to identify the sponsor, where to find the *Directory*, and how to use it.

You may write your information in the second person, talking directly to your readers as I did here.

## Discussion

Besides giving students an opportunity to write, this prompt forces them to think about how they would use an important research skill.

Teachers can afford to let students pick the topic for the proposed research paper. Having a choice gives students a sense of control. Since the procedures for evaluating websites are pretty much standard, teachers don't lose anything by giving students the choice.

This prompt is suitable for competent writers who have to master the research elements or for competent researchers who have to master writing skills. Don't give this sort of prompt to students who haven't achieved competence at either research or writing.

### Prompt #3: eyewitness account

Next Monday during class time, two students are going to demonstrate peer editing. After the presentation, you will have 10 minutes to write a description of what you saw. Save that paper!

To prepare for your essay assignment, try to picture yourself as you wrote that description. How did you decide what to include and what to leave out? If you had the opportunity to revise your original account, would you change it? How? It's perfectly fine to compare notes with your classmates if that will help you.

Write an essay in which you describe how writers decide what goes into a piece of writing and what does not. Since you are a writer, you can use your own experience to illustrate your points. If you wish, you may quote from your original description in your essay.

### **Discussion**

Of the three narrative writing prompts presented here, this is the most difficult. Students have to think about their own thinking processes, which is neither easy nor comfortable.

This is also a difficult assignment from a writing standpoint as well. The range of potential thesis statements is broad. Moreover, the student is required to narrate a series of mental acts, rather than physical ones.

This assignment is valuable in getting students to think about the writing process as a process of rejecting ideas. Most students think of writing as just piling on more words.

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