



MY Access! Writer's Workshop

Middle School Narrative Writing

Prompt: Learning from Experience

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Learning from Experience

We learn many things from experience. Think about an experience that you had that taught you an important lesson. What was the experience? What lesson did you learn from this experience? Write an essay about an experience you had and the important lesson you learned from it.

As you write, remember your essay will be scored based on how well you

- develop a multi-paragraph response to the assigned topic that clearly communicates the purpose of your story to the audience.
- describe the characters, setting, and conflict using meaningful sensory descriptions and details that enable the reader to visualize the experiences in your narrative.
- organize your story in a clear and logical manner, including an introduction, body, and conclusion.
- use well-structured sentences and language that are appropriate for your audience.
- edit your work to conform to the conventions of standard American English.

Attacking the Prompt

- Read the prompt again. Underline or highlight exactly what the prompt is telling you to DO.
- This is a narrative prompt, so you need to use a story format. Be aware, however, that you cannot just write a story about your experience, but you need to explain the lesson you learned.

Teaching Ideas for MY Access! Learning From Experience

Part 1 - Prewriting

- Read the prompt with students and “attack” it—figure out what, exactly, they are expected to write about.
- Have students discuss the three quotes about “learning” in small groups. Then discuss as a whole class. The idea is to get students thinking about the bigger lessons they have learned in life!
- Distribute the T-Chart and give students 5 minutes to list their experiences (they are only completing the LEFT side of the T-chart. If necessary, have them fold it in half so only that side shows). They don’t need to list ideas for each category, but they do need to get down as many ideas as possible. The teacher should also complete a chart.
- Teacher shares list with students. Instruct them to add any new ideas to their personal list if something you shared triggers a memory.
- Have students share with a partner and continue to add to their lists. Remind them that the purpose of this activity is to get down as many ideas as possible.
- Share as a whole class:
 - As students share, teacher fills out the left side of the T-chart on the board or in Word if capable of projecting. After a student shares an experience, ask him/her to tell you the lesson learned. Fill out the right side.
- Have students fill out the right side of their personal T-Chart for their top TWO or THREE experiences only.

Beginning to Draft

- Initially, simply have students do a “quickwrite” for 8-10 minutes about one of their starred ideas on the T-chart. Have them write as quickly as possible without stopping to think—they just need to get their ideas down. Tell them not to worry about grammar or spelling. If they run out of ideas on one topic, they should choose another starred idea and begin writing about that.

Revising and Narrowing Focus

- After students get something down on paper, have them try “looping” as a way to narrow their focus.
- As students are writing, begin teaching them about the features of a strong narrative.
- Complete the activity “Teaching the Elements of a Narrative” using the MY Access! Topic Outline.
- Use the “Planning a Short Story/Narrative” handout in *Step Up to Writing* and work through ideas provided for starting and ending narratives. This activity will work excellently in conjunction with the MY Access! Narrative Wizard. Both will help students focus in on HOW they will tell their stories.

MY Access! Learning From Experience: Thinking About the Prompt

*Directions: Discuss the following quotes with your group. When you are finished discussing, every group member needs to write **in their own words** what they think each quote means.*

I am always ready to learn although I do not always like to be taught.

-- Winston Churchill

A tough lesson to learn in life is that not everyone wishes you well.

-- Dan Rather

The first problem for all of us men and women is not to learn, but to unlearn.

-- Gloria Steinem

Learning From Experience

Directions: On the left side of the chart are some categories that may help you remember an important experience in your life. Under each category write a brief description of any events you remember. On the right side, choose your top 2-3 experiences and record the lessons you learned from each.

Life Experience	Life Lesson: What You Learned
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Mistakes you have made

Challenges you have faced/Times you have struggled

Times you have been rewarded

Events that have happened to you that changed your thinking/opened your eyes to something new

LOOPING

Looping is an exercise many writers use to narrow the focus of a piece. Often, in early drafts we write anything and everything that comes to mind about our topic (and this is okay!). As we revise, we want to “zoom in” on only the most important and interesting parts of our narrative. We need to discover our PURPOSE for writing.

Tell students:

Step 1: Re-read your entire piece.

Step 2: Choose one line that stands out to you. Maybe it is an extremely important moment in your story, maybe it is the most exciting point, or maybe you just like the idea you are trying to express.

Step 3: Underline or highlight that line.

Step 4: On a blank piece of paper, write ONLY that line at the top of the paper.

Step 5: Now, for next ten minutes, write as QUICKLY as you can about only that line.

Step 6: Think about what happened. Do you like what you just wrote more than your first draft? If so, you now have a NEW and more specific focus for your story. At the very least, one part of your story has been “exploded.”

LOOPING in MY Access!

Here is a powerful way to use Looping while logged in to MY Access! This exercise will help students process and understand the power of revision.

Tell students:

Step 1: Give students 10-15 minutes to write quickly about their prompt in MY Access! Do not allow them to use tools and encourage them to keep typing without thinking too much!

Step 2: Stop students. Have them re-read their piece and choose one line that stands out to them to highlight.

Step 3: Write that line down on a piece of paper.

Step 4: Submit the draft you just completed and receive a score.

Step 5: Back at “assignments,” begin a “revision” of the piece. When you get to “My Writing Space,” delete everything you just wrote (don’t panic--your first draft is already saved).

Step 6: Write the line from “Step 2” at the top of your writing space. Now, for next ten minutes, write as QUICKLY as you can about only that line.

Step 7: Submit this response.

Step 8: Think about what happened. Compare your two scores. Do you like what you just wrote more than your first draft? If so, you now have a NEW and more specific focus for your story. At the very least, one part of your story has been “exploded” and this will add to the overall purpose of your first draft.

Narrative Texts: Telling a Story

Characteristics of a Narrative:

- Narrates (tells) a sequence of events and scenes with sensory details
- Develops plot and character
- Has rising action and conflict that leads to a climax
- Can be in 1st or 3rd person point-of-view

Purpose of a Narrative:

- To entertain and relate an event within a time sequence
- Can (but not always) share personal reflections or express thoughts and feelings

Types of Narrative:

- Novels
- Short stories
- First person autobiographical incident
- Personal memoir or essay
- Myths, legends, folk tales, fairy tales, tall tales
- Epic poems

Features of a Narrative:

- **Setting:** Where and when the story takes place
- **Characters:** Described in detail so reader knows not only what they look like, but also what they think, say, feel, etc.
- **Plot:** What happens—the sequence of events. Strong plots have the following elements:
 - **Conflict:** moments that create suspense or anticipation for the reader. Conflict doesn't always have to be dramatic or scary (even happy stories have conflict).
 - **Climax:** The turning point of the story—the point where the greatest emotional involvement for the reader takes place.
 - **Resolution:** The final outcome of the story. It doesn't have to be happy, but it should give the reader some sense of closure.

Teaching the Elements of a Narrative

1. Distribute the following materials to your students:
 - A professional narrative text
 - A hard copy of the *MY Access! Narrative Topic Outline*
 - A marker, crayon or highlighter
2. Place students in groups of four. Give each student in the group a different colored marker/highlighter and assign each student an “expert” role.
 - Student 1 will read the text and highlight only the **setting**.
 - Student 2 will read the text and highlight details about the **characters**—physical descriptions as well as anything they do, say, or think.
 - Student 3 will read the text and highlight only the **conflicts** they see in the story.
 - Student 4 will read the text and highlight the **climax** and the **resolution**.
3. Read the story as a whole class. Each student is to highlight his or her “expert” area as you read. After, discuss the various elements and how/why they worked. For example, why were the character descriptions important? What did you see the characters doing? What did the setting add to the story? How did the author make the climax exciting?

An Extension of This Activity

This activity can also be used as a form of peer response. This time, however, students in the group will bring their own narratives. They will read the first narrative, and each student will highlight his or her area of expertise. Then, have students pass to the right and read the second narrative doing the same thing. They should also write any questions they have in the appropriate section of the *MY Access! Narrative Topic Outline*. When students get their own narrative back, have them check to make sure they have all colors highlighted. If not, time to revise!

Narrative Topic Outline

Setting: Where and when does your story take place? Describe your locations in detail.

Characters: Who is in your story? Describe these people in detail. For example, what do they look like? What do they say that is important (dialogue)? What are they feeling?

Plot: What happens in your story? Create pictures for your reader to see, hear, and feel by using a great amount of detail in every scene you describe. **Show**, don't tell.

Conflict: A good story has to create suspense, anticipation, or a sense of wonder for your reader; otherwise, why would your reader keep reading? Even if your story is about a happy time in your life, remember to include something that will arouse your readers' emotions and make them excited about what will happen. Show your reaction to the conflict.

Climax: What is the turning point of your story—the point where you have your readers' greatest interest and greatest emotional involvement in your story?

Resolution: What is the final outcome of your story?

Introducing your story: How will you begin your story so that your readers will get really excited about reading on?

The following are some suggestions.

Dialogue—“It’s perfectly clear why she wants it,” said Marge, as she cut through the store, making sure she would beat out Jessica.

A flashback—Erin was a hundred yards from the finish line and knew she shouldn’t look back. The problem was that she couldn’t help herself.

A startling statement—My town of Newbridge was a village of fools, fools young and old.

A puzzling statement—Across the street lived old Johnson, blind as a bat, but kept my house safe from the zombies who visited every night.

A description of your main character and your setting—Erica pulled back her hair and put on her glasses. Now that she was running for class president, she wanted to look the part.

Putting your story in order: How will you tell your story? Will you start from the beginning and describe each scene until you get to the end? Or will you start at the end of your story to create interest and then after the first paragraph begin at the beginning?

Most importantly, make an outline of what happens in each scene of your story in the order that it happened before you begin writing. Then follow the sequence of events when you write your story. Otherwise, you can confuse your reader about what is happening.

MY Access! Writing Domains

Type of Writing:

Your writing will be evaluated on the basis of five domains or trains of writing. Study each domain on the rubric and USE BULLET POINTS to take notes so that you can define each one. The feedback you receive will use the language on this chart.

Focus & Meaning	Content & Development	Organization	Language Use & Style	Mechanics & Conventions
				<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Piece is paragraphed• Grammar errors do not interfere with the message• Uses proper punctuation• Excellent spelling

Student Sample – Score point 3

Don't ever smoke out in the open because you never know who could be driving by, and don't smoke it just because all your friends are doing it.

It was Friday in the afternoon and my friends Monshea, Maruim, Mercedes, Nye, and Duebie stopped by to see if I wanted to come outside. At first I was not going to come out, but they talk me into coming out. Since it was a nice outside we decided to walk to the park, when we got there Nye who was eighteen pulled out a blunt that was called black and mild. I never had it before but the rest of them did them did so they start smoking it, and Duebie who was only seven took about five puffs. "Boy" when I saw that I was in shock, then that when it around to me I said no, then thats when everybody was like stop being a chicken, Mercedes and Duebie did it and they're only seven and ten so how come you can't do it. I will never listen to them again because soon as I put that thing to my mouth, guess who showed up my mother. All I heard was Dameka your better get your behind in this right now. She was coming to tell me that she was going to the store and she will be back. I figured something was going that is why I didn't want to do it in the first place. Then I said goodbye to everybody and got in the car, when we got home my mother tore my hiney up. Now that is an experience that I learned, don't do something that you are not suppose to do just to fit in.

Student Sample- Score point 6

It was our fourth game of Risk at the Taylors' beach house during a summer a few years ago, and a torrential storm showed no sign of letting up. Rain battered windows that had seen better times while a slight draft spread through the house. A gloomy feeling hung in the air and settled upon everyone in the cottage.

"I'm so bored! This game is getting really old!" my god sister, Su Rei, cried with frustration as I eliminated the last of her armies from the game board on the kitchen table for the third time. "I've got to do something else or I'll explode!"

Six sets of eyes turned to look at her. "Can we finish the game first? I'm winning... again," Rei's blonde cousin, Robin, said smugly.

"You are not," Robin's brother bickered from his end of the table. Simon had just turned fifteen and did everything he could to irk is sister who was three years his senior. "Besides, you may have won the last game, but only because I was going so easy on you."

"Simon, Robin!" my godparents warned for the umpteenth time that afternoon. Lindsay and Riley had always enjoyed the siblings' company; however, this was the first time in numerous years that they had had custody of the entire group, or the Munchkin Bunch as Lindsay teasingly called us: Simon, Robin, Su Rei, my brother, and me. At that point, my thus far taciturn sibling Eric spoke up.

"It's raining, it's cold, and most of us are bored. What do you say to a trip to the movie theater?" Normally, Eric never suggested things like this under someone else's roof, but the fact that he had showed everyone how evidently desperate he was for a change in scenery.

“Hey, that’s a good idea,” Riley said, standing slowly and stretching. “Pile into the car, kids.”

Eagerly, we followed his example. We only slowed when Robin threw open the front door, greeted by a sheet of coastal rain water.

“Close that door this instant!” Lindsay exclaimed. Even Riley was stunned at the commanding voice that had issued from Lindsay’s small figure. “Coats, everyone,” she said, tossing everyone warm windbreakers after Robin had wrestled the door closed. “No excuses,” she cut Su Rei off with a maternal glance. “I’m not sending you all home in a few days to have your parents ask me why you’re sick,” she said defensively.

“But you are my parent,” Rei grumbled.

“Exactly.”

After Lindsay was sure everyone was warm, she allowed us through the door. The downpour had yet to cease, and it had created a steady stream of water trickling down the gutter, onto the driveway and beneath the car. Riley jumped into his rickety Chrysler Plymouth and unlocked the doors. Although Simon was extremely short for his age, I was the youngest and smallest of the bunch, and therefore always the final person to step into the vehicle.

As I stamped my feet, trying to keep warm, I heard a loud snort from inside, and Su Rei groaned. “Looks like we’re stuck with the worst,” she muttered to me. “Again.”

Meanwhile, I had become thoroughly sodden; the previously warm jacket I wore did not keep out the growing chill. Shivering, I ducked my head into the car and scowled.

Riley and Lindsay sat in the driver’s and passenger’s seats. Somehow, Simon had managed to squeeze between them, smirking as his guardians shifted awkwardly. The three back seats were filled by the rest: Robin and Su Rei controlled the window seats while Eric balanced precariously between them.

“I guess we should take two cars instead,” Lindsay said hesitantly. “Or I could just stay here.”

“No way! This is a family thing, we’re all going. Besides, two cars would be a waste of gas,” Riley declared with finality. “It’s not like we’re going to get pulled over!”

“Mei, looks like you’ll have to sit on either Rei’s or Robin’s lap,” Lindsay sighed, using my old nickname.

How do I always find myself in the worst situations? I thought as I mentally slammed my head into an imaginary brick wall.

After a considerable amount of arguing, I finally sat uneasily on Rei’s lap. As soon as we had pulled out of the cottage’s cobbled driveway, Robin glanced behind us and swore.

“It’s a cop!” she yelled. Eric swiftly covered Rei’s face with my dripping hood which muffled her protests.

“Hey, it’s no big deal.” Riley tried to calm us down, but he failed miserably. “I bet we’re all overreacting. He isn’t following us!” Under his breath, Riley added, “He’d better not be following us.” Lindsay gave him an apprehensive glance.

For the next two miles, we drove in silence. I watched as the tough pine-like coastal trees passed by and periodically glanced behind us to watch the police car. It was still following Riley’s Plymouth closely, and I imagined a shady looking officer sitting behind the tinted windows, observing every move we made.

“Can I take my face out of this hood?” Rei gasped. “I’m losing oxygen here!” She pulled the material from herself and sighed. Eric, Simon, and Robin were staring at her; I still looked out of the window.

“He’s getting closer,” I whispered. “Rei, we’re Siamese twins connected by the shoulder if anyone asks!”

“I’m three years older than you!” she burst out indignantly.

“Shh!” Eric and Robin said. Both of them had their faces glued to the mottled rear window as if they were playing a fascinating video game. Silence reigned throughout the vehicle, and I began absently scrutinizing passing buildings and the odd looking trees once more. Rei had pulled my hood over her head again. The others were all watching the officer behind us warily.

After what seemed like hours, the police car finally pulled into a shopping mall. Lindsay sighed with relief, and Su Rei coughed and uncovered her head for a second time.

“That was better than any movie!” Simon exclaimed. Suddenly, we all laughed. Eric was so amused by our earlier predicament that by the time we had parked at the movie theater, tears were streaming down his face. However, despite our mirth, each of us had learned our lesson. None of us, especially me, were willing to experience another “cop episode.” After we had watched a film at the theater, Riley and Lindsay drove back to the cottage, brought back two cars, and drove us home in two separate vehicles. Since then, each and every one of us has been particularly careful about driving safely.