To write forcefully and in detail about history, students need interactive experiences about which to write. Writing for Understanding activities tap into students’ multiple abilities so that all learners—even those with lesser linguistic skills—have something memorable to write about. Creating purposeful writing assignments—such as writing an oral history on the legacy of the civil-rights movement, haiku on the internment of Japanese Americans during World War II, a eulogy for the Mayan civilization, or a letter to the editor of a colonial newspaper commenting on the Boston Massacre—motivates students to write with style and meaning.

Eleventh grader Julia Adler enjoys writing. But in her traditional history classes, she found that writing assignments were vague and predictable. “Typically, we were told to write all we knew about some king we had studied,” she explains. “The problem with assignments like that is I didn’t know what to write about.” When Julia was assigned research papers with few guidelines and expected to repeat facts she found in the library, she often would add imaginary dialogue to make the task more interesting. “You don’t learn much just by rewriting plain facts that you have read or heard about,” she says.

Julia’s experience changed when she entered a class that used the Writing for Understanding approach. During a unit on the civil-rights movement, she was required to write a dialogue between Martin Luther King Jr. and Malcolm X. The goal was for students to portray their understanding of the differences in the philosophies of the two civil-rights leaders. Prior to writing the dialogue, they had a variety of multiple-ability experiences that gave them information about the civil-rights movement and the ideas of the two men. Students imagined the pain of discrimination in an Experiential Exercise, participated in an Interactive Slide Lecture on the major achievements of the movement, and read and discussed primary source materials on King and Malcolm X. Immediately before writing the
dialogue, students engaged in a pre-writing activity designed to give them ideas for the dialogue. Working in pairs, students assumed the roles of King and Malcolm X and responded in character to prompts from the teacher, such as “Integration into a racist system won’t work” and “Separation is no different from segregation.” Initially, Julia and her classmates were skeptical about the role-play.

By the time she sat down to her assignment, Julia was well prepared. “I really understood the ideas of Martin Luther King and Malcolm X through the different activities. That’s why I put more effort into the dialogue than I would have put into a regular essay assignment.” From Julia’s dialogue:

The room was bathed in the light of the fire. It was a sort of office, with an oaken desk with high-backed chairs and mahogany bookshelves lining two walls.... Through the door strode two men, chatting amiably.

**Malcolm X:** Martin, I’ve been meaning to talk to you about this for awhile. I think that you’re going about the civil rights movement the wrong way.... This policy of nonviolence just seems a bit irrational. It’s kind of like saying, “Go ahead and whip me, beat me down, just like you’ve done for centuries. I don’t mind.”

**King:** Our nonviolence policies have helped us accomplish so much. Sit-ins, marches, demonstrations, and those freedom rides ... they show that we are unified, that we will not lie still while they oppress us. It also shows how strongly we believe in this cause, what we know is right, and we shall endure any amount of pain for this cause; that we shall not stoop to violence, because that would be on the level of those who are against us, and that would destroy our cause politically and socially.

**Malcolm X:** We all know this but the time is NOW. We have been using nonviolent tactics for years and, yes, it has brought results, but the results come so slowly.

**King:** Malcolm, I know that things may not have been happening very quickly in the past few years, but look at it from the time scale of one hundred years, two hundred years. For two centuries the black man had been denied his rights as a citizen, first with slavery, then with oppression and segregation. Segregation is what most white people grew up with and were taught to believe. ... You must understand how deep this vein of racism runs in America, and what a hard task desegregation is.

**Malcolm X:** That’s another thing I really don’t agree with you about. Why desegregate? What if we fight for, and get, our own power, and our own businesses, and restaurants, that are the same as the whites’. Why do we have to go to the whites and beg to be let into their establishments. Even if we finally get into them, and are allowed to be in the same room with them, they will still treat us badly, giving us lower quality food in restaurants, and worse tables, and lower-paying jobs or all sorts of devious little things that cannot be pinned down to complain about.

**King:** Malcolm, one of the ideas behind desegregation is so that the whites will be able to, or will be forced to, associate with us and see that we are people. ... If they know us and have been around us for awhile, they can realize for themselves that racism is wrong, because we are their equals, just painted differently by the hand of God.
You can project slides of images to add realism as students role play different historical figures discussing key issues.

Julia attributes her successful dialogue—which demonstrated a clear understanding of the salient differences between King and Malcolm X—to the style of the assignment, which allowed her to make the dialogue realistic. She was also able to draw on the rich experiences that preceded the assignment to lend historical detail to her writing.

Writing as a Key to Learning in Social Studies

In the conventional history classroom, writing is used almost exclusively for assessment. While it is valuable to have students demonstrate what they learn through essays, test questions, or position papers, writing assignments should also be used to facilitate learning. Consider writing not as an end itself, but as access to learning. Writing can help your students learn history in these ways:

- Writing challenges students to clarify, organize, and express what they have learned. When students are asked to verbalize their understanding of a historical issue, they often respond with vague, unorganized ideas. Requiring students to put their thoughts in writing challenges them to have explicit, detailed, and tangible ideas. After a study of the aftermath of the Civil War and Reconstruction, for example, students might have a general opinion about the present-day condition of African Americans. But when required to write a letter to Frederick Douglass about the issue—citing historical and

“Through lots of different types of writing assignments I realized that history is something that we need to understand by asking ‘why’ and ‘how.’ History can be an enjoyable learning experience.”

High School Student
contemporary evidence—students are forced to clarify their ideas, to organize what they have learned, and to express their ideas coherently.

- Writing requires students to analyze and synthesize. Writing can be used to allow students to analyze historical events or to synthesize a large body of information. High-level thinking enables students to draw conclusions, to make connections between the past and the present, and to develop informed opinions. At the conclusion of a unit on the Great Depression, for example, you might have students study poverty in the United States today. They could analyze pictures of individuals living in poverty, examine data on current economic trends, and synthesize their knowledge of the Depression, the New Deal, and contemporary poverty by writing a coherent plan suggesting a course of action to alleviate poverty in America.

- Writing enables students to reach deeper understanding as they draw on previous learning for supporting detail. Too often students make generalizations or express opinions about historical events without supporting detail or fact. Having students write about history is an excellent way to teach them the necessity of supporting their arguments with solid historical evidence and of carefully reviewing past events for deeper meaning. Assigning a position paper on whether European colonization benefited or hurt Africa, for example, forces students to analyze what they learned, to formulate an argument, and to support it with historical detail.

- Ownership of written products motivates students to excel. Students invest more time and energy in learning history if they are challenged to write creatively. If you encourage your students to develop their individual voices, their writing will become a form of self-expression rather than just a chronicle of facts. Students might learn about the plight of Chinese immigrants who were detained on Angel Island by viewing slides, listening to primary source accounts about life in the detention center, and reading the poetry Chinese immigrants wrote on the walls of the processing center. Students could then write and illustrate their own poems describing the experiences and feelings of detainees on Angel Island.

- The writing process makes students refine their ideas. The writing process—brainstorming, writing rough drafts, revising, and editing—requires focused thinking and precise expression. Whereas the spoken word is transitory, a written idea can be reviewed, revised, and embellished. The process of writing a polished, well-supported piece leads to greater understanding of a topic. Students might think carefully about the Lewis and Clark journey, for example, by assuming the role of William Clark and writing a journal entry about his expedition. Prompted by illustrations from the journey and a word bank of key terms from Clark's journal, students could write a first draft, share and critique their drafts in small groups, and then read the best pieces aloud and compare them to Clark's actual writings.
Basing Writing on Multiple-Ability Experiences

Writing in the conventional classroom generally reveals that most students do not have much to say about the history they are taught. Essays, opinion pieces, and test answers often lack historical detail, original style, and creative expression. At best, most writing efforts tend to be a simple summation of memorized facts.

To facilitate powerful writing in history, students need a variety of memorable, interactive experiences on which to base their writing. These activities must tap into multiple abilities so that all learners—even those with lesser linguistic skills—have something to say. As students participate in these activities, they learn history, develop ideas, and form opinions before they begin formal writing. Donald Murray argues that a critical “pressure that moves [writers] forward toward the first draft is increasing information about the subject.” When students see powerful slides, role-play, discuss a controversial issue, or act out a moment in history, they are beginning the writing process. The sadness in a slave spiritual or the visible destruction of Hiroshima evokes emotions, thoughts, and questions—the essence of what drives people to put words on paper.

Following is an example of how you could sequence lessons on the Great Depression to prepare students to write an autobiographical sketch of an individual from that time. Notice how the activities tap into a wide variety of abilities.

First, students view (visual-spatial), discuss (linguistic, interpersonal), and act out (body-kinesthetic, intrapersonal) a series of slides during an Interactive Slide Lecture that chronicles the coming of the Depression. Throughout the activity they record notes (linguistic). In an Experiential Exercise detailed in

“If a child can be encouraged to make a discovery nonverbally and then verbalize his feelings, he will actually be practicing the creative process.”

Thomas Blakeslee
Chapter 3, after the teacher Pretends to lose some of the class’s quizzes, students experience some of the pain victims of bank failures felt (intrapersonal). Then students work in pairs (interpersonal) on a Social Studies Skill Builder to graph (logical-mathematical) key economic factors—unemployment, gross national product, stock prices, farm prices, bank failures—of the economic collapse. Finally, during a Problem Solving Groupwork activity, students work in groups (interpersonal) to create a minidrama (body-kinesthetic, intrapersonal) about how individuals were impacted by the Depression. They base the minidramas on images of the time (visual-spatial) and primary and literary source material (linguistic). As the minidramas are presented, students take notes (linguistic) on the various ways people were affected by the Depression.

In this sequence of activities, students learned through images, dramatizations, words, graphs, and simulations, and now have a plethora of information, ideas, feelings, and impressions—plus their own writing from their notes—on which to base on an autobiographical sketch of a fictitious figure from the Depression. The experiences give students empathy for Depression victims and specific details to include in their writing. Eleventh grader Colleen Abastillas was able to convey the pain and shame of a grocery store owner whose business had failed: “People just didn’t have the money to buy things, not even food. . . . Instead of having workers sell my apples, I was the one out on the corner selling what I had left. This was the only way I could support my family. I felt so ashamed, I could do nothing but bow my head down. . . . The one thing I could not tolerate was charity. Bread trucks came giving out free food, and I couldn’t stand the thought of depending on anyone else, but me.”

"The student writer’s most important inner resources are words to use in talking about personal experience. Start with what they know and feel—and in their own words." 

Dan Kirby and Tom Liner

Give your students a variety of information, ideas, feelings, and impressions through multiple-ability experiences to create autobiographic sketches—rich with historical detail—of people impacted by the Depression.
Creating Writing Assignments with Purpose

Purposeful writing assignments—dialogues, poetry, stories, newspaper eulogies, speeches, letters—motive students to write with style and meaning. While traditional essays and position papers are appropriate for some topics, giving students a wider variety of writing activities promotes experimentation and makes writing more exciting and novel. Here are twelve different forms of writing that will challenge your students to write creatively and in detail about history.

- Encourage students to write a dialogue between two historical figures that highlights opposing viewpoints. Ask students to write dialogues in a conversational tone and to include the salient points for each speaker. For example, students might write a dialogue between a turn-of-the-century worker and his boss that focuses not only on typical worker’s grievances—long work hours, low pay, unsafe working conditions—but also on management’s concerns: competition, low productivity, worker absenteeism. Other suitable subjects are Soviet and American ideology during the Cold War, a Loyalist and a Patriot in 1776, Mansa Musa and Sunni Ali Ber, a Japanese courtier and a samurai warrior, Thomas Hobbes and John Locke, and Harriet Tubman and John C. Calhoun.

- Teach students to write essays that includes a clear thesis statement, topic sentences for each paragraph, supporting detail, and a strong conclusion. Essay assignments are best used when you want students to analyze or synthesize a large body of history. For example, you might want students to write an essay highlighting the conflicts that led to the split between the Orthodox Church and the Roman Catholic Church. Other ideas for essay assignments include a comparison of European and Japanese feudalism, an analysis of whether the Civil War was inevitable, an exploration of the historical roots of tension in the Middle East, and a comparison of Native-American and colonial land adaptations.

- Captivate interest in the past by having students write eulogies extolling the virtues of a prominent historical figure or civilization. Eulogies should include formal language, a brief summary about the person (or civilization), an elaboration of that person’s legacy, and a conclusion about how the achievements of that person still impact the world today. A eulogy to the Roman Empire, for example, would include a summary of the accomplishments of the Roman Empire and a list of how those accomplishments—in areas such as law, architecture, art, government, and sports—are seen in the world today. Other people and civilizations students can write eulogies about include Kublai Khan, Hiawatha, Abraham Lincoln, Susan B. Anthony, Socrates, the Soviet Union, the Roman Empire, and the Mayan civilization.

- Focus interest on controversial historical figures by having students create a Hero/Wanted poster that both praises and criticizes a figure from the past. Each poster should have an illustration, background information, and a list of the person’s accomplishments and “crimes.” Students use critical-thinking skills to explore dual perspectives. For example, a poster on Nelson Mandela might list his accomplishments—awakening the

Prompting Inspired Writing

When a writing assignment is compelling enough for students to care about, inspired writing follows.

"Writing a eulogy about Joaquin Murietta made me think about how Mexicans must have felt after the war with Mexico. I could really feel history because I had to put myself in Murietta’s place."

Middle School Student
History Alive!

conscien
ces of South Africa, building a powerful political movement, focusing
world attention on the social problems of his nation—and his alleged
crimes: inciting South Africans to riot, arming members of the African
National Congress, making South Africa look dis harmonious to the rest of
the world. Other poster candidates include Chingis Khan, Martin Luther,
Christopher Columbus, Joseph Stalin, Mao Tse Tung, Huey Long, Al Capone,
and Indira Gandhi.

- Show students how to write historical journal entries that bring to life
  the events of the past. Encourage students to adopt a narrative format that
  uses the colloquial language of the era. Each entry should include the cor-
  rect historical date and a detailed account of the historical figure's feelings
  and experiences. Use visual or musical prompts to give students ideas. For
  example, to encourage students to write journal entries about the Lewis and
  Clark expedition, show them a series of illustrations from William Clark's
  own journal and a map detailing the journey's route. For each illustration,
  ask students to write an entry from Clark's perspective and in the present
tense—as if they were there. Other ideas for journal writing include a report
from a British journalist on social life in the American colonies, a journal
from a participant in the French Revolution, a travel log from the Silk Road,
and excerpts from the diary of a civil-rights activist who participated in the
Freedom March.

- Challenge students to write letters that convey the feelings of a historical
  figure to a particular audience. Letters are written from the point of
  view of someone who witnessed history and then related those events to a
  specific audience. Encourage students to use descriptive narrative and to
  integrate as much accurate historical information as possible. Motivate them
  with pre-writing activities that make them feel as though they have wit-
  nessed history. During a unit on World War I, for example, place students on
  the floor between rows of desks representing trenches, and show them a
  series of slides depicting the horrors of warfare on Europe's western front. As
  they are sitting in the trenches, have them write two letters home, one to
  their family and one to a trusted friend. Later they can discuss how the tone
  of each letter depended on the audience for which it was written. Other his-
  torical personas they might adopt include an Arab traveler writing home
  about a visit to Timbuktu, Dorothea Lange writing to President Roosevelt
  chronicling the plight of victims of the Depression, or the bomber pilot
  writing home about dropping an atom bomb on Hiroshima.

- Have students write a memorandum to a historical leader that recom-
  mends a course of action or a new policy. Memoranda should be properly
  formatted with To, From, Re, Date; an executive summary of the action or
  policy recommendation; and a list of supporting reasons. For example, stu-
  dents might assume the role of Sor Juana Inés de la Cruz, a great writer and
  Spanish nun living in Mexico in the sixteenth century, sending a memo to
  the king of Spain deploring the unequal position of women in Mexican
  society. Among the evidence she might cite is that women received little if
  any schooling, that nuns were expected to play a less public role than
  priests, and that women writers could find no publishers for their work.
  Other possibilities include memos to the president regarding poverty in
Chapter 6

America today, to Portugal’s Prince Henry the Navigator about whether or not to trade with Africa, to a British viceroy regarding India’s demand for independence, and to President Truman regarding whether or not to use the atomic bomb on Japan.

- Help students understand bias by assigning them to write a newspaper editorial about a historical event. Editorials should clearly state their position on the issue, use language that reflects the bias of the newspaper, and contain supporting evidence. For example, students might assume the role of an Islamic editorial writer commenting on the Crusades. Far from a Holy War, students would write about the Crusades as a military invasion of Islamic territory and as a calculated war of genocide against the Muslim people. Other opinion pieces might include an editorial from a South Carolina newspaper on the eve of the Civil War, an editorial on the Boston Tea Party from a colonial newspaper, and an editorial from a Catholic newspaper on the Reformation.

- Teach students to interview individuals who experienced recent history and to write oral histories afterward. Prepare students by conducting a mock interview in class, asking well-conceived, thoughtful questions. Then have students make a list of twenty to thirty questions to ask their interviewee. Carefully discuss ways—such as being polite, making eye contact, asking several questions, practicing active-listening skills—students can make the interviewee feel more comfortable. After they have conducted their interview, their write-up should include an introduction of the interviewee, direct quotes and paraphrasing from the interview, and an analysis of the interviewee’s perspective on the historical event. One powerful oral history students can research, interview, and write about is the Vietnam War. Require students to find someone who was affected by the war—a protester, a conscientious objector, a soldier, a parent who lost a son or daughter, a local politician who opposed the war—and then ask such questions as: What do you remember about the war? How did it affect you personally? Did you support or oppose the war? What do you remember most about the war? How did the war change our nation? Other topics for oral histories include the Depression, World War II, the civil-rights movement, the Cold War, recent immigration, and the social rebellion of the late 1960s.

- Encourage students to write with empathy about an event or group in history through poetry and song lyrics. Students should adhere to a specific style of poetry or song lyric and use descriptive language that evokes emotion and makes direct references to the topic. For example, after showing slides about the internment of Japanese Americans during World War II, challenge students to write haiku from the perspective of those interned, using evocative language and emotion. Other possibilities include illuminated poems on medieval Europe, a spell-out poem about Montezuma, lyrics to a corrido, or folk song, about the Mexicano heritage in the Southwest, and adapted lyrics to “My Country Tis of Thee” from the perspective of a turn-of-the-century populist.

- Teach students how to write position papers that take a definitive and on controversial issues. Position papers should include an introduction framing a controversial issue, a clear statement of the student’s

“Oral histories have been a tremendous success with my students. Initially, students are reluctant and a little scared to take the risk to interview someone. But after they talk to someone and record original historical findings, they produce fabulous writing and have a real sense of accomplishment.”

Mike Warner, High School Teacher

“The haiku my students produced about Japanese-American internment were amazing. The students illustrated their poems, and I posted them on the wall for all to see. They left a lasting impression.”

Deborah Whitson, High School Teacher
Students as Published Authors

Publishing student writing enlarges the audience, motivates students, and creates the need for real communication. You might post student writing in class, photocopy it for others to read, or encourage students to give dramatic readings of their written work. You might join with other teachers to print and bind oral histories for the entire school, submit pieces to the school paper, or display writing in the halls. Or you might help students submit writing to the local paper or writing contests.

History Alive!

position, supporting evidence, compelling arguments against the opposing viewpoint, and a persuasive conclusion. For example, students might write that the grievances aired in the late nineteenth century by women reformers at Seneca Falls have not been redressed today. As evidence, they might include the fact that today women earn approximately seventy cents for every dollar a man earns, that women do about eighty percent of the housework in the United States, and that only ten percent of management positions are held by women. Other position papers might be on whether the United States should be praised or condemned for its actions in the Cold War, whether Hernan Cortés and his men were guilty of genocide, whether Africa benefited from European colonialism, or whether Russians were better off under communism.

- Show students how to integrate newfound historical knowledge into a creative story. Stories should have a clear plot, a descriptive setting, characters, a conflict, and a resolution. Challenge students to integrate historical information into their stories. For example, after students have listened to Hopi music from rain-dance ceremonies, ask them to write a story about how the rain god affected life in the Southwest. Their story should include aspects of the geography, history, and social life of the Southwest; and the elements of a good story, such as character, conflict, and resolution. Other possible topics include a tale based on African folk tales, a story about life without the Bill of Rights, a story in the style of the Canterbury tales, and a story about life as a serf on a medieval manor.

Show this slide of the Pueblo Welpi where Hopi lived in Arizona and play music to inspire your students to write a creative story about Native Americans.
Writing as a Process

Use the experience and innovation of English teachers as you incorporate writing into your classes. Frustrated with traditional instructional methods like sentence diagramming and grammar drills, many English teachers looked to the writing of professionals. They found successful writers use a process based on writing from experience, revising original drafts, and careful editing, and know that writing takes time, patience, and revision. Likewise, students in history classes need to honor the writing process. To demonstrate their understanding of a topic effectively, students must be allowed to generate ideas through pre-writing activities, to create original drafts, and to revise and edit them. This investment in time yields powerful writing and increased learning. Here is an effective, six-step writing process you can teach your students.

1. Engage students in pre-writing activities. To write forcefully about history, students need concrete ideas and a way to organize them. Pre-writing activities help students generate specific ideas. For example, you might put them through a role-play that simulates discrimination and immediately afterward have them write down all their ideas and feelings. Students might also access concrete ideas by reviewing their notes from previous assignments; role-playing dialogues between historical figures; participating in panel discussions to explore different viewpoints on controversial events; examining historical photos, illustrations, or art; listening to music that represents an idea from the past; or working with a partner or small group to brainstorm ideas. Once students have generated ideas, they must organize and plan their writing. Model several methods for organizing ideas. You might have them put their ideas into outline form by topic and subtopic, or into a spoke diagram with the main idea in the center surrounded by supporting details.

2. Give clear expectations and precise guidelines for writing assignments. Confusion is a major obstacle to coherent writing. Give your students a handout that clearly states guidelines and deadlines for all parts of the assignment.

3. Have students write a first draft. Once students finish organizing their ideas, have them write down all of their ideas and experiment with organizational structure. Stress that while this draft does not have to be polished, it must be complete. Collect the drafts and give students credit for their work. Read them quickly, and note your suggestions.

4. Use peer feedback groups. Divide students into heterogeneous groups of three or four. Before students move into groups, emphasize that feedback should be honest, constructive, and specific. Once students are in groups, encourage them to read their papers aloud to the group. While one student reads, the others should ask for clarification. As comments are made, writers should note the suggestions directly on their drafts. After listening to a paper, student respondents should fill in the "Peer Feedback Checklists" (see p. 118) and give them to the writer.

"There is something antic about creating, although the enterprise be serious. And there is a matching antic spirit that goes with writing about it, for if ever there was a silent process, it is the creative one. Antic and serious and silent." —Jerome Bruner

"Writing has got to be an act of discovery ... I write to find out what I am thinking about." —Edward Albee

A New Beginning

During peer revision time, ask students to move the concluding paragraph of their first draft to the beginning to act as an introductory paragraph. Have them read this new introduction to their peer group for feedback. Sometimes writers finally get to what they really want to say only at the conclusion.

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Peer Feedback Checklist

Respondent's Name __________________________ Writer's Name __________________________
Assignment __________________________ Date __________ Class/Per. __________

Scoring scale: 1 2 3 4 5
Poor Average Excellent

FIRST DRAFT  Score (1 – 5)  Comments and Suggestions

Did the writer:
1. Write clear sentences?

2. Cite accurate historical information?

3. Use supporting details and examples?

4. Use a proper format and organization?

5. Create a logical, coherent piece of writing?

Additional feedback

6. Pick out three sentences you particularly like. What do you like most about them?

7. What is your favorite part of this piece? Why?

8. What should the writer do to improve the piece?
5. Require students to make revisions. Students should use the feedback they received from you and from their peers to revise their original draft.

6. Have students edit their final draft. Before turning in their final drafts, require students to have their papers edited. The writer can fill out the “Editing Checklist” on page 120, or you can have the writer get someone else—a classmate, a parent, or another teacher—to complete it. Tell students that if their editor finds many errors, they must rewrite the paper. Minor changes can be made directly on the final draft. Students should attach the completed “Editing Checklist” to their final draft.

Hints for Managing the Paper Load

Assessing Writing for Understanding activities can be taxing and time-consuming, especially if you expect to thoroughly grade every piece of writing. Here are alternatives that will give your students substantive feedback while saving you from a crushing paper load.

1. Use Peer Feedback Groups during the writing process to minimize the time it takes to grade rough drafts.
2. Have students write in a first draft/final draft format. Grade only the final draft.
3. Use focused grading. Grade for only one or two specific parts of the assignment other than historical accuracy, such as organization or persuasiveness. At the beginning of each assignment, clearly define the criteria for assessment.
4. Use a portfolio system in which students keep selected samples of their work throughout the semester. After students complete several Writing for Understanding assignments, have them choose two or three to further revise. Thoroughly grade these writings.

Ready-Made Portfolios

At the end of the writing project, collect all drafts, notes, and checklists—stapled together, with the final draft on top. Students (and you) will see how much work they have done to get to the final draft. These writing assignments can go into students’ portfolios.
5. Stagger due dates for major writing assignments among your classes, and don’t set them immediately before the end of a grading period.

6. Create a “Writing Evaluation Form” (see page 121) to allow student to assess themselves. Tailor the form to the featured aspects of a particular assignment.

---

**Editing Checklist**

1. Describe the appearance of the paper. Is it typed? Well-formatted? Clean?

2. List any spelling errors.

3. List punctuation or capitalization suggestions.

4. Give examples of sentences that are hard to read, and offer alternatives.

5. Give examples of arguments that were not supported with details or examples, and suggest alternatives.

6. Comment on the paper’s organization.

Editor’s signature ____________________________
# Writing Evaluation Form

Name __________________________________________
Assignment ______________________________________ Date _______________________

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Student Assessment</th>
<th>Teacher Assessment</th>
<th>Points</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1.</td>
<td>First draft completed on time.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.</td>
<td>Helpful suggestions given in Peer Response Group to other writers.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.</td>
<td>Revision notes made on first draft.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>4.</td>
<td>Revisions incorporated into final draft.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>5.</td>
<td>Careful editing of final draft for spelling, grammar, and punctuation errors.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6.</td>
<td>Final draft completed on time.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7.</td>
<td>Historical information used correctly.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8.</td>
<td>Ideas supported with detail.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9.</td>
<td>Sentences clear and understandable.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10.</td>
<td>Appropriate format and organization.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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</tbody>
</table>

**Student comments**

**Teacher comments**

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Three Outstanding Writing for Understanding Activities

Successful Writing for Understanding activities are content-appropriate, purposeful, based on multiple-ability experiences, and tailored to match the subject matter and your purpose. They require that you think of writing as more than an assessment of student knowledge, but as an opportunity to further student understanding of the content. Here are brief descriptions of three outstanding Writing for Understanding activities.

☐ Labor and Management Talk It Out

After learning about the Industrial Revolution and the working conditions in factories, students sit in pairs facing each other and assume the role of either a worker or a factory owner. The teacher prompts the “workers” by asking them to repeat in unison: “Why is pay so low in this factory?” “Workers” then engage in a debate with their partners. After a minute, the teacher stops the class and reads a line for the “factory owners,” and the pairs once more debate. The teacher reads three or four lines for each character and then asks the students to switch roles. After the debate, students have plenty of ideas with which to write a turn-of-the-century dialogue between labor and management.

Favorite Features

- Students must take on the role of a historical figure and passionately defend his or her position.
- Students must switch roles, forcing them to argue both sides of an issue.
- The pre-writing activity gives students plenty of ideas to include in their dialogues.
- Students begin writing immediately after the activity. Their excitement and enthusiasm often translate into passionate writing.
Asian Immigration: The Chinese on Angel Island

This Writing for Understanding activity is part of a unit on turn-of-the-century immigration. Students write a three-stanza poem about the Chinese immigrant experience that focuses on the long wait many had at the detention center on Angel Island in San Francisco Bay. As a pre-writing activity, students stand in pairs next to a wall covered with pieces of butcher paper as they view slides and listen to the teacher detailing the history of Chinese immigrants in California. While looking at a slide of the Angel Island barracks and poems carved in the walls by the waiting immigrants, students hear primary source accounts of what being in the detention center was like and write several lines on the butcher paper, imagining the feelings of the immigrants. They then listen while the teacher reads several poems written by Chinese immigrants, and then compare their poems to the immigrants’ poems. Students see several slides of life on Angel Island and write poetic lines for each scene, comparing their words to actual poems each time. After the slides, students walk past the poem-covered walls, reading the words of their classmates. The students are then ready to begin creating a more refined three-stanza poem.

**Favorite Features**

- Students empathize with Chinese immigrants when they hear the immigrants’ poems and see detention-center conditions.
- Students have an opportunity to compare their poems to the immigrants’ poems.
- Students are able to see and read the poems of their classmates.
- Before writing their final poem, students have many sources—photographs, stories from Chinese immigrants, the poems of Chinese immigrants and other students, and their own poetry—from which to glean ideas.

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*Students imagine the feelings of Chinese immigrants detained on Angel Island by viewing slides of the detention center, listening to a tape detailing the detainees' experiences, and writing poems on the walls, just as the detained immigrants did.*
A Letter Home from the Trenches

This Writing for Understanding activity could be used as part of a unit on World War I. After learning about the outbreak of World War I in an Interactive Slide Lecture, students feel the terrible sense of isolation and terror faced by soldiers as they crouch in "trenches" between rows of desks, view slides of the western front, hear excerpts from All Quiet on the Western Front, and respond—verbally, physically, and in writing—to various situations soldiers faced in the trenches. Then, students receive facsimiles of "aerograms" and write a letter to their families describing their experiences on the warfront. Students are encouraged to use descriptive language to explain how they cope with the rigor of the lifestyle, to describe their living conditions, and to convey the physical and emotional trauma of trench warfare.

Favorite Features

- Students learn about the physical and emotional trauma of trench warfare through a variety of intelligences—body-kinesthetic, visual-spatial, linguistic, intrapersonal, and interpersonal.
- Students write immediately after they experience the trench war simulation so that their thoughts, feelings, and experiences are incorporated into their letters.
- Students write in cramped, uncomfortable conditions, which helps make the writing more realistic.
- Students recognize the need to tailor writing to the audience as they decide what details from the warfront would be appropriate to describe to their family.

Student write letters home from the trenches, describing the living conditions, the rigorous lifestyle, and the physical and emotional trauma of trench warfare.