

## Writing Prompts

Schoolwide has compiled a list of writing prompts meant to assess students' ability to independently write for various purposes, gauge their familiarity with features of different genres and text types (narrative, informative/explanatory, and opinion/argumentative), and evaluate their knowledge of the qualities of good writing (idea development, purpose, organization, conventions, craft, and style). On-demand writing assessments allow teachers to observe and evaluate students' strengths and weaknesses and, consequently, plan meaningful instruction that meets students' needs and supports their development as confident, effective writers.

There is a menu of prompts organized by grade levels and text types for teachers to choose from. The prompts provide a context for student writing that includes an audience, a purpose, and a form or genre of writing. We imagine that teachers will use these prompts with their students before, during, and/or after a unit of study for both formative and summative assessments:

- Before and/or during your unit of study: Identify what students already know about genre features and writing for a specific purpose and audience. Then build on what they know, clarify misconceptions, and plan for whole-class instruction that meets students' needs. Additionally, begin to group students with similar needs and prepare for individual and group conferences and differentiation opportunities.
- After a unit of study: Assess what students have learned about genre-specific features, author's purpose, and audience awareness. The on-demand writing assessment can be another lens to look at students' writing in order to better understand how your students have improved as writers after an in-depth writing unit.

## OTHER THINGS TO CONSIDER

- Let your students know what they will be doing and why. Tell them the purpose of the on-demand writing task so they will understand your motives and try their best.
- Support your students in feeling comfortable about writing, and encourage them to remember all the things they know and have learned about writing.
- You may choose to have students write in response to the prompt in a single timeframe (approximately 20–40 minutes, depending on the grade you teach) or over the course of a couple of days. To get a better idea of how students go through the writing process independently, you might have students brainstorm, plan, and draft on the first day and revise and edit their writing on the second day.
- Use Schoolwide’s digital assessment tool (EVAL). This will assist you in scoring students’ writing using standards-based criteria.
- Have students score their own writing by using student-friendly rubrics.
- Provide time for student reflection following on-demand writing. Students can write an entry about the experience in their Writers’ Notebooks. They can also share their thoughts and ask questions through peer and teacher conferences.
- Provide students with specific feedback about their writing. Let them know what they are doing well and how you will help them improve their writing.

## Grades 6–8 Writing Prompts

Narrative	Informative/Explanatory	Opinion/Argumentative
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• You don't have to spend money in order to have a good time. Write a true story about when you had a great time without spending a lot of money.</li> <li>• Think about a special person in your life. This person may or may not live with you. Write a story about a day that you spent with this special person.</li> <li>• Suppose you could meet any person from history. Perhaps this person made important decisions that changed the world. Whom would you choose to meet and why? Write an original story in which you describe your encounter with this person. Be sure to include a detailed account of the events in the story, as well as a description of this person and the setting in which the story takes place.</li> <li>• Think about an event you will want to remember when you are old. Write a story about what happened so that if you read this story again when you are 80 years old, every detail will seem as clear as if it happened yesterday.</li> <li>• Think about an experience you had that was full of emotion. It may have been a positive emotion, such as happiness, excitement, or pride, or it may have been a negative emotion, such as anger, jealousy, or sadness. Write a narrative describing what happened to</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Think about how daily life, from reading to playing games to communicating with others, has changed over the past 100 years because of technology. Using specific details and examples, explain how these advancements in technology have changed daily life.</li> <li>• We see trees and nature around us everywhere. There are so many natural things on the planet that we sometimes forget how important they are and how they make our lives more enjoyable. Write an essay explaining why trees and nature are important and how they make life more enjoyable. Give reasons why you think the way you do.</li> <li>• People learn things in school and in life. What is the most important thing you have ever learned? You may have learned how to do something or learned a valuable lesson about how to get along with people. Think about why this lesson was important to you. Write an essay using specific details and examples to explain what you learned and why it is very important to you.</li> <li>• Your social studies teacher has asked you to write about the following topic: Explain why you would or would not want to live in a large city. Before you begin to write, think about living in a large city. Would you like or dislike it? Why do you think the way you do? Now write an</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The school board plans to add 1½ hours to school each day. Do you agree or disagree with extending the school day? Write an essay using specific details and examples to convince the school board to accept your position.</li> <li>• Think of something you would like to have improved, changed, or added in your school. It could relate to a school policy, a facility or building, or a course offering. Take a position on one specific issue and convince others to agree with you.</li> <li>• Some students want to have drink and snack machines at your school. Many parents, however, think those items are not healthy for students. What do you think about having drink and snack machines in school? Write a letter to convince the principal that drink and snack machines should or should not be allowed at your school. Remember to include specific reasons and examples to make your letter convincing.</li> <li>• The cafeteria manager in your school has noticed that many students throw away most of their lunches. She is concerned about this problem and would like to make changes to the menu based on what middle school kids like to eat. Decide how you would change the menu. Write a letter to the cafeteria manager to convince her that your changes will appeal to the kids in the school and reduce lunchroom waste.</li> </ul>

## Grades 6–8 Writing Prompts (continued)

Narrative	Informative/Explanatory	Opinion/Argumentative
<p>make you feel the way you did. Don't tell how you felt; instead, show it by using details and descriptive language.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Think about a time when you had to work hard in order to do something. Maybe you spent a long weekend working on a school project, or maybe you had to practice weeks on end to prepare for a play or a game. Write a story about a time when you had to work hard in order to do something and why it was difficult or challenging for you. Give details that show how you worked hard at it and what the results were.</li> <li>• Different places around the country experience all different types of weather. Depending on the time of year and where you live, it can be rainy, snowy, windy, hot, or cold. Think about a time in your life when you have been affected by extreme weather. Write a narrative about the experience. Be sure to include details that describe what happened and why you will never forget this experience.</li> <li>• The principal has asked for students to submit stories about personal achievements and goal setting. He is going to publish some of them on the school website. Think of a time when you achieved a personal goal. Tell your readers about the story of how you met your goal. Be sure that your readers understand why the goal is important to you.</li> </ul>	<p>essay for your teacher about whether or not you would want to live in a large city. Give specific reasons explaining why you think the way you do.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• You have been chosen by a company to make a new product. Your product could be a food, a toy, a game, or any other item you want. Write a report for the company that describes your idea for a new product and explains how it can be used.</li> <li>• Your class is studying ways to stay healthy. Think about the kinds of foods that students eat each day and the kinds of activities that help students get exercise. Write a report for students your age explaining ways to stay healthy.</li> <li>• We all have a hero or heroine—a person whose qualities, achievements, or lifestyle we admire. Choose a person you consider to be your hero or heroine. Write an essay explaining why this person is your hero or heroine.</li> <li>• A new student from a faraway place has enrolled in your middle school. How can this student become successful? Why will these actions make him or her successful? Write an essay explaining how to become a successful middle school student.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Studies have shown that some students learn best when they eat or snack while they study. Many school officials, however, do not allow food in the classroom because they believe that eating can interfere with class work. The principal has asked for students' opinions about eating in the classroom. Write a letter to convince your principal to allow students to eat in the classroom or to keep the ban on eating in class. Support your position with specific reasons and details.</li> <li>• Celebrities are often considered role models simply because they are famous. Many kids admire entertainers and athletes. Decide whether you think celebrities make good role models for children. Write an essay expressing your opinion, and support your position with specific details and examples.</li> <li>• Some people say that life in the past was better than it is today. For example, many things cost less in the past. However, other people are glad that they live in today's world with computers and cell phones. Would you rather live in the past or the present? Write a speech to read to your class that tells why you would rather live in the past or the present.</li> <li>• Your school was granted money in order to improve the technology in its classrooms. The principal suggested buying laptops, and the student council</li> </ul>

## Grades 6–8 Writing Prompts (continued)

Narrative	Informative/Explanatory	Opinion/Argumentative
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Think about a time when something unexpected happened. Write a narrative in which you describe this unexpected event or experience to someone you know. Be sure to include specific details, descriptive language, and a logical sequence of events so that your reader can clearly understand the event.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Each class must take a science or social studies field trip. Choose a place where you would like to go for a field trip. Why will your choice be a good place to visit, and what will you learn? Write an explanation about what makes your choice a good place to visit for a science or social studies field trip. Also explain what you hope to learn from the trip.</li> <li>People’s character traits define who they are and can help them throughout their lives. These character traits could include honesty, bravery, loyalty, compassion, determination, or creativity. Select one character trait that you believe is very important in life and write an essay to explain why that trait is so important.</li> <li>Many people have an activity or hobby that they like. Choose one of your favorite hobbies or activities and write an explanation for someone who doesn’t know much about it.</li> </ul>	<p>proposed buying electronic readers. Choose one of these two suggestions or come up with your own idea for spending the technology grant money. Then write a persuasive essay expressing which idea is best and why. Include a description of how the technology would be used and how it would benefit students.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>You just heard on the news that a local school approved a new policy that will allow students to use electronics in the school. What is your opinion of this new policy? Write an essay stating your opinion about whether you agree or disagree with it. Be sure to include details and reasons to support your opinion.</li> <li>The school district is reconsidering the policy on backpacks in the school’s classrooms. Decide whether backpacks should or should not be allowed in the school’s classrooms. Write a letter to persuade the principal to agree with your decision. Include specific reasons and examples that will make your argument more convincing.</li> <li>Scientist Albert Einstein said, “Imagination is more important than knowledge.” Do you agree or disagree with this statement? Include specific details and examples to convince others to support your position.</li> </ul>