

Motivating writing activities for teenagers

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Tbilisi, 17 November 2018



In this session

- Why teenagers dislike writing
- Best-practice principles for writing activities
- 10 activities to try

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- **Why teenagers dislike writing**
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Reasons teens dislike writing

- They don't like using pens
- It's old-fashioned
- They lack real-life experience
- Stressful associations
- They lack strategies, skills and techniques
- They haven't done enough *deliberate practice*
- ...

Sample of students' writing

Dear John.

~~I write~~ I'm happy to write you again. ~~Sorry for not~~
I'm sorry for not writing sooner, but I was
interested in Sudan, so

~~My qualities~~ are I have got lots of
qualities; I'm hard-working, reliable,
and I'm also a liar, and that's a
good thing ⁽¹⁾ because John has to trust me.

I'm avible for an interview
anytime. If you say Monday 30³⁰ AM
(1) will be there. ~~also~~ ^{avible} on Feb. 30.

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Writing tasks that teenagers *don't* hate:

- traditional tasks with a creative twist
- an element of the unexpected
- options and alternatives to choose from
- an added challenge
- 'joint hardship' (enduring pain together)

Adding unexpected challenges

What makes them effective?

There is something about a seemingly pointless challenge that many teenagers cannot resist.



‘Challenge accepted’ meme

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1. Time limits for writing

Set a time limit instead of a word limit

- Works well with flexible, open-ended writing tasks
- Effective in mixed-ability groups
- Students agree on a time and set the timer



2. Unusual constraints

WRITING GUIDE

■ **Task** Write an email with a description of your room to *My space, my world*.

■ **Ideas** Decide how you are going to start your description. Remember to make it interesting. Make notes about:

- the general appearance of your room. Is it small or big? Tidy or messy? Dark or light?
- the things inside your room. Where exactly are they? What do they say about your personality and interests? Remember to use adjectives and adverbs.
- the things you like best about it. Choose three adjectives that best describe your room.

■ **Plan** Decide which ideas you are going to use and match them to these paragraphs.

Paragraph 1: Open your description in an interesting way.

Paragraph 2: Describe the most important things first.

Paragraph 3: Describe other things in your room. Remember to say what you use them for.

Paragraph 4: Sum up your description.

■ **Write** Write your email. Use the paragraph plan to help you.

■ **Check** Check the following points.

- Are your ideas divided into paragraphs?
- Is there a variety of adjectives and adverbs?
- Have you checked spelling, grammar and punctuation?



2. Unusual constraints

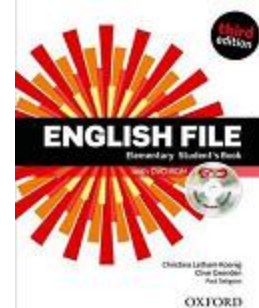
Standard task:

■ **Task** Write an email with a description of your room to *My space, my world*.

Add additional constraints and arbitrary requirements, eg:

- Write precisely 183 words
- Use six different 'colour' words in the email

3. Random phrases



The White Cottage

Bed and Breakfast in West Bexington, Dorset

Mark and Diana Buckingham and their family welcome you to their 200-year-old country home in a small village in Dorset.

Two double bedrooms, one single, and a family suite TV WiFi



b Look at the information box and then write a similar email to the White Cottage Bed and Breakfast.

- Decide how many nights you want to stay and the kind of room you need.
- Ask an *Is there / Are there...?* question.



Formal emails (e.g. to a hotel or Bed and Breakfast, a language school, etc.)

Beginning

Dear Mr / Mrs / Ms + surname, or

Dear Sir / Madam if you don't know the person's name

Use a comma (,) (or nothing), NOT a colon (:)

Dear Mr Brown, NOT *Dear-Mr-Brown*:

Middle

Don't use contractions.

I would like to make a reservation

NOT *I'd like to...*

End

Regards

Your first name + surname

The White Cottage – reservation

From: Pascal Mercier [pascal80@gmail.com]

To: thewhitecottage@greentomato.co.uk

1 _____ Mr and Mrs Buckingham,

I 2 _____ like to make a 3 _____ for a 4 _____ room and a single room for two nights, 5 _____ 24th to 26th June.

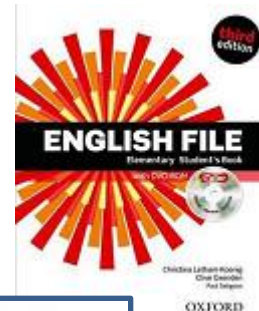
We 6 _____ to arrive by car at 7 _____ 5.00 in the afternoon on the 24th. Is there a place where we can park near your house?

Could you please 8 _____ the reservation?

9 _____

Pascal Mercier

3. Random phrases



Look at the information box and then write a similar email to the White Cottage Bed and Breakfast.

- Decide how many nights you want to stay and the kind of room you need.
- Ask an *Is there / Are there...?* question.

Include the phrases:

“a whisker from the beard of Charles Darwin”
and
“a warm glass of Sri Lankan mango juice ”



3. Random phrases

We are a group of well-known stem-cell researchers from Cuba. Our goal is world domination and to produce ear-wax from the DNA we had collected from a whisker of the beard of Charles Darwin.



our group.
What kind of facilities does the hotel offer? For example: Do you have a warm glass of deeps frozen Sri Lankan mango juice?



3. Random phrases

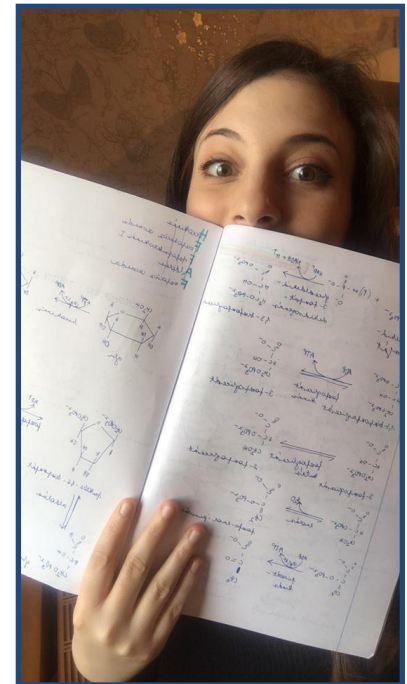
An other important thing. My best friend will die on our visit because he has a rare tropical illness. His last wish is a fresh, warm glass of Sri Lankan mango juice. I think it's not a big ~~thing~~ thing to ask.



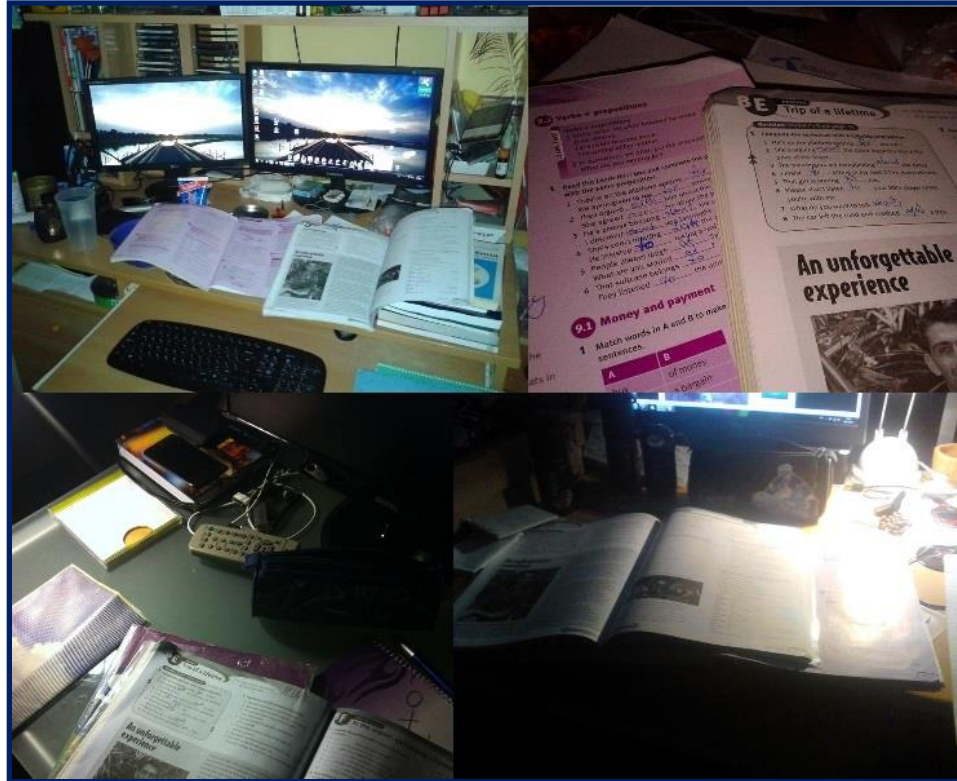
4. Homework selfie

To deter students from doing 'corridor-work'...

- ask students to send/upload a homework selfie
- vote for the most creative photo
- winner gets a classroom privilege



4. Homework selfie



Me to Polar Bear Resistance League

Post photographic evidence that you did 'homework' and not 'corridor-work'.

Upload a photo of your finished homework. In the background your home surroundings should be clearly visible.

5. Convert to QR code

If students are interested in technology...

- occasionally invite them to convert writing into QR code
- use your phone's QR-code reader to access the text
- optional idea: convert your feedback into QR code, too



5. Convert to QR code



6. Creative problem solving

You are alone, locked inside the bathroom.

You have no mobile device.

Send a message or get someone's attention

Use the things in the bathroom:

- *nail clippers*
- *toothpaste*
- *loofah*
- *comb*

6. Creative problem solving

Send a message: 1) Write a message on the loofah with the paste
2) Wait for it to dry
3) Throw out at window

Send a message with toothpaste to your neighbour?
You should write your message on your window.
That's all.

7. Setting-problem-resolution stories

Collaborative writing activity in groups of 3

- each student has a blank piece of paper
- each student writes paragraph 1: setting the scene
- rotate, read, add the next paragraph
- paragraph 2 introduces a problem
- rotate, read, add the final paragraph
- paragraph 3 resolves the problem

8. Left hand, right hand

Hi, my name is left

Hi, my name is right

8. Left hand, right hand

- Write two sentences: one left-handed, one right-handed
- compare the sentences
- choose human qualities to describe each set of handwriting
- imagine a conversation between your left hand and right hand
- write the dialogue down
- switch the pen from hand to hand for each new turn

Hi, my name is left

Hi, my name is Right

9. Write the first sentence

- show students a book they haven't read
- their task is to write the first sentence
- show them the blurb
- invite them to ask questions
- students write their sentence on slips of paper
- read out all the sentences (students' + actual first sentence)
- vote for favourite

9. Write the first sentence

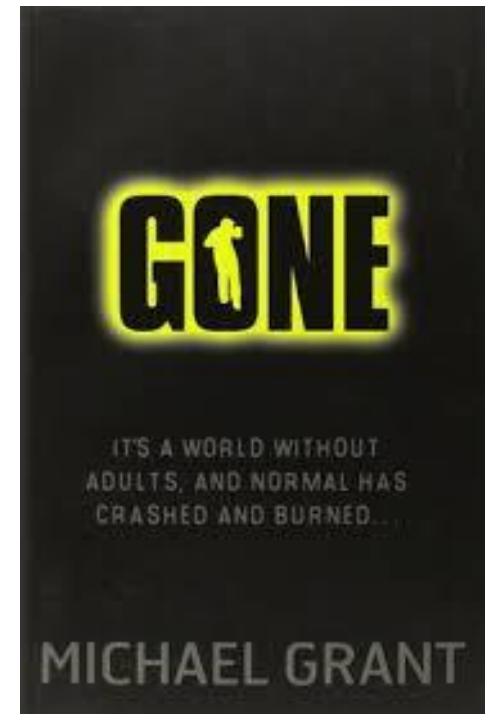
One minute the teacher was talking about the Civil War.

It all started at 12:00 o'clock on Monday.

GONE. THEY'RE ALL GONE.

It's only us now.

Do you want a bar of chocolate?



10. Hidden song lyrics

Standard writing task with a creative ‘song lyrics challenge’

- students plan their writing
- they also choose a well-known song and find the lyrics
- select four lines from the song
- ‘smuggle’ those lyrics into their text
- share, read, try to identify the lyrics and song

10. Hidden song lyrics

Tbilisi: a visitor writes...

There's so much to discover in this city. I love walking around, every day discovering something brand new. You'll probably see me in one of the cafés. Come over and start up a conversation with just me. I'd be happy to show you around. Come on now, follow my lead. I'll drag you into all the bookshops, though. I can browse in bookshops for hours. I may be crazy, don't mind me.

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Ed Sheeran – Shape of You

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OXFORD

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