

# The Writing Strategy Organizer

**1** Pick a topic...

## Topic T-Charts

Like	Hate
Pizza	Homework
Baseball	Cleaning my room
My dog	All vegetables
Cars	Math
Recess	Spelling tests
Disneyland	Rainy days
David Letterman	Scary things
Money	Being bored
Fishing	Getting dressed up
Paintball	
Staying up late	

### Like/Hate

Things you like and things you hate.

### Typical/Unusual

Typical life experiences and unusual life experiences.

### Fun/Have To

Things you do for fun and things you do because you have to do them.

### Change/Stay the Same

Things you want to change and things you want to stay the same.

### Regret/Proud Of

Things you regret and things you are proud of.

**2** Develop an idea...

## What-Why-How

What	Why	How
My dog is the most amazing animal in the whole wide world.	He protects me.	Whenever someone comes to the door he barks to let me know.
	He plays with me.	At the park we play frisbee. He catches it in his mouth and brings it back.
	He does my homework for me.	He's great with math. He has a little trouble holding the pencil, though.
	He makes money for me.	We were on David Letterman's "Stupid Pet Tricks." Disney just called about a movie deal.

### What do you think?

This is your opinion.

### Why do you think it?

These are the reasons that support your opinion.

### How do you know?

These are the examples, evidence, descriptions, or reference citations that prove your opinion.

**3** Add detail...

## Idea-Details

Idea	Details
At the park we play frisbee. He catches it in his mouth and brings it back.	He runs as fast as he can. He jumps up in the air. He almost never misses. People can't believe how good he is. He can jump about 5 feet high. He'll only catch it if I throw it.

### Make a Paragraph

With just a few changes, the idea and supporting details can easily be combined into a paragraph:

"Sometimes, my dog and I go up to the park to play frisbee. As soon as I throw it, he runs as fast as he can to catch it. He jumps high in the air and catches it in his teeth. He can jump about five feet high. People can't believe how good he is because he almost never misses. But he'll only catch it if I throw it."

Not every detail needs to be used. Often, writers will change things around a bit as they go along.

**4** Add "showing" detail...

## Tell-Show

Tell	Show
He runs as fast as he can. He jumps in the air.	As I take out the frisbee, he starts to wag his tail. As soon as I let it fly, he tears after it as fast as he can. Just when I think he's not going to get it, he leaps into the air, stretches out his neck, and snags it between his teeth like a wild animal capturing his prey.

### How Do You Do This?

Learning to create great "showing" details takes a lot of practice. Fortunately, practicing is easy and fun. The best way to get started is to visualize a scene before you start to write. Try this:

- Think about your "telling" detail(s).
- Close your eyes and make a picture in your mind.
- Make a mental list of everything you "see" in the "picture."
- Now, in your writing, describe the scene that you've created in your mind.

**5** Develop a narrative...

## Transition-Action-Details

Transition	Action	Details
About a month ago...	My dog and I went to Andrews Park to play frisbee.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The wind was really blowing.</li> <li>• There was hardly anyone at the park.</li> </ul>
I ran him around for a while, and then...	I took out the frisbee and threw it hard and it took off over the trees.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• I tried to stop my dog from going after it, but it was too late.</li> <li>• He ran off. I couldn't see him anymore.</li> </ul>
	The frisbee went over the trees and down a steep hill.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• There was some construction on the other side, and I was worried my dog might get hurt.</li> </ul>
A few minutes later...	My dog came running back with the frisbee.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• He was all dirty. It looked like he'd been in the mud.</li> <li>• He had a cut on his ear.</li> </ul>

Fill out the ACTION column first, the DETAILS column next, and the TRANSITION column last. Try to keep the number of ACTIONS between 3 and 7. Each row of the chart can be a separate paragraph. Or, several rows can be combined together. It depends on how many DETAILS you have. Not every row needs a TRANSITION.

**6** Capture a scene...

## Draw-Label-Caption



I'm playing frisbee with my dog at Andrews Park.

### A Few Things to Think About

- This is just a rough sketch, not a finished illustration.
- Label everything you can think of.
- In your caption, write down anything you think is important.
- Each thing you identify in the picture is a detail you can use when you start to write.
- Spending time on the picture makes you more familiar with the scene and helps you think of things to write about.

**7** Create a strong beginning...

## Action-Feelings-Setting



Action	Feelings	Setting
I've just thrown the frisbee, and my dog is starting to go after it.	WHAT: I'm excited but also a little scared. WHY: I threw it too far and he's going to run off into the trees where he might get hurt.	We're up at Andrews Park. It's really windy and cold. There aren't many people around.

"It was cold and windy that day at Andrews Park, and there weren't very many people around. I threw the frisbee hard into the wind and it just took off like I'd never seen before. Immediately, my dog started chasing after it. And as I saw it sail off over the trees and toward a big construction site, I started to get worried."

**8** Plan an entire piece...

## Content-Purpose-Audience

Main Idea	Key Details
What's the one most important thing you want your audience to know?	What details will help your audience "unlock" your main idea?
Think	Do
What do you want your readers to think about after they're finished?	What do you want your readers to do after they're finished?
People	Questions
Who are you writing to?	What does your audience want to know about your topic?

### Content

The main idea plus key supporting details.

### Purpose

What you want your readers to think and/or do.

### Audience

The people you are writing to and the important questions they have about your topic.

# The Writing Strategy Organizer

**9** Improve focus and develop a main idea...

## Main Idea

### What is your main idea?

What's the one most important thing you want your audience to know?

### It's like this...

Imagine taking an entire piece and scrunching it down into a single sentence that still said more or less the same thing. That's kind of what a main idea is. Most pieces are built on a single thought. That thought is the main idea and everything else in the piece is there to help the audience understand it. The simplest way to think about the main idea of a piece is to think of it as the one most important thing you want the audience to know. If you had to write just one sentence to represent everything you wanted to say, that would be the main idea.

### Is your main idea:

- \_\_\_ A complete thought; a complete sentence?
- \_\_\_ Something that is important to you?
- \_\_\_ Something that is important to the audience?

(A good main idea has all three of these qualities.)

### Something to think about.

The main idea is probably the most important thing about a piece of writing. If you make sure you have a good main idea, and that the details in your piece support it, you're almost guaranteed to have a successful piece.

**10** Find details...

## Where Do Details Come From?

"A detail is the answer to a question a reader might have."

### 5Ws+H

Who? • What? • When?  
Where? • Why? • How?

Spend more time answering the "Why" and "How" questions. The answers almost always produce the most interesting details.

### 5 Senses

See? • Hear? • Touch?  
Smell? • Taste?

Spend most of your time thinking about what you want readers to "see." Make use of the other senses only rarely.

### Action

First, ...  
Then, ...  
Next, ... etc...

For more details, break the action down into smaller "events." Plan out the sequence of events using Transition-Action-Details.

### Feelings

Every "who" in your piece has feelings. YOUR feelings will usually be the most important. Strong feelings make for a strong piece.

### Attributes

Every person, place, or thing in your story has attributes: shape, size, color, anything you can think of to describe anything in your piece.

### Setting

Every setting can be described in great detail. Readers like it when the writer "sets" the scene. Don't forget to include a back story detail.

**11** Write great fiction...

## The 5 Facts of Fiction

**1** **Fiction is all about character.** Who is the main character? Can you describe his or her personality? How did your character get to be this way? The more you know about your characters (especially about why they do the things they do), the better your story will be.

**2** **Fiction is all about what your character wants.** What one thing does your character want more than anything else in the world? Why does your character want it? The more important something is to someone, the more he or she will do to get it.

**3** **Fiction is all about how your character gets or does not get what he or she wants.** Is your character successful? Or does your character's quest end in failure? What obstacles does your character encounter?

**4** **Fiction is all about how your character changes.** How does your character change as a result of what happens? How is your character at the beginning? At the end? What does your character learn?

**5** **Fiction is all about a world that you create.** What kinds of people, places, and things does the world of this story contain? What successes, disasters, and conflicts arise in this world? Complete this sentence: "This is a world where..."

1 Main character 2 Motivation 3 Plot 4 Main idea 5 Setting

**12** Write a good lead...

## What Makes a Good Lead?

What's the best way to start a piece of writing? No one really knows. Each piece of writing is different because writers have different ways of introducing themselves to their readers. Every writer must consider his or her audience, and try to decide what few words will be most likely to keep the reader reading. In general, good leads:

**Get right to the point.** There's no rule about how short a lead needs to be. In most cases, however, the lead is contained in the first one or two sentences. Remember, you don't have much time to hook your reader.

**Have immediate impact.** Some leads are funny, some are surprising, some are just plain weird. But good leads make the reader feel some emotion right away.

**Hint at the topic.** You don't want to give away your whole idea, you want to save some of the best stuff for later. But you have to give the reader something.

**Promise the reader a good experience.** A reader has to make a big investment of time to read your writing. What would make someone want to spend an afternoon reading your work instead of doing something else?

**Make the reader want to read on.** If a lead doesn't make the reader want to continue reading, then what comes after the lead will never get read.

**13** Draft effectively...

## Diligent Drafting

### Write on every other line.

Skip a line between lines. It's so much easier to make changes during revision when you have all that space to write between lines. And besides, it'll make you feel like you're getting twice as many pages written.

### Number, date, and save everything.

With all those pages, you'll need to keep them in order. You should also put the date on each page. When you go back over previous drafts those dates could make the difference between being finished and being confused. And save everything you write—at least for a while.

### Write on one side of the paper only.

This makes it easier to keep track of pieces that span many pages. It also allows you to cut your writing into pieces if you need to move things around.

### If you get stuck...

Every writer gets writer's block. Here are four smart things you can do about it:

- Go back to your pre-writing and look for new material. Or, do some new pre-writing.
- Share your writing and ask your audience if they have any questions or any thoughts about what you could write next.
- Read your piece from the beginning. New ideas often occur to writers when they read over their entire piece.
- Put the piece aside and work on another piece for a while.

**14** Know when you're finished...

## When Are You Finished?

### After reading the beginning...

- \_\_\_ Will my readers know what my paper is about?
- \_\_\_ Will my readers think my piece is going to be fun to read?
- \_\_\_ Will my readers want to find out more?

### After reading the middle...

- \_\_\_ Will my readers think I included enough details to help them understand my main idea?
- \_\_\_ Will my readers have enough information so that they don't have a lot of questions?
- \_\_\_ Will my readers think I included just the right amount of information?

### After reading the ending...

- \_\_\_ Will my readers understand the one most important thing I wanted them to know?
- \_\_\_ Will my piece feel finished and give my readers something to think about?
- \_\_\_ Will my readers feel that they had fun or that they learned something new?

### How long should my piece be?

Your piece should be long enough to express your ideas in such a way that all your reader's questions are answered—and not one word longer!

**15** Make sure you have a good idea...

## Do You Have a Good Idea?

Is your idea...

- **Something you have strong feelings about?** What are those feelings? How will you communicate those feelings to your reader? Is there a key moment or a particularly important detail you want to emphasize so your reader will understand exactly how you feel?
- **Something you know a lot about?** What are the main things you want to cover? What's the most important part of your piece? What's the one thing you want your audience to know about your topic?
- **Something you can describe in great detail?** What are some of the details of your topic? Why are these details important? How do these details help the reader understand your message?
- **Something your audience will be interested in?** Who is your audience? Why will they be interested in your topic? What will interest them most?
- **Something your audience will feel was worth reading?** What will your audience get from reading your piece? Will your audience learn something new? What will make your audience want to follow your piece all the way to the end?

**16** Write a good ending...

## What Makes a Good Ending?

Endings are tough, no doubt about it. And what seems like a good ending to some people can be a real let-down for others. And yet, endings are important. After all, the ending is the last thing your audience will read, so it'll probably be something they'll remember. Here are some ideas for things you can try:

**Your main idea.** One way to make sure your audience doesn't miss your message is to put it right at the end.

**How the piece might affect the reader's life.** This kind of ending can help you get the reader's attention.

**A recommendation or some advice.** Everyone loves good advice. Of course, everyone hates bad advice. And some people don't like getting any advice at all. But I still think this is a great way to end a piece.

**Your purpose.** Telling the reader why you took the trouble to write it might help them feel good about why they took the trouble to read it.

**How you feel about the piece.** Sometimes, a thoughtful reflection makes the perfect ending.

Thanks to Mrs. Goffe's 3rd graders at Sunrise Elementary School for giving me these great ideas about endings.