

Motivating writing activities for teenagers

Edmund Dudley

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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 ⁽ⁱ⁾ because John has to trust me.
I'm avible for an interview
anytime. If you say Monday 30³⁰ AM
(i) 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

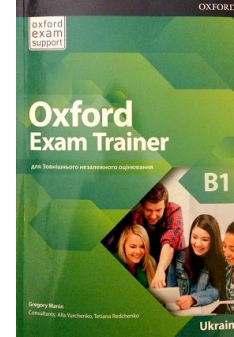
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1. Time limits for writing

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

6 EXAM TASK Do the exam task.

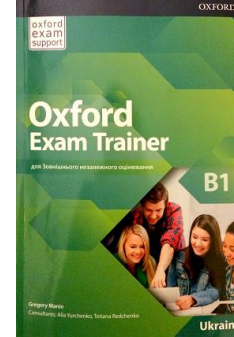
You are studying on a student exchange programme in Wales. You have found a job offer at a summer camp for children. Read the advert below and write a letter of application in which you:

- ▶ say why you are interested in this role,
- ▶ describe your previous experience,
- ▶ explain why you are a good candidate for this job.

Write a letter of application of at least 100 words. Start your letter in an appropriate way.

Add additional constraints and arbitrary requirements, eg:

- Try not to use the letter *J*
- Use six different 'colour' words in the email



3. Random phrases

Making a hotel reservation

Formal letter/email: replying to an advertisement, making an inquiry

I am writing to enquire about ...

I am interested in ...

I am writing to request ...

I would like to ask if ...

Could you give me some information about ... ?

Could you please send me further details about ... ?

I would be grateful if you would send me some detailed information about ...

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 deep frozen Sri Lankan mango juice?



3. Random phrases

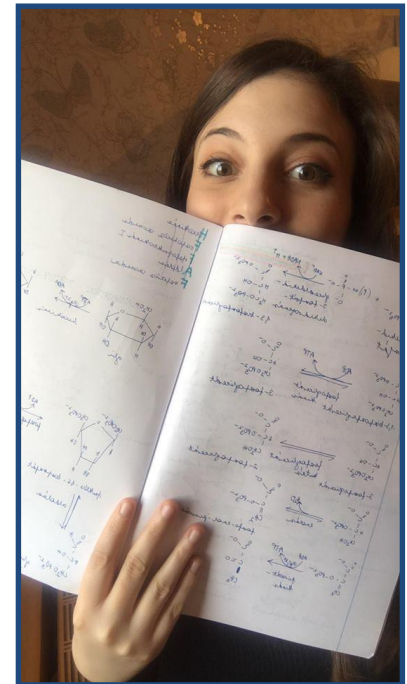
An other important thing. My best friend will die on our visit because he has a rare tropical illness. His last wish is a fresh, warm glass of Sri Lankan mango juice. I think it's not a big ~~thing~~ thing to ask.



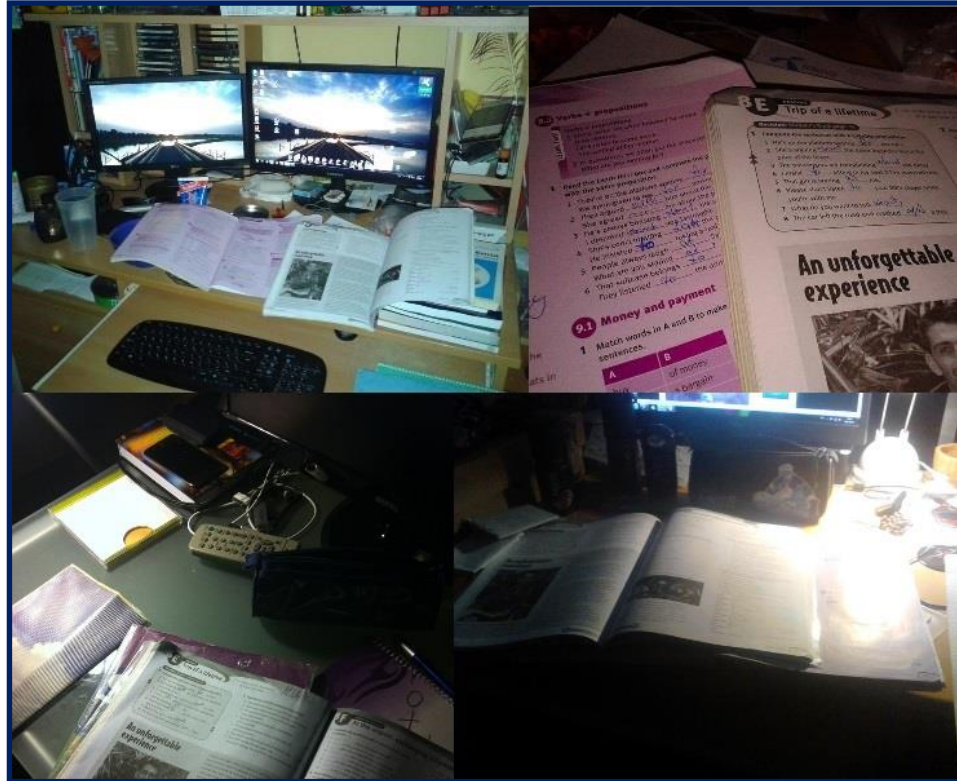
4. Homework selfie

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

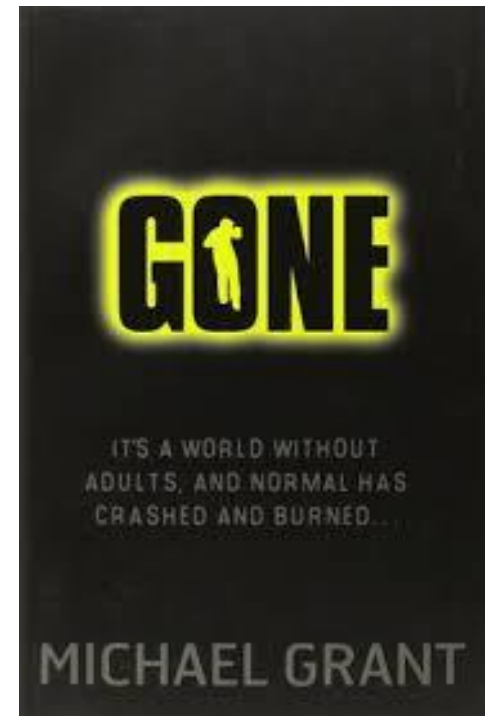
One minute the teacher was talking about the Civil War.

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

GONE. THEY'RE ALL GONE.

It's only in 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

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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