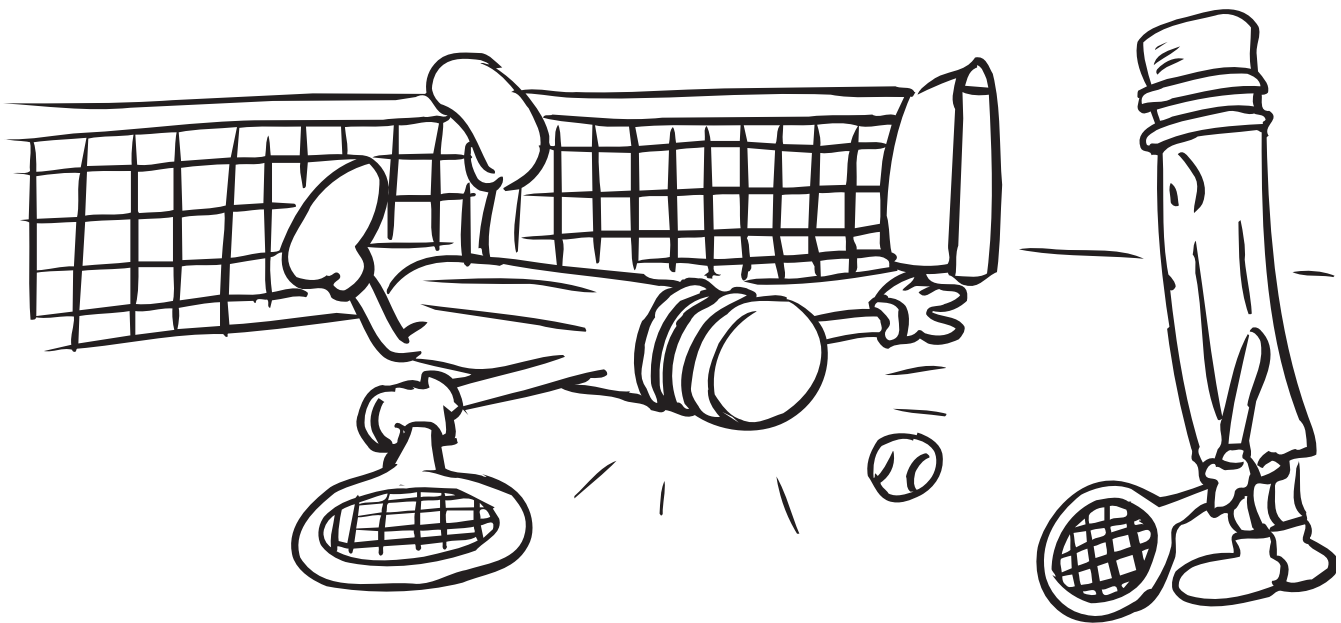


# Table of Contents

Finding Topics for Writing .....	5
Using Precise Language .....	24
Varying Sentence Structure .....	46
Voice.....	61
Leads and Endings.....	82
Using Dialogue.....	91
Revising .....	98



# Finding Topics for Writing



A writer without a topic is like a dog without a bone, a cat without a mouse, a teacher without caffeine. Nothing can happen until a writer can find a topic. All of our fabulous lessons in precise language, revision, leads and endings, sentence variety and voice would be wasted unless we had a piece of writing that can use them.

Fret not, dear friends. In this section we have some ideas to help get your students started at . . . getting started! Deciding what to write is critical. Based on our experience, the writer who has no topic will find other ways to entertain himself or herself, and this often involves distracting other students.

In this section, we provide viable alternatives to tired handouts of writing prompts. We ask students to find topics in the every day, write about their interests and use visual stimuli for writing. And if that doesn't get the juices flowing, we include a list of 126 things to write about.

Use these as jumping-off points for the writer who is blocked or reluctant to start. Use this as a twist to shake up writers who are stuck with one topic or genre. Use these to get the writing going in your classroom.



# Writer Interest Survey

Have students complete this survey early in the school year. It is a simple “getting to know you” activity. Simply read aloud each category, and have students circle how they feel about then. We have provided blank lines to add additional topics, as requested by your students.

Any topic that is an “I love it” or a “Gross out” is probably a topic that the student feels pretty passionate about. That is a writing topic. For example, this is the beginning of Judy’s survey.

- |                        |       |       |        |
|------------------------|-------|-------|--------|
| 1. Homework            | : -)  | :( -) | : -b   |
| 2. Curfews or bedtimes | : -)  | :( -) | : -b   |
| 3. Reality TV shows    | : -)  | : -   | :( -b) |
| 4. Playing sports      | :( -) | : -   | : -b   |
| 5. Chores at home      | : -)  | : -   | :( -b) |

She loves playing sports, is grossed out by chores and reality TV shows and felt “Whatever” about homework, and curfews or bedtimes. Three potential topics here. Look at how many ways they can be developed.

## Sports

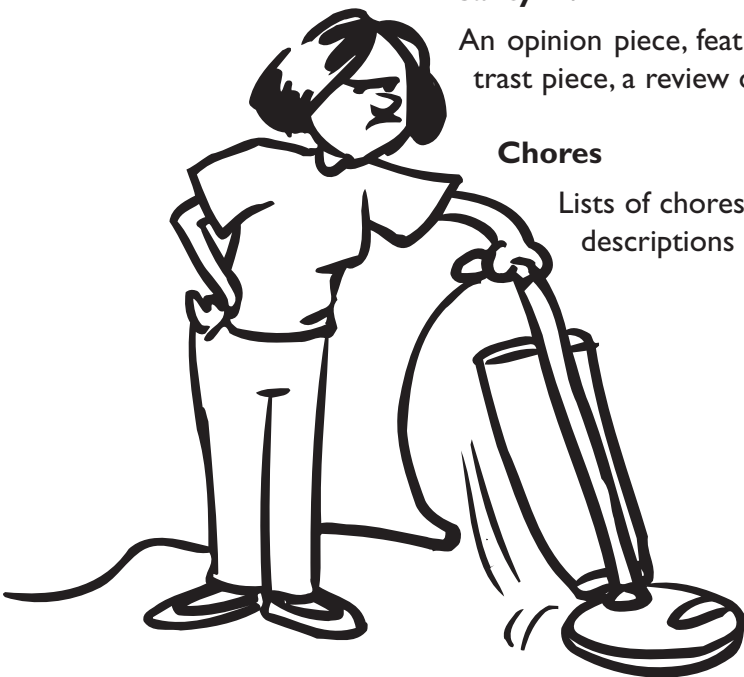
The sports she enjoys watching, the ones she plays, how to play well, her favorite players, sports history, play-by-play accounts, persuading others to play sports, a beginner’s guide to sports, etc.

## Reality TV

An opinion piece, feature article, history, poem, a compare and contrast piece, a review of a particular show and so on.

## Chores

Lists of chores, argument against chores, “how to” do chores, descriptions of chores and so on.



# Writer Interest Survey

Rate how you feel about the following things:

:-) I love it.

:-| Whatever.

:-b Gross out.



1. Homework	:-)	:-	:-b
2. Curfews or bedtimes	:-)	:-	:-b
3. Reality TV shows	:-)	:-	:-b
4. Playing sports	:-)	:-	:-b
5. Chores at home	:-)	:-	:-b
6. Video games	:-)	:-	:-b
7. Listening to music	:-)	:-	:-b
8. Having a pet	:-)	:-	:-b
9. Learning to dive	:-)	:-	:-b
10. Writing for fun	:-)	:-	:-b
11. Food in the school cafeteria	:-)	:-	:-b
12. Rainy days	:-)	:-	:-b
13. Fashion	:-)	:-	:-b
14. Long car trips	:-)	:-	:-b
15. Trips in an airplane	:-)	:-	:-b
16. Aliens and space creatures	:-)	:-	:-b
17. Action movies and superheros	:-)	:-	:-b
18. Teddy bears	:-)	:-	:-b
19. Your hometown	:-)	:-	:-b
20. Brothers and sisters	:-)	:-	:-b
21. Cousins	:-)	:-	:-b
22. Visiting relatives	:-)	:-	:-b
23. Lima beans	:-)	:-	:-b
24. Chocolate chip cookies	:-)	:-	:-b
25. Your neighbors	:-)	:-	:-b
26. _____	:-)	:-	:-b
27. _____	:-)	:-	:-b
28. _____	:-)	:-	:-b
29. _____	:-)	:-	:-b
30. _____	:-)	:-	:-b

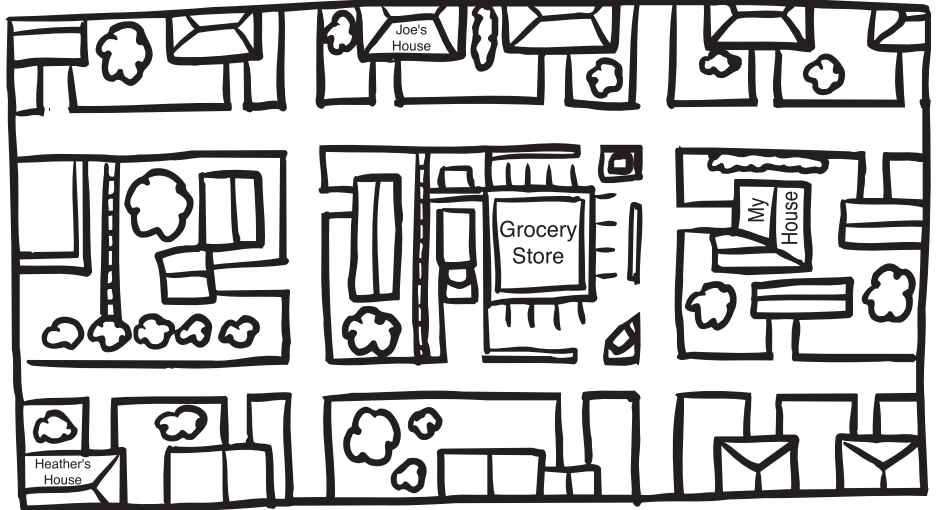
# Mapping Our Lives

## ★ Objectives

- Writers will find authentic writing topics from our own lives as writers.
- Writers will discover stories in our own personal narratives.
- Writers will generate ideas for writing based on personal experiences.

## ★ Materials

paper  
favorite writing instruments  
your memories



## ★ Procedure

1. Begin by doing your map for the class. The map must be of a place where you have lived. It can be a neighborhood or street, a house or apartment, a motor home or trailer, a camper or a single room in any one of these. The map should have as many details as possible. Label everything!
2. While mapping, tell stories or share details from the map.
3. Students make their own maps. Remember DETAILS!
4. Peers share maps and chat about the stories that go with them.
5. Using your own map, consider aloud possible writing topics prompted by your map. Select a topic and begin drafting.
6. Students return to their maps, decide on a topic and begin drafting.

## ★ Evaluation

Observation of mapping and conversation  
Map, drafts and subsequent copies of writing

## ★ Benefits

1. Accessible, writer-centered activity
2. Engages multiple intelligence through the use of drawing, interpersonal relationships and writing



Now I think about all the writing I can do. Rob and Charlene threw the best summer parties. They had fabulous fireworks. Bob and Lisa had honeybee hives in their backyard. They always gave homemade honey candy to the neighbors. Bob and Margaret, the retired couple across the street, gave the best Halloween candy. The man next door never smiled and got angry if our Frisbee™ went on his lawn. Any one of these can be a topic.

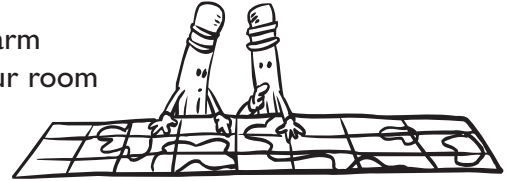


# Mapping Our Lives



Draw a map of a place where you have lived. It might be:

- a house
- a street
- a neighborhood
- a motor home
- a trailer
- a camper
- an apartment building
- a city
- a farm
- your room



A large, empty rectangular box with rounded corners, intended for the student to draw a map of a place where they have lived.