

# USING SAMPLE PROMPTS

## WRITING

In addition to developing topics to assign students and encouraging students to develop their own topics, teachers may assign topics from the sample prompts listed on the following pages.

Here are some suggestions for using sample prompts to help students practice writing. However, classroom practices described below **would not be appropriate for writing assessments**, which must be independent student work. *See Writing Test Specifications, on the Web, or the Oregon State Assessment Administration Manual for more assessment details.*

- Assign topic: Teacher assigns topic or supplies short list of topics from which students choose.
- Brainstorm topic: Students participate in one-on-one, small group or classroom discussions as they choose and narrow their topics.
- Pre-write: Students prepare to write by mapping, webbing, outlining, word clustering, etc.
- First draft: Let thoughts flow (revising, editing and proofreading come later).
- Peer response: Students give each other specific feedback, using the scoring guide to provide meaningful comments. They may actually score papers, followed by one-on-one discussion. The teacher may circulate around the room during this time, also offering verbal feedback.
- Second draft: Using peer and teacher feedback, students revise their first draft,

correcting conventions errors in particular. The second draft should represent the students' very best work, given everything they know about writing and the feedback they receive.

- Scoring: Teacher scores second draft using scoring guide. Written comments point out specific characteristics (e.g., *Conclusion could be more developed*).
- Revision: Using written teacher feedback, students revise second draft, paying close attention to each trait and all written comments. Students correct all conventions errors that are pointed out, and respond to other suggestions (e.g., by developing the conclusion). This is not a proofreading exercise; students are expected to engage in deep revision. The scoring guide can help with specific suggestions for revision.

As the state test approaches, teachers may create an environment for students similar to the actual test.

- Give students a choice of three prompts from the sample list that follows; and
- Require students to work independently to produce final essays of about two pages in length over the course of three class sessions.

*Continued...*

# SAMPLE PROMPTS

State writing prompts address experiences and interests relevant to the student’s age level. Although prompts may encourage students to write from experience, they are not intended to intrude on personal feelings or call for discussion of personal values. They are designed to be free of stereotype—age, gender, geographic, ethnic, socioeconomic, religious or physical disability.

The following is a list of sample prompts from previous state writing tests, arranged by grade level and mode. They may be used as class assignments or practice tests, as described in the previous section.

The modes in which a student may write (narrative, imaginative, expository, and persuasive) are defined in the document titled State Assessment Modes, which can also be found on this website, along with an additional instructional mode, descriptive writing.

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## GRADES 3-5

### **Narrative**

Think of a time when something surprised you. Maybe it was a big surprise or a small surprise no one else noticed. **TELL WHAT HAPPENED.**

Think about a time that you helped someone or someone helped you. **TELL WHAT HAPPENED.**

**TELL ABOUT** a physical activity in which you have participated (for example: recess, games, dance, individual or team sports, skateboarding, bicycling or swimming).

**TELL ABOUT** a person who has been important in your life. Be sure to give specific details that tell how this person has influenced or changed your life.

**TELL A TRUE STORY** about an experience that you have had with an animal.

### **Imaginative**

Pretend you are not a person. You are something else. You can be anything your mind can think up. **MAKE UP A STORY** about ONE thing that happens to you.

**MAKE UP A STORY** in which someone tries to do something that is very hard to do.

We all make wishes that we hope will come true. Think of one wish and **IMAGINE** that your wish comes true. Think of all the ways your life changes because of your wish. Tell what the wish is and describe in detail what happens when that wish comes true.

You have read stories that explain why something in nature is the way it is—such as “why a camel has a hump.” **MAKE UP YOUR OWN STORY** to tell why something is the way it is.

Imagine that you are alone on a beach at night. Suddenly, you see lights far out on the ocean. **MAKE UP A STORY** about what happens to you.

### **Expository**

A rainy day doesn’t have to be bad. Some people like rainy days. **EXPLAIN** how to turn a rainy day into a good day.

Think of one thing you know how to make. **EXPLAIN** very clearly how you make it.

Think of something you have done. Maybe it was playing an instrument, having a family outing, baby-sitting, riding a bike or a horse for the first time, growing some vegetables or flowers, going for long hike, taking a bus across town, learning to skateboard, playing chess or anything else. **EXPLAIN** what you did so that the reader can understand exactly how you did it.

Inventions are all around us. For instance, the telephone, television and automobile are all inventions. Even simple things like buttons and forks had to be invented by someone. Think of ONE invention that is not listed here and use examples to EXPLAIN how this invention has been helpful OR harmful to people.

EXPLAIN how you celebrate a favorite holiday, event or custom. Be sure to use details so that your reader can picture what your favorite time is like.

### **Persuasive**

Think of one thing at your school that you would like to change. Write an article that would CONVINCe other students and teachers in your school to want the same change.

Pretend a friend of yours has decided to eat ONLY junk food. Write a paper that would CONVINCe your friend to eat a healthy diet.

Think of a rule you would like to have changed. Try to CONVINCe an adult that the rule should be changed.

Think of a pet that would be good to have in your classroom at school. CONVINCe your teacher that your class should get this pet.

If you could change just ONE thing, what would it be? It might be a big change everyone would notice, or only a little change. Write a paper that clearly tells what change you would make and why. Give reasons that will CONVINCe a reader that the change you want is important.

### **Descriptive**

A newspaper is having a contest among elementary students to see who can write the most effective description of a favorite meal or an interesting meal. Write an entry for the contest in which you DESCRIBE one of your favorite meals or one that was unusual

or interesting. DESCRIBE it so clearly that the judges know exactly what it is like.

Almost everyone has had at least one teacher who is hard to forget. Think of a teacher you have had that you will remember for a long time. DESCRIBE that teacher so clearly that your reader will know just what that teacher is like and what makes him or her so hard to forget.

Think of a place you can picture clearly in your mind—a place not many people have a chance to visit. It might be a place very few people even know about. DESCRIBE this place so clearly that a person reading your paper will feel as if he or she is right there.

Think of someone you have known that you will remember for a long time. DESCRIBE that person so clearly that your reader can understand exactly why this person is so hard to forget.

DESCRIBE a pet you own or would like to own. Tell how it looks, acts and feels when you touch it.

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## **GRADES 6-10**

### **Narrative**

Sometimes things turn out in a way we did not think would happen. TELL A STORY about a time or event that turned out differently than you expected.

Remember a time when you faced a challenge. You may recall a difficult problem, competition or task you had to face. Recreate that situation. TELL WHAT HAPPENED and how you met or failed to meet the challenge.

Think about a time in your life that involved ONE of the following: discovery, surprise, OR survival. TELL THE STORY of what happened.

We all have good times that stand out in our memories. Write a NARRATIVE about one of your pleasant memories.

Most people, at some time in their lives, have had to wait for something they wanted very much. It might have been a certain event they looked forward to or a certain object or thing they wanted. Think of a time in your life when you had to wait for something and TELL WHAT HAPPENED.

You can probably remember at least one time when you did something for someone else that made you feel proud of yourself. Think about what you did and how you felt about it. TELL WHAT HAPPENED.

TELL A TRUE STORY about an unforgettable moment which occurred when you were participating in or observing a physical activity (for example: recess, games, dance, individual or team sports, skateboarding, bicycling, swimming or any other physical activity).

### **Imaginative**

Imagine that the time is late at night, you (or a character in your story) are at home or in a familiar place when the telephone rings. Create a story that includes this scene.

MAKE UP A STORY with ONE of these titles: (a) “Lines” or (b) “No Closed Doors.”

Imagine that you are caring for younger children for an evening. Make up a story to tell them to entertain them. Invent your own story rather than using one you have heard before.

Pretend that you found something mysterious. WRITE AN IMAGINATIVE STORY about what you found and what happened.

Authors look to many sources for ideas. Use one of the following ideas and MAKE UP A STORY: (a) “Coals and Embers” or (b) “Injustice.”

In the following poem, Donald Justice sets up a situation in which a late-night driver sees one lonely light on in a house in the small

town of Ladora, Wyoming. He wonders about the person who is awake in the middle of the night.

Excepting the diner

On the outskirts

The town of Ladora

At 3 A.M.

Was dark but

For my headlights

And up in

One second-story room

A single light

Where someone

Was sick or

Perhaps reading

As I drove past

At seventy

Not thinking

This poem

Is for whoever

Had the light on

MAKE UP A STORY in which the main character is awake at 3 a.m. with the light on. (You can pretend to be this person, if you wish.) By the way the story unfolds, let the reader know why the light is on, and what the person is thinking about as the car speeds by.

MAKE UP A STORY that contains the line, “If only I had read that letter a day sooner...”

A strange noise wakes you in the middle of the night. You go to investigate. What happens?

### **Expository**

Everyone is an “expert” at something. Think of something you do well—anything at all. EXPLAIN how to do this so clearly and so

completely that your reader will understand just what it takes to be good at this activity.

Leaders are necessary to any group: families, friends, teams, clubs, countries, and others. **EXPLAIN** what it takes to be an effective leader.

Students choose a variety of ways in which to stay physically fit. Many choose to participate in organized sports, while others choose individual out-of-school sports or other ways to exercise. **EXPLAIN** why an activity you chose is important to you.

In all our possessions, there are usually one or two very precious objects. Choose one that you really love. Describe how it looks, why it's special, and how or why you got it. Use as much detail as you can to **EXPLAIN** why this object is important to you.

You may have heard the expression, "Experience is the best teacher." Think of an experience or situation in which you either learned something or taught something to someone else. **EXPLAIN** what was learned or taught by this experience.

Suppose that your home was destroyed by a natural disaster. You and your family escaped safely. Assume that you could safely retrieve only one non-living thing from the disaster. **WRITE A PAPER EXPLAINING** what you would take and why.

### **Persuasive**

People are always looking for ways to improve schools, and some of the best ideas come from students. Think of **ONE** change you could propose that would make your school better. Write a letter to the editor or an essay that would **CONVINCE** other students and teachers in your school to agree with you.

Think about one change you would make in your community. What would the change be?

Why? Write a letter to your mayor, city manager, or city council representative **CONVINCING** them to make the change.

Pretend that a friend of yours has decided not to eat milk, cheese, or any kind of vegetables. Write a paper to talk your friend into eating a healthy diet. Use good reasons to convince your friend.

Almost everybody would like to change someone's mind about something. Perhaps there is something you would like a friend, parent, teacher, principal, public official, or someone else to feel differently about. Write to the person **PERSUADING** him or her to change that particular position or attitude. Use specific reasons and examples to make your argument **CONVINCING**.

A famous song says, "Chicago is my kind of town." Is your hometown "your kind of town" or not? **WRITE A PAPER TO PERSUADE** a reader to agree with your feelings about your town.

### **Descriptive**

Think about what your school is like at lunchtime. Pick one particular place, large or small, and picture it in your mind. **DESCRIBE** this place at lunchtime so clearly that your reader can tell just what it is like to be there.

**DESCRIBE** a place where people go to have a good time like a fair, a carnival, someone's home, or a place outdoors. **DESCRIBE** the place so clearly that someone who has never been there could tell what it is like.

Almost everyone has had at least one teacher who is hard to forget. Think of a teacher you have had that you will remember for a long time. **DESCRIBE** that teacher so clearly that your reader will know just what that teacher is like and what makes him or her so hard to forget.

Everyone has had some type of work experience, whether it was at home (building or repairing something, baby-sitting, yard or

garden work, etc.) or at a workplace for pay. DESCRIBE a work experience you have had so that a reader can visualize your work environment and understand how it felt to be there.

Music is an important part of most people's lives. DESCRIBE a piece of music that is one of your personal favorites to listen to and/or perform. Include a description of your reactions to the music. (You might

choose to describe an individual song or piece of music, or an entire tape, CD, or live performance by a certain group or individual artist.)

Most people have their own "territory" or place where they feel most comfortable or most alive. DESCRIBE your "territory" so clearly that a reader could picture what it is like for you and how you feel there.