

A photograph of several students in a classroom setting, focused on their laptops. The students are seen from the side, with their hands on the keyboards. The background is slightly blurred, showing a window with greenery outside. The overall tone is educational and modern.

# 14 NON- WRITING OPTIONS TO TEACH WRITING

**BY**  
**ASK A TECH TEACHER**

# **14 Non-writing Options To Teach Writing**

***Ask a Tech Teacher™***

## 14 Non-writing Options to Teach Writing

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# NON-WRITING OPTIONS FOR WRITING

## Essential Question

*I don't like writing—how can technology make it easier?*

## Big Idea

*Writing is about communicating, not putting pencil to paper*

## Teacher Preparation/Materials Required

- Have backchannel device available.
- Ensure all required links are on student digital devices.
- Be familiar with writing projects students completed prior years.
- **This is an introduction to non-writing writing, not a lesson plan in each. That would be a full book. Options you like: use the included links to find more-detailed lesson plans or contact Askatechteacher@structuredlearning.net.**

## Assessment Strategies

- Completed writing activity
- Worked well in group or independently
- Used good keyboarding
- [tried to] solve own problems
- Higher order thinking: analysis, evaluation, synthesis

## Steps

**Time required:** 45-90 minutes for each activity; some are spread over several weeks  
**Grade levels:** Grades 2-High School, depending upon activity

What is 'writing'? Here's a definition from Merriam-Webster:

*...the way you use written words  
to express ideas or opinions*

This one is from the Free Dictionary:

*The act or process of producing and  
recording words in  
form that can be read and understood*



If you ask students (and too often, teachers), to define 'writing', they probably agree with these two, adding that writing uses a **pencil and paper** (maybe a word processing program), requires **language skills** such as grammar, spelling, sentence fluency, and paragraph construction, and revolves around **activities** such as taking notes, conducting research, writing an essay, or composing a story.

Let's take another approach and look at this definition as it is aligned with the goals of most popular writing curricula and the Common Core Standards:

*To build a foundation for college and career readiness, students  
need to learn to use writing as a way of offering and supporting*

## 14 Non-writing Options to Teach Writing

*opinions, demonstrating understanding of the subjects they are studying, and conveying real and imagined experiences and events. They learn to appreciate that a key purpose of writing is to communicate clearly to an external, sometimes unfamiliar audience, and they begin to adapt the form and content of their writing to accomplish a particular task and purpose. They develop the capacity to build knowledge on a subject through research projects and to respond analytically to literary and informational sources.*

Nowhere does this lengthy definition mention activities or process (such as ‘recording words’ or ‘use written words’) because *any* activity or process is fine as long as it achieves the goals. Sure, "share knowledge" works better with appropriate transition words and comma placement, but those sorts of skills better fit 'language' than 'writing'. Writing is about the thoughtfulness and creativity required to communicate based on audience, task and purpose. These include (rephrased from Common Core Writing Standards):

- *dig deeply into subjects of interest to achieve better understanding and to build knowledge*
- *assess the credibility and accuracy of each source, and integrate the information while avoiding plagiarism*
- *share knowledge with others to enrich them, collaborate, or accomplish a particular task*
- *evaluate what is being read to determine the theme and key purpose*

Figures 1a-d are examples of writing programs students may recognize from prior years.

- *Blogs*
- *Desktop publishing*
- *Digital storytelling*
- *Discussion Boards*
- *Drawing program*
- *Google Docs/Word*
- *Slideshows*
- *Spreadsheets*
- *Text program*
- *Twitter*

Figure 1a-d--Word processing examples 1st-5th grade



Maybe students don't think of 'drawing' or 'Twitter' as word processing. Discuss this. Review the elements of writing and discuss how all of these are satisfied by unusual writing methods.

## 14 Non-writing Options to Teach Writing

Compare these communication methods by putting a table up on class screen. *Figure 2* is an example, with some of the writing options listed. *Figure 3* shows one you'd put up for students to see—not filled in. Prompt students to discuss each category as it relates to a productivity tool. For example: When discussing the 'purpose' of a word processing program, how does that help student select it as the appropriate tool for a particular task, rather than, say, a spreadsheet or a slideshow? How does 'Presentation' inform which tool would be best for the student needs?

*Figure 2—Compare-contrast: Productivity tools*

<b>Element</b>	<b>Presentation</b>	<b>Word processing</b>	<b>Spread--sheets</b>	<b>DTP</b>
<b>Purpose</b>	<i>Share a presentation</i>	<i>Share words</i>	<i>Turn numbers into information</i>	<i>Share information using a variety of media</i>
<b>Basics</b>	<i>Graphics-based Design is important to content Layout communicates Few words, lots of images</i>	<i>Text-based Design is secondary to content Layout may detract from words Primarily words communicate</i>	<i>Number-based Focus on tables, graphs Little text; lots of statistics and data Almost no words</i>	<i>Mix of media—equal emphasis on text, images, layout, color</i>
<b>Sentences</b>	<i>Bulleted, phrases</i>	<i>Full sentences with proper conventions</i>	<i>None</i>	<i>Full sentences, bullets,</i>
<b>Content</b>	<i>Slides cover basics, to remind presenter what to say</i>	<i>Thorough discussion of a topic. Meant to be complete document</i>	<i>Statistics, data, charts, graphs</i>	<i>To draw an audience in;</i>
<b>Use</b>	<i>As a back-up to presentation</i>	<i>As complete resource</i>	<i>To support other presentation methods</i>	<i>Good way to group information for easy consumption</i>
<b>Presentation</b>	<i>Speaker presents with their back to the slideshow</i>	<i>Speaker reads from document</i>	<i>Speakers uses it in a presentation or 1:1</i>	<i>Speaker passes out as a handout or take-way</i>
<b>What else</b>				

Working together, complete the table:

*Figure 3--Compare-contrast tools with students*

<b>Element</b>	<b>Prese-ntation</b>	<b>Word Processing</b>	<b>Spread-sheets</b>	<b>DTP</b>
<b>Purpose</b>				
<b>Basics</b>				
<b>Sentences</b>				
<b>Content</b>				
<b>Use</b>				
<b>Presentation</b>				
<b>What else</b>				

## 14 Non-writing Options to Teach Writing

Iconic writing activities -- like online writing sites, book reports, biographies, and trifold -- place student focus on words and paragraphs. This for many interferes with their ability to achieve the real goals of writing. Instead, try something new. Three of my favorites are [comics](#), [Minecraft](#), and [non-paper media](#), but over a dozen more fresh options are listed below.

- *art*
- *audio*
- *blogs*
- *comics/cartoons*
- *desktop publishing*
- *digital storytelling*
- *discussion boards, comments, forums*
- *music*
- *serialized novel*
- *slideshows*
- *spreadsheets*
- *Twitter novel*
- *videos*
- *vignettes*
- *Round Robin—Summative*

As you evaluate these options, consider these characteristics (from Common Core):

- *communicate information and ideas to multiple audiences with a variety of media*
- *understand how email/forums/blogs communicate (why are these word processing?)*
- *know what tasks are best suited to word processing as opposed to presentation programs or spreadsheets*
- *produce/publish writing and present relationships between information and ideas clearly and efficiently (from Common Core)*
- *integrate information from different media to develop a coherent understanding of a topic or issue (from Common Core)*
- *write routinely for a range of tasks, purposes, and audiences (from Common Core)*

Then, complete this table with students, comparing-contrasting elements of each writing approach:

*Figure 4--Evaluate non-writing writing options*

Element	Art	Audio	DTP	Music	Slide-show	Spread-sheet	Video	Word processing
Purpose								
Basics								
Sentences								
Content								
Use								
Presentation								
What else								

***Options include a line in front of each step. Check these off as you complete them to help you keep track of which options you've completed with each class.***

## 14 Non-writing Options to Teach Writing

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### Art

\_\_\_\_\_ A picture is worth a thousand words—what better way for a writer to understand their characters and setting than to draw them. Daniel Tammet is famous for seeing the answers to math problems as a colorful video across the landscape of his brain.

\_\_\_\_\_ Show students projects they completed prior years there they used art to communicate ideas (Figures 5a-d):

Figure 5a-d—Writing with Art K-6



\_\_\_\_\_ Here are seven excellent drawing tools. They include software, online tools, web-based tools, and Chromebook and iPad apps:

- *GIMP* – free software download similar to Photoshop
- *Google Draw* -- free with Google Apps
- [Lunapic](#)
- *Paint* -- free with Windows
- [Paint Studio](#)
- *Photoshop* -- if not in your budget, try *Photoshop Elements*
- [Pixlr](#) -- software download, web app, or mobile

\_\_\_\_\_ Before selecting this option, students should evaluate it using *Assessment 18*. Does it fulfill what they require? Content ? Use ? Presentation? Other categories ?

\_\_\_\_\_ For lesson plans: [Click here](#)

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## 14 Non-writing Options to Teach Writing

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### Vignettes

\_\_\_\_\_ Discuss the meaning of ‘vignettes’. Help students understand it is a verbal sketch, a brief essay, or a carefully crafted short work of fiction or nonfiction. Examples include:

- Dickens’ *Sketches by Boz*
- Cisneros’ *The House on Mango Street*

\_\_\_\_\_ In this option, students work in groups to write a series of interlinked vignettes based around a cast of characters and a central atmosphere. Discuss *atmosphere*. Why is this important to a vignette?

\_\_\_\_\_ Here are basic rules to follow when writing vignettes:

- *Each vignette abides by the collection’s atmosphere.*
- *Each vignette is 800 words. They can be shorter, but not usually longer.*
- *The vignette must evoke emotion.*
- *The vignette shares a moment (the power and emotion) rather than a plot line.*
- *The vignette collection is tied together by a common mood.*

\_\_\_\_\_ Here’s how this works:

- *Students work in groups organized by the media they’ll use to write their vignette. For example, those who wish to use a comic creator would join the same group. Those who will use art work together.*
- *As a group, write a character study of each character. Work together to agree on what defines each character.*
- *As a group, decide on setting and atmosphere. Work together to agree on what defines the overarching setting and atmosphere of the story.*
- *Develop a schedule of who will publish their vignette when. These will be published in a collaborative student blog or another location selected to curate these stories.*



\_\_\_\_\_ When done, students visit and comment on three of the stories written by classmates.

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## Round Robin Story—Summative

\_\_\_\_\_ A fun writing project is a Round Robin story where a group of students collaborate to write a story. By the end, each student realizes that s/he offers a unique perspective that reshapes and redefines the story.

\_\_\_\_\_ Here's how it works: Form students into groups of five based on the method they choose to write their story. For example, those who wish to write with audio recordings will be in the same group; those who prefer digital storytelling will join than group.

\_\_\_\_\_ Give students ten minutes to roughly plot out the story including five categories: 1) characters, 2) setting, 3-4) two plot points, 5) climax and ending. Now the fun starts.

\_\_\_\_\_ Each student goes to their digital device and writes *Part 1*—an introduction to the characters based on the outline created by the group. After five-ten minutes, a bell rings and students move to the next group member's digital device. Here they read what has been written and add *Part 2*—the setting—making sure the two parts blend together. After another five-ten minutes, they again move to the next digital device in their group, review the two parts already written and add *Part 3*—the first of two plot points. This continues for five switches. When the story is completed, each student reviews the final story at their own seat for spelling, grammar, flow, and consistency—or other writing elements discussed in class. Read several for the class.

\_\_\_\_\_ Save the completed story to the student blog or another easily-accessible location. Print/share/publish as is the custom in your school.

\_\_\_\_\_ This Round Robin project also works well for non-fiction. In that case, segments include 1) introduction, 2-4) three points to be discussed, 5) conclusion. This follows the well-accepted five-paragraph essay used in many classrooms.



## Other Singles from Structured Learning

- 14 Non-writing Options to Teach Writing
- [15 Digital Tools in 15 Days](#)
- 25 Digital Tools in the Classroom
- [Blogging in the Classroom](#)
- [Brainstorming](#)
- [Bridge Building](#)
- Copyright Do's and Don'ts
- [Debate in the Classroom](#)
- [Digital Book Report](#)
- [Digital Note-taking](#)
- [Digital Quick Stories](#)
- [Digital Quick Writes](#)
- [Digital Timelines in the Classroom](#)
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- [Gamification of the Classroom](#)
- [Genius Hour](#)
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- Human Body
- Infographics 101
- [Internet Search and Research](#)
- Keyboarding and the Scientific Method
- [Khan Academy](#)
- [Presentation Boards in Class](#)
- Robotics
- Screenshots, Screencasts, and Videos
- [Service Learning and Tech](#)
- STEM Bundle (4 lesson plans)
- Symbols, Tools, and Toolbars
- [Twitter in the Classroom](#)
- [Write an Ebook](#)

## 14 Non-writing Options for Writing in the Classroom



Which book?	Price
<i>K-8 Tech Textbook (each grade level—print, digital, or both)</i>	<i>\$32.99/25.99/53.08 + p&amp;h</i>
<i>K-8 Student tech workbooks (with video, teacher manual)</i>	<i>\$199 per grade level</i>
<i>35 More Projects for K-6 (aligned w curriculum—digital only)</i>	<i>\$31.99/25.99/52.18 + p&amp;h</i>
<i>55 Tech Projects—Volume I, II, or both (digital only)</i>	<i>\$18.99/\$32.49 + p&amp;h</i>
<i>K-8 Keyboard Curriculum (print, digital, or both)</i>	<i>\$25.99-\$64</i>
<i>K-8 Student keyboarding wkbks (with video, teacher manual)</i>	<i>\$199 per grade level</i>
<i>K-8 Digital Citizenship Curriculum</i>	<i>\$29.95/25.99/50.38 + p&amp;h</i>
<i>K-8 Common Core Lessons</i>	<i>FREE-\$48.55 + p&amp;h</i>
<i>Pedagogic Articles</i>	<i>\$6.99 (digital only)</i>
<i>K-8 Tech Scope and Sequences (Word doc)</i>	<i>\$9.99 each (digital only)</i>
<i>Posters for the Tech Lab</i>	<i>\$2.99 each (digital only)</i>
<i>16 Holiday Projects</i>	<i>\$4.99 (digital only)</i>
<i>98 Tech Tips From Classroom</i>	<i>\$9.99 (digital only)</i>
<i>Classes (certificate and college credit)</i>	<i>\$260-\$450</i>
<i>Project-based learning (lesson plans)</i>	<i>\$1.99 each on varied topics</i>
<i>New Teacher Survival Kit (K-5)</i>	<i>\$360 and up (+ p&amp;h)</i>
<i>New Teacher Survival Kit (K-6)</i>	<i>\$380 and up (+ p&amp;h)</i>
<i>New Teacher Survival Kit (6-8)</i>	<i>\$330 and up (+ p&amp;h)</i>
<i>Homeschool Tech Survival Kit</i>	<i>Starts at \$99.00</i>
<i>Bundles of lesson plans</i>	<i>\$7.99 and up</i>
<i>Mentoring (1 hr. at a time)</i>	<i>\$50/hour and up</i>
<i>Year-long tech curriculum help (via wiki)</i>	<i>\$145</i>
<i>Consulting/seminars/webinars</i>	<i>Call or email for prices</i>
<b>Total</b>	

**Fill out this form (prices subject to change).**

**Email [Zeke.rowe@structuredlearning.net](mailto:Zeke.rowe@structuredlearning.net).**

**Use PayPal, Amazon, TPT, pre-approved district PO**

**Questions? Contact Zeke Rowe**

