



Step 1 – Dare to Start

Objectives: How do I get started?

1. Define your writing style
2. Get your materials ready (binder, word processor); improve typing skills
3. Plan your time
4. Just start
5. Write one vignette

Overview: Before students get started with this project, they need to see the “big picture” of what’s involved, learn their own writing style, get their materials ready, and plan the whole project.

Many students are terrified of writing. For them this step is integral to easing their fears and working toward some enthusiasm for the project. We do this by starting with their attitudes about writing. ANY attitude and any degree of competence is acceptable for this project. If a student can write a story (albeit rough) and is willing to do the required work, he can “write his roots.” I try to encourage students by introducing them to famous authors who have similar fears yet work through them.

All authors are different in their style of writing. This difference can be difficult for a coach (mother/teacher) if her style is different. For example, if you, as coach, like to write first thing in the morning, it may be difficult to appreciate your student’s preference to write at night. If you, as coach, need absolute quiet to write, it will be difficult to accept your student’s preference for music in the background. The goal here is to identify what works best for the student and then make realistic plans to augment the project.

An important part of this project is a computer and printer that works. Another plus (though not essential) is typing ability. I recommend that every student be introduced to the basics of typing with the correct fingering. Every student who has a basic knowledge and a little practice on the keyboard will improve his typing speed through this project.

Hints:

1. During this first lesson, give an overview of the 30 steps by referring to the table of contents.
2. After reading the introduction “learning your writing style,” discuss schedule and course expectations. Let older students help plan their own schedules. It helps to write a tentative schedule, try it for several weeks, review it, then revise it accordingly. Since your student is not the only one in the house, he will need, of course, to adapt himself to the schedules of others in the household.
3. Make sure your computer is in good working order (but I have no idea how to do that; one usually finds out once it crashes).
4. You will use considerable reams of paper with the several drafts of this book. Find a cheap source of paper or use the back side of used paper until the final copy.
5. The very first writing assignment is a short vignette, a peek into the life of a person. Explain to your student that the stories he will be writing are just series of vignettes. If he can write a vignette about himself and a few other family members, then he should have no trouble expanding these into whole stories.
6. One of the **Practice/Prepare** exercises is to write a letter to one’s parents. Obviously if you are the teacher, it will be tempting to let your child just tell you the contents of the letter. The letter-writing is



important, though, since it provides practice for writing in a letter format. It also helps him to better organize his thoughts (as does all writing).

Group Activities:

1. Ask students to list biographies they have read. Write a communal list on a whiteboard.
2. Bring in a list and/or a stack of biographies (e.g., Corrie ten Boom, Eric Liddell, George Washington, Frederic Handel, Daniel Boone, Leif Erikson) to expose students to a variety of biographies (long/short, childhood through adult/one stage of a person's life, famous people/common people with amazing experiences, etc.).
3. Discuss: *If you were to write a whole book about someone in your family, who would it be? For further discussion: Why is this person so interesting to you? Would this person's story appeal to others? Why or why not?*
4. Explain the differences between an autobiography, a biography, and an anthology. Inform students that their work will be an *anthology* rather than an *autobiography* or a *biography*. That is, an autobiography is written by a person about his own life, a biography is about one other person's life, while an anthology is a collection (in this case, a collection of family stories).
5. A great discussion for more advanced students is: *Discuss the characteristics of a great book. How are they related to Philippians 4:8?*
6. Have students share their attitudes about writing. Assure them that anyone who is willing is invited into this group.

Planning:



Dare to Start

How do I get started?



Objectives

Here we go! We'll get into this project slowly to be sure you're ready (and willing!). This week you will:

1. Express your feelings about writing.
2. Define your writing style.
3. Get your materials ready.
4. Plan your time.
5. Just start.
6. Write one vignette.



Learn

Do you love to write? Do you hate to write? Are you a good writer? Before you start this project, let's get to know you a little better. First, what's your attitude about writing? Check off the comments that apply to you.

1. Summarize your attitudes about writing.

Do you like to write? Why or why not?

- Sign me up. I'm eager.
- I love to write.
- Do I have to?
- I'd like to, but I don't think I can.
- I can't!
- I've never been able to write.
- It's just not my thing.

Are you a good writer?

- I write well; I get good grades in English composition.
- I write well, but it doesn't show in my grades.
- I'm an average writer.
- I'm a poor writer.
- I can do okay, but it's difficult for me.
- I can do okay, but I don't like it.



In one sentence, summarize your attitude toward this writing project.

2. Learn your writing style.

Every author writes differently. This is true about WHAT he writes and HOW he writes. Explore your own writing style. First, though, let's look at what some famous writers say about their writing styles. **With which do you agree? Why?**

- Anne Morrow Lindbergh: *I think best with a pencil in my hand.*
- Katherine Anne Porter: *I prefer to get up very early in the morning and work.*
- Jack Kerouac: *The desk is in the room, near the bed, with a good light, [I write] midnight 'til dawn.*
- Hannah Arendt: *For excellence, the presence of others is always required.*
- Ernest Hemingway: *You can write any time people will leave you alone and not interrupt you.*

Fill out the following questionnaire:

1. When do you prefer to write (morning, afternoon, or evening)? _____
2. Where do you like to write (at a desk, in a comfortable chair, other)? _____
3. How long do you like to write before taking a break? _____
4. What kind of break is best for you and for how long?

5. Do you like to jot down an outline before you start or just dive in? _____
6. What do you do when you're deep in thought (pace, twirl hair, tap foot)?

7. What environment is best (alone with complete quiet, background noise, people in the room, soft music, music with a beat)? _____
8. What else helps you to concentrate? _____
9. Do you like to hand-write text and then type it, or do you like to type right onto the computer? _____



3. Get your materials ready.

Computer and word processor

For this project you will need a computer with a word processing program (Microsoft Word, WordPerfect, Apple Works, or an appropriate equivalent). You should be able to do the following functions on your computer. You will have opportunity to practice this week.

- Create a folder
- Create a file
- Find a file
- Select margins
- Set 5 tab spaces from left margin
- Set spacing (double-space for all drafts; 1.5 space for final copy)
- Center
- Select fonts
- Change font size
- Change font style (i.e. **bold**, *italic*)
- Highlight, cut and paste
- Use thesaurus and spell-check
- Save your work
- Print the text

Binder with five tabs

You will need a three-ring notebook (1-1/2" to 2") with five tabs. Later you will label these tabs.

4. Plan your time.

Do you know the difference between a successful student and a failing student? Time management. Every person has the same amount of time (approximately 24 hours a day). What differentiates them is how they use this time. Consider the fable of the tortoise and the hare. Some students (like the hare) dive into projects but never follow through. Others (like the tortoise) may get a slow start but stay steady until the job is finished. During this writing project you have assignments every week. In the beginning of the week you and your "coach" will work together. Then, on your own, you will do the **Practice** and **Apply** sections. It works best for you to mark hours on your weekly calendar. You will need between two and five hours each week to do the assignments.

5. Just start!

The hardest part of any job is the first step. This is ESPECIALLY true for writing. Do you know why? Seeing a word on paper is making a commitment. It LOOKS like you are signing a document, that EVERYBODY will see what you've written, and THE BIG RED PENCIL IN THE SKY will come down and correct what you've written. If this is how you feel, you are not alone. This is how John Steinbeck expressed it:



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I suffer always from fear of putting down that first line. It is amazing the terrors, the magics, the prayers, the straightening shyness that assails one.

If you're trying to come up with the perfect opening, don't. Later we will work on your openings and closings.

How perfect do you need to be? Not at all. A first draft is a trial. It is SUPPOSED to look sloppy (as long as you and your writing coach can read it). Add an idea in the margin or cross out whole sections. At this stage it doesn't matter. The focus is first on the content. We'll revise it later.

6. Write one vignette.

You could describe yourself using a list of adjectives like *fun-loving*, *adventurous*, *intelligent*, or *shy*. Or you could write a list of "likes": *She likes to talk on the phone, read horse stories, play frisbee, eat chocolate frozen yogurt, or make jewelry.*

Another way to describe a person is to create a *vignette*. A vignette (pronounced *vin-yet*) is a glimpse into a person's life. To create a vignette, you:

- a. Choose a person.
- b. Put the person in a typical setting (time and place).
- c. Show him/her doing something characteristic.
- d. Write in third person.

Carson described his mother.

Mom

Eyes half-opened, Mom sipped her black coffee while squinting through the window at the sunny day. Papers were strewn around the floor, computer was booting, and Mom was praying. Any minute she would announce, "It's family time" whereupon Dad and the boys would plop into their familiar chairs in the living room.

Look at the other examples following:

Jeff

Gobbling down his chili and cornbread, Jeff announced, "Gotta go. I'm late for baseball practice. See you later, Mom." His friend Matt's mother was waiting in the driveway with Matt slumped in the backseat, already tired after a long day of school. Jeff, on the other hand, was full of energy, as he bounded into the Ford Taurus and greeted Mrs. Morgan. "I can't wait to play ball," he spouted eagerly.

Joanna

After she tossed her jeans onto a heap on her bedroom floor, Joanna called again, "I'm coming, Mom." Indecisive Joanna hated to make early morning decisions. She kept grabbing at items to wear, then discarding them. Finally she made a



decision. It would be the jeans, after all. “Now what top should I wear?” One more time she responded to her mother’s call, “I’m almost ready, Mom.”

Katie

Next to the fire, Katie curled up in her light blue afghan and welcomed Cuddles, her gray cat, onto her lap. Rocking slowly, she read another chapter of *A Wrinkle in Time*, her favorite book. “Someday I too will be an author,” she sighed to herself.

A vignette tells the truth about a person, but it combines several details into one “snapshot.” For example, your mother has a sage green shirt, drinks decaf coffee, talks to her friend Jan on the phone, and pets your dog Fido. You can put all these elements into one snapshot of her. In that way, the story is “fictionalized history.”

Practice/Prepare

- 1. **Write a letter to your parents.** Use this information to write to your parents about yourself and to plan together how to make this project most successful. Use the proper form for a personal letter. In the first paragraph, summarize yourself as a writer. In the second paragraph, ask your parents to help you with the project. The following is an example.

August 25, 2002

Dear Mom and Dad,

As you know, I don't like writing very much, but I'm willing to learn. I often get stuck and can't think of what to write. Then I get frustrated and want to quit. What helps me is to get up and wander around until I can get my thoughts together. It also helps me if I have no interruptions, because I can get distracted easily. I realized also that I work best first thing in the morning before my head gets full of other things.

Would you help me with this project? I'd like to work on it a little bit each morning before my other courses. May I use the computer then? If you see me wandering around, please don't think I'm avoiding my work. I really am thinking. It would also help me if you didn't talk to me or look over my shoulder while I'm writing my stories. I promise I'll show them to you later when I'm finished.

*Your son,
Carson*



2. Purchase a binder and a five-tab divider. Label the tabs:

Family Records
Other Information
Interviews (notes from family interviews)
Story Ideas
Stories

Be sure you have access to a computer and printer when you need it.

Gather your supplies. Next to you, keep your **Write Your Roots** workbook, as well as a thesaurus and a dictionary.

If you're composing directly onto the computer, be sure you have plenty of printer paper (use scrap paper if you want). Always type double-spaced, 12 point, with a simple font (e.g., Times).

If you are writing on paper first, be sure you have a supply of notebook paper, pencils with erasers, a pencil sharpener, scissors, transparent tape, and a wastepaper basket (perhaps the most important item for a writer!). Leave enough room between lines to cut out sections to rearrange later. Also leave large margins for editorial comments.

3. Practice your typing. During this project your typing WILL improve. Just watch! Before you start typing, though, be sure you are using the correct fingering. If you do, you will type much faster. Take the time to learn by doing one of these:

- a. Buy a typing program (e.g., Typing Tutor) for use on the computer.
- b. Purchase a typing book that has the keys diagrammed on a chart. The book will also contain a list of simple words (and pretend words) that can be created with letters on each line. Then start with each row and start practicing.
- c. Set up your own typing program.
 1. Reproduce the keyboard onto a larger sheet of paper and display it above the computer (or typewriter). This is to attract your attention to the placement of the keys on the diagram and to prevent your looking at the keys.
 2. Place your left hand on the keys *a s d f*. Place your right hand on the keys *j k l*;
 3. Now look at the chart above your computer. Look at the *a s d f*, and practice typing them several times without looking at the keyboard. Check the screen. Are they accurate?
 4. Do the same with the right hand.
 5. Now get creative. What words can you create with the letters on each row? Start with *a s d f* (e.g., *sad*, *add*, *fad*).
 6. Add on *g* and create more words (e.g., *gas*, *sag*).
 7. Now do the same with *j k l*;
 8. Add on *h*.



9. Copy your list of real and pretend words ten times each without looking at the keys until you can type each one perfectly.
 10. Now you are ready to add on letters from the top row, then the bottom row, and finally the numbers and other symbols.
 11. Once you have practiced and practiced each set of words, you are ready to copy whole sentences and then paragraphs.
 12. When you can type a whole page, time yourself and count the errors. Do the same thing the next day, and the next, and the next. Before long you will be typing 30 words per minute, then 40, then 50, then....?
4. **Practice word-processing skills** (as listed in the **Learn** section). Practice using one of the word-processing programs (Microsoft Word, WordPerfect, or Apple Works) or an appropriate equivalent. Practice the following. You could use the vignette you are writing this week to practice:
- Create a folder
 - Create a file
 - Find a file
 - Select margins
 - Set 5 tab spaces from left margin
 - Set spacing (double-space for all drafts; 1.5 space for final copy)
 - Center
 - Select fonts
 - Change font size
 - Change font style (i.e. **bold**, *italic*)
 - Highlight, cut and paste
 - Use thesaurus and spell-check
 - Save your work
 - Print the text
5. **Make a weekly plan.** Every week you will have a **Practice/Prepare** section to complete, either practicing a skill from the **Learn** section or getting ready to write. During this project you will be interviewing family members. If you have family members (like grandparents) who live some distance from you, this would be a good time to arrange a visit. Then decide how much time you will work each week. Make a schedule that fits your style and your other responsibilities. Later you will be writing one story per week and/or revising previous stories.



Apply

- 1. **Organize your binder and other materials.**
- 2. **Write at least one vignette about yourself.** Choose yourself at any age. Choose a typical place and time of day where you might be found. Describe yourself doing something characteristic. For this exercise use third person (*he/she*) to describe yourself rather than first person (*I*). You can use this space to write a first draft and then type it, or you can type directly on your computer.

- 3. **Expand your vignette to write a whole story about yourself (#1).**
- 4. **Save the above story in a separate file on your computer.** Label it with #1 and the date. Put a #1 on every version of this same story. Label the second draft #1 with the new date; the next draft will be #1 with a later date, etc. Do the same for every other story you write. You will be writing many, and this will help us keep track of the stories. Later we'll put them in the order you want, but we'll know that each story is numbered and that later dates mean revised versions.
- 5. **Print Story #1 and put it in your binder under "Stories."** There! You're on your way to writing a book.