

Help Johnny **WANT** to Write



**Encouraging the
youngster who struggles**

Dr. James Sutton

-a resource for teachers and parents-

Help Johnny WANT to Write:

Encouraging the youngster who struggles

James D. Sutton, EdD

Psychologist and educator

I never had much difficulty with writing as a student. Although my penmanship generally left a lot of room for improvement (and still does), the skill of putting thoughts to paper came easily for me. I was fortunate; it was a something I *knew* I did well. As a former Special Education teacher and school psychologist, however, I have seen plenty of youngsters struggle with writing. There are few academic tasks more difficult for these students than one of staring at a blank piece of paper with a singular direction to write. The longer they stare, the more the words *don't* come—as the sheet of paper gets bigger and emptier.

I clearly can remember students who found it painful to put even a heading on their paper. It seemed that their focus became one of surviving the task while writing as little as possible. (We'll be looking at interventions for both of these concerns later.) If we aren't successful in helping these youngsters feel more comfortable about

This ebook has been an especially rewarding project for me. I have written a lot of things, but this subject “connects” with me personally as well as professionally.

We live in an age of email and text messages on cell phones. (This is an ebook, for goodness sake.) It seems today that everything requires speed and shortcuts. I still believe, however, that persons who can communicate effectively and persuasively in writing distance themselves from the herd. The impact can be profound; the organization of thoughts on paper aids both organization and thought.

You might be interested to know just about every word of this ebook was created first in ink on a yellow legal pad. All my books were written in the same manner. It's not the only way to do it, but it works for me.

(The fonts and line spacing in this ebook have been expanded to improve readability on a computer screen.)

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writing, even to the point of enjoying it a bit, their discomfort with writing will follow them into adulthood. We don't want that.

There's no wonder why the development and improvement of writing skills had become an enormous issue when we observe the pressure good teachers are facing to bring students along in essay skills. *No Child Left Behind*, a federal mandate to schools, stresses academic skills (not just writing) where students are to demonstrate AYP—*Adequate Yearly Progress*. This is a challenge both school-wide and student-by-student. (And it's understandable why some have described AYP as *Another Year of Pain*.)

What Will Be Covered Here

It is not my intent to cover here the academic specifics of teaching writing, although I taught language arts in the public schools. My emphasis will focus on ways and avenues of encouraging students to engage in writing and become more interested in the activity of putting thoughts and ideas to paper. We'll cover it in the following four parts:

Stop, Drop, and Write

*Schools are reinforcing an emphasis on skills of writing with school-wide activities like **Stop, Drop, and Write**.*

At a set time during the school day, all students receive a signal to stop whatever they are doing and write an essay from a given prompt.

All grade levels participate at the same time, with the length of time on the activity varying according to developmental abilities and attention span.

***Stop, Drop, and Write** essays make excellent “markers” for a student's development and improvement in the skill of writing. Many teachers and administrators believe that improvement in writing boosts scores across the curriculum. (It only makes sense it would.)*

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1. **Fountain pens**— Yes, fountain pens. I came upon this approach completely by accident when I brought my old Esterbrook fountain pen to school. My students were amazed that it could be “loaded” with ink by working a little lever on the side. They *all* wanted their turn with my fountain pen. “Hey!” I thought, “there just might be a way to use this to promote writing skills.” There certainly was. I eventually learned that my “discovery” wasn’t that unique after all. I will share input from others that support the use of fountain pens in the classroom.

In addition to their fun and unique appeal, fountain pens provide other benefits for reluctant writers. We’ll look at a number of them.

2. **Approaches to encourage and promote writing**— In this part of the ebook we’ll focus on ways to encourage students to write by making writing a more interesting challenge, by minimizing the seemingly painful aspects of writing to some youngsters, by creating peer-to-peer involvement, and by specific acts of support that appeal to students. These interventions can be accomplished with or without fountain pens.

Essay Writing

There are right at 20 different kinds or forms of essays depending on the task and the need and intent of the writer.

An essay can tell a simple story (narrative essay) or it can compete for a substantial grant (scholarship essay). Some essays are derived solely from the resources of the writer, while others can require study and research.

Because of the importance of writing to overall academic success, rudiments of essay writing are taught early on in school. The most common types of essays are narrative, expository and persuasive.

Narrative Essay— Here’s where the writer tells a story. An essay about a trip to the farm at Christmas would be an example of a narrative essay.

Expository Essay— An expository essay explains. “Explain the process of the Water Cycle” would be a prompt for an expository essay. (Other essay types, like definition, description, position, cause and effect, and compare and contrast build from expository style.)

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3. Sources of fountain pens and inks— Excellent and inexpensive student fountain pens are still available, but not always easy to find. Information on sources for fountain pens, ink cartridges and colorful bottled inks will be provided. Ideas for getting these items donated will also be covered.

4. Closing thoughts— This section will wrap up the ebook and encourage your feedback.

Why a Fountain Pen?

There are a number of excellent reasons why a fountain pen tends to encourage more and better writing for a student. Do fountain pens require a bit more care and attention? Yes, but I believe the benefits are substantial.

Benefits of Fountain Pens

Benefit #1: Curiosity and spontaneity— Students find fountain pens different and interesting, characteristics that certainly don't hurt when we want a student to *use* a pen. It's a novel approach to writing for a youngster. Hopefully, we can keep the "novel" part of it going.

Persuasive Essay— *This type of essay makes the writer's case, an attempt to persuade the reader. "Write an essay about why you believe high school students should be allowed to vote" would be an example of a prompt for a persuasive essay.*



Assessment of Writing

The skill of writing presents interesting challenges in terms of assessment. Unlike arithmetic, where a column of numbers are either added to the correct sum or not, writing involves a more subjective approach to scoring. This is especially the case with holistic writing.

Holistic writing requires a student to put words on paper in the completion of an essay. This essay, a piece of continuous and congruent text (holistic), is usually 100 words or more depending on the task and the grade level of the student.

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The Esterbrook pen I brought to class and showed to my junior high students was actually my *second* fountain pen. I used it through junior high and well into high school. My first fountain pen was a smaller, maroon-colored Esterbrook, my rite of passage into the Big League of cursive writing—fourth grade. My teacher sent me home with “the note”, a prescription for an Esterbrook and a bottle of Skrip ink—Washable Blue. Dad took me down to the drugstore where the clerk let me try out several points until I found the one that was just right for me. I was turned on to writing, and, with a few books to my credit, my affinity for putting words to paper has never slacked.

A teacher in Wyoming had a similar experience to mine when he used his old Parker fountain pen in his classroom. He stayed with one color (green) and made it a point to write only encouraging comments with the fountain pen. Students not only saw the green ink as heralding something positive, many of them asked to try his pen. It became a fun “hook” for encouraging students to write.

Benefit #2: Reduced fatigue— Some students, especially those who struggle with writing, hold a ballpoint pen like it were attempting to escape from their

Prompts are given for the task of holistic writing, establishing a topic and a focus for the assignment. Prompts are critical in the scoring of the writing, as they show the scorer how well a student attended to the directions of the task.

Holistic writing is evaluated by persons trained in the process. They employ specific criteria and use standards of comparison, such as a hierarchy of sample essays. Scoring is ultimately reflected in a number that communicates a student’s relative standing in the skill.

This process of writing and evaluation is essentially the same whether done as a classroom activity or as part of a national educational assessment like the NAEP (National Assessment of Educational Progress).



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hand. They squeeze it to death. Fatigue and cramping set in, making it difficult for a student to continue, a ready-made excuse for stopping (and whining).

Unlike ballpoint pens that require the writer to press the ink (a form of colored grease) *into* the paper, fountain pens work on capillary action and simple gravity. The pen only needs to make light contact with the surface of the paper, meaning a youngster can write longer and with much less effort. In fact, a fountain pen will dictate a need for reduced effort and pressure, for if a student presses too hard, the ink will blot and smudge. Quality control is somewhat automatic if the youngster is paying attention (not always a given).

Benefit #3: Penmanship—A fountain pen’s sensitivity to touch requires a student to keep the hand moving when the point (nib) is in contact with the paper. This causes youngsters to be more aware of their precision in writing—their penmanship.

Penmanship is such an issue that a private school in Edinburgh, Scotland, requires students to do language arts with a fountain pen only. The principal of the school believes care in writing translates to care in the composition of what is being written, as well as how students

How a Fountain Pen Writes

A fountain pen is like a golf club or a baseball bat; it has a “sweet spot”. Using that sweet spot makes all the difference in the performance of the pen.

The point of a fountain pen, called the nib, is made of metal thin enough to flex as it moves across the paper. The hole in the center allows air to enter the pen and ink to flow to the point. (The black piece under the nib is called the “feed”. It contains a channel that moves the air and ink through the pen.)

The nib is split from the hole to the point. Each side of this split is called a “tine.” Each tine has a tiny piece of hard metal, called iridium, welded to the tip. As the nib is flexed during writing, the tines open and close, delivering ink to the paper.



The iridium is the only part of the nib that actually touches the paper. Its hardness makes the nib durable, causing a good pen to last for generations. (So choose your fountain pen wisely; you will have it for a long, long time.)

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feel about their work and themselves. (Although I understand and respect his position, I would be selective of fountain pen tasks to keep the “fun” benefit more in place. Even a good thing could grow stale and flat if overused.)

Benefit #4: Control—Students can accomplish something with a fountain pen they could never do with a ballpoint: they can vary the size and impact of a line. Pressure on the point of a fountain pen opens the tines on the nib, making a line wider and bolder as long as the pressure is applied. This technique has its limits, of course, but it’s pretty cool!

Benefit #5: Colors of ink—Just like the teacher in Wyoming who made green ink his “signature” color, fountain pens allow a wide variety of choices of ink color. Colored inks are not only readily available (we’ll cover sources later), kits can be purchased that allow writers to create personalized colors that are uniquely theirs.

Benefit #6: Permanence— One does not have to toss a fountain pen when it runs dry on ink. Since it can be filled over and over again, a favorite pen can be used for years—even a lifetime.

Holding a Fountain Pen

The sweet spot of a fountain pen is the iridium at the point. The pen is held by the section (the piece that holds the nib and feed) at a bit of an angle so most of the iridium makes contact with the paper.



The correct way to hold a fountain pen

(If the pen is held where only the very end of the nib touches the paper, little of the iridium makes contact, missing the sweet spot.)

The pen can then be rolled slightly to the left or right to fit the style and comfort of the writer. Over time, the iridium will take the “set” of the writer, one reason why it’s not a good idea to make a practice of lending out a favorite pen.

(The pen should never be grasped below the section, as there is ink flowing to the nib. It would be a very messy way to write.)

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If you think about it, not many items in this world are meant to stay with us for a lifetime. In our hurry-up society, where many things are used once then tossed into the trash, it's refreshing to consider how a simple item like a fountain pen can be passed on from generation to generation. That's pretty special. My junior high school grey Esterbrook (the one I showed my students) is over 50 years old, yet it writes perfectly. In my private collection of fountain pens, I have a fountain pen that dates back to the Civil War. (It fills with an eyedropper!) It looks a little rough, but it writes beautifully. A fountain pen's longevity makes it a perfect gift for a young person.

Comments From Others

I went online to the *Fountain Pen Network* and posted a question asking why members preferred to write with a fountain pen, and if they encouraged others, especially young people, to write with a fountain pen—and why. Here are a few of the responses I received to the posting.

A member in Ohio: *When I use fountain pens, my writing is actually much more intelligible due to the writing style they encourage.*

Contemporary Fountain Pens

Contemporary fountain pens are quite simple, having only three parts: the section, the barrel and the cap.



The section of this pen has a convertor installed

The Section— *The section contains the nib (the metal point that puts ink on the paper), the feed (a black piece underneath the nib that delivers the ink to the nib) and a recess in the back that accepts an ink cartridge or a convertor (enabling the writer to use bottled inks). The section is usually a one-piece unit. In vintage pens the nib and feed could be removed from the section for maintenance and repair.*



This section accepts either an ink cartridge or a convertor for bottled ink

A Bay Area, California, parent: *My goal is to get him to relax himself while he writes. He's a tense bundle, and there's no good way to use a fountain pen while clenched up. I'm considering this cheap therapy.*

A member in Melbourne, Australia: *My hands never get tired from writing, no matter how much I write. A fountain pen will last me throughout my lifetime, and there are so many great options ranging from nibs to inks and even writing style.*

A parent in Alberta, Canada: *I started my eight and ten-year-old with fountain pens this year. The ten-year-old in particular really struggles with penmanship, and the fountain pen has encouraged him to make an effort. We're seeing great improvement. My own fountain pen experience started with a grade 8 English teacher who wrote in italic all the time. He eventually ordered inexpensive Shaeffers for the whole class and taught us all. So yes, teachers can be a huge influence.*

The Barrel— *The barrel is the body of the pen that screws or snaps onto the section and covers and protects the cartridge or converter. In the case of aerometric pens, the barrel covers a flexible ink sac that is connected to the section (very much like the vintage pens).*

Unlike vintage pens that fill with a lever or a button, the barrel of contemporary pens must be removed in order to put ink in the pen. (Note: Some contemporary pens, especially the more expensive ones, fill and function like the vintage fountain pens. It's another example of how some things never go out of style.)

The Cap— *The fountain pen's cap covers the nib when the pen is not being used. It serves to keep the nib from drying out. (To improve the seal, most fountain pens have an inner cap also.)*

Most caps can fit over the end of the barrel when the pen is being used. This is referred to as the cap being "posted". Posting the cap helps prevent loss or misplacement of the cap while the pen is being used.



The cap on this pen is posted

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An English teacher in Louisiana: Last year I managed to acquire a fountain pen for each of my Advanced Placement students (about 15 of them) and gave them a lesson or two in writing. They refill their pens in my class where I keep six or eight bottles of different inks. Now the regular classes are interested. For very special work, I hand out a fountain pen.

Students write better. I believe they consider more carefully their choice of words and phrasing, and the fountain pen slows them down enough for a thinking process to occur.

In my unscientific research over the past few years, handwriting improves in about 75% of my students; actual content improves in about 40% .

A student in Victoria, Australia: I received a good fountain pen for my 13th birthday. That was seven years ago. I was permanently hooked on fountain pens to the point that I now refuse to write with anything else. And I do a LOT of writing.

Breaking in a New Fountain Pen

The feeds of brand new fountain pens often contain traces of oils used in the manufacturing process. Getting ink to flow quickly and well in a new pen is made easier through a process called “flushing”.

Two drops or so of dishwashing liquid are stirred into a cup of warm water. This water is flushed in and out of the pen as if you were filling it and emptying it. (For cartridge pens, use the convertor to flush the pen.) Pat the nib dry with a paper towel and allow the pen to dry before inking it.

This process clears the ink channel of the feed. The bit of dishwashing liquid is supposed to facilitate ink flow by improving the surface tension inside the feed.



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A parent in Long Island, New York: *I recently purchased a Pelikano Junior for my daughter who is in the fifth grade. She loves it and leaves me notes all over the house. She loves the Pelikan Purple ink. She's doing great with it.*

A student in Singapore: *Personally, I found myself wanting to find an excuse to use my fountain pen after I got into this about three months ago. That includes homework. I even do math sums with my fountain pen. I think it's great for students who are known to be "lazy" writers.*

A student who didn't mention a location: *I got into fountain pens two years ago from my English and literature teacher who uses them all the time. I feel that using a fountain pen improves my work in all subjects, except for mathematics, of course. They make writing less of a chore and more enjoyable. Fountain pens also make me think more about my writing, and are a lot easier on the hand than ballpoint pens. I used to get cramps in my wrist all the time, and now I have no such problem.*

Filling a Fountain Pen

A few modern pens, and essentially all vintage pens, fill by working a lever or a button on the barrel. In both, the nib is immersed in the ink supply as the fluid is drawn up into a rubber pen sac.

Contemporary fountain pens generally use an ink cartridge, making the inking process simple and clean. A new cartridge simply is snapped into the section. These pens usually can hold two of the short international cartridges (the one being used and a spare).

Some cartridge pens come with a convertor. The convertor allows the use of bottled ink, which is cheaper than cartridges and comes in many colors. (There are even kits for mixing custom, "signature" colors.) The nib is placed in the ink supply and the ink is drawn up into the convertor.

A third style is the aerometric pen; it uses bottled ink only. A pen sac is attached to the section and mounted inside a metal tube. Part of the tube is cut away to expose a metal strip over the sac. With the barrel removed, the metal strip is pressed and released while the nib is immersed in the ink supply. This draws the ink into the pen sac.

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Interventions

There's likely not a lot of intervention going on when students are writing an essay or are writing open responses to questions. Success on these tasks would represent the "proof of the pudding" that encouragement, incentive and motivation for students to write are successful. In this regard, what you'll find here is basic, but practical and effective. In fact, you'll find that these ideas and suggestions can be used for academics other than writing.

Most of these interventions come from my best-selling book, *101 Ways to Make Your Classroom Special* (Friendly Oaks Publications, 1999) or my inservice workshop for teachers, *Working Effectively with the Difficult, Defiant and Noncompliant Student*. Known contributors are recognized, as they should be.

The Pen Nap

Purpose— To encourage students to initiate and sustain the activity of writing

Here's a statement that will be true every single time: *Students will never complete a task they never start.* Some youngsters are reluctant to begin a task they perceive as being endless. (The same thing happens at home when a youngster doesn't want to leave a fun activity to do a chore.)

I'm sometimes asked for ideas for increasing a student's intrinsic motivation to do academic tasks. The question brings a smile to my face because 90% of the time young people are intrinsically motivated already.

If, for example, a youngster arrives home after school and is instructed to select a task he is motivated to do from a choice of homework or video games, which one do you think he'll select? (Duh!)

Young people aren't that different from adults in that both perform in school or on the job partly to avoid unpleasant consequences. In both cases, school or work, there's still a lot teachers and employers can do to increase interest and performance in accomplishing tasks.

(Isn't it interesting how we notice a shift in a person's attitude when work becomes less a job and more a career? Why can't the same thing happen in a classroom? I believe it can.)

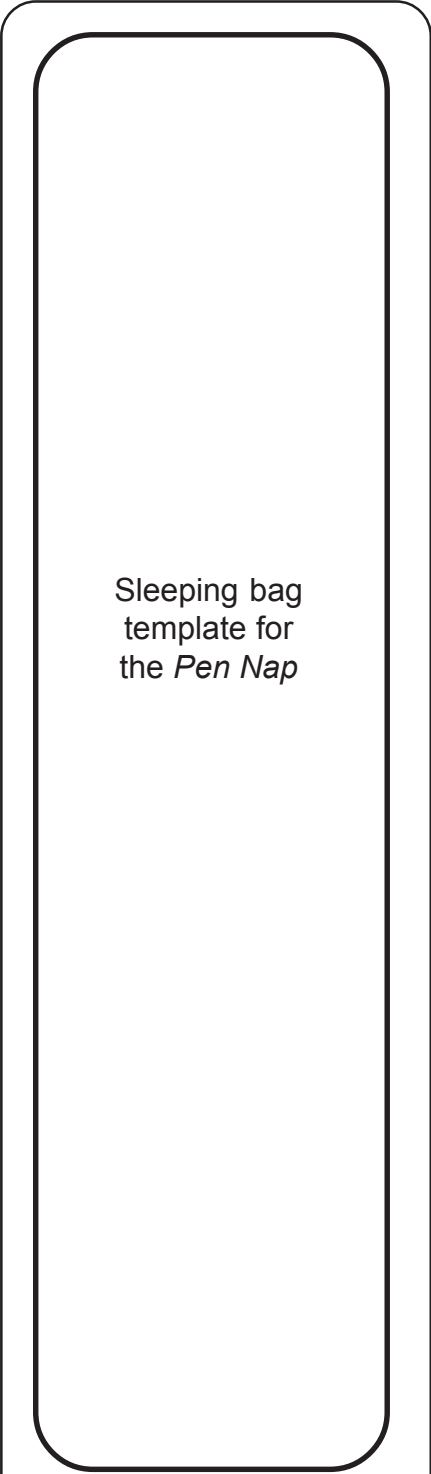
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One way to encourage students to initiate a task and stay with it is to offer a scheduled, short break for *everyone* during the task. The promise of the break stresses more focus and time-on-task until the break. An added benefit is that, with all students seated and working, distractions created by classmates are minimized.

With young students, make the break a “nap” for their hardworking pen. Students make a sleeping bag for their pen by cutting and assembling the pieces using the template on the right. Let the students decorate them, even write their pen’s name on the sleeping bag. Then, when a bell or sound goes off signaling the *Pen Nap*, everyone stops what they are doing and allows their pen to take a two-minute snooze inside the bag. Another sound signals “wake up”. The pen, now refreshed, goes back to task.

The same basic strategy works well with older students by calling it a “focus activity”. Stress that, during the focus activity, everyone will remain seated and “focused” until the break.

In either of these approaches to the *Pen Nap*, it is important to ensure as much success as possible by starting the nap early in the activity when the intervention is first used. This tells students that it is not the intent of the teacher to trick them into working long and hard before the break. Eventually, however, the break should be moved further and further into the class period to



Sleeping bag
template for
the *Pen Nap*

Two of these make each half of the sleeping bag. Turn the top one down so the top of the pen (the “head”) will show.

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shape and show students how much they can accomplish when they become absorbed in the task. The more they accomplish up to the “nap”, the less of it they have to finish later.

Like all interventions, this one should not be overused.

An Honest Five Minutes

Purpose— To demonstrate to a student just how much they can accomplish with even five minutes of sustained effort

This idea is a great one to use with the student who daydreams excessively, spends too much time “getting ready”, or is simply dragging his feet on a task. The youngster is asked to give an activity an *honest* five minutes as a timer is started. Basically this is yet another way to encourage short-term focus and the self-realization of how much work can be accomplish quickly.

Three-student Groups

Purpose— To gain more effort from a reluctant youngster by putting him with two peers who are “invested” in his performance

Youngsters don’t always work well in groups at first, so it is important to keep activities short and simple at first. The goal initially is the successful completion of a group activity, not a high amount of academic output.

If the time leading up to the Pen Nap is lengthened gradually, students will hardly notice the change. They should become more capable and accustomed to sustained activity. Benefits like nothing left over for homework can be self-reinforcing.

*This intervention was furnished by **Dianne Herrick**, an educator in Show Low, Nevada. It’s a quick and easy redirection to task.*

I wish I had used more of these three-student groups when I taught junior high school. It would have made a difference.

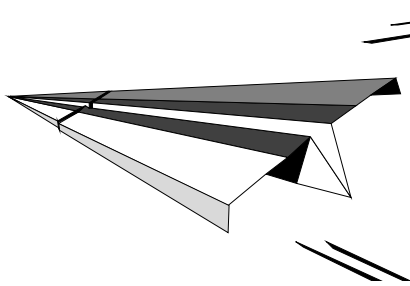
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Groups of three work well because there's no place for a reluctant student to hide. (Where possible, put a reluctant student with two stronger ones.) As a additional investment into the task, and a point of empowerment, have the reluctant writer pick up the assignment and turn it in for the group.

Some type of Round Robin activity might be helpful, where each of the three students takes a turn writing on the assignment. For instance, a prompt could encourage them to work together in telling a story (narrative). In this approach, no student is required to do more than a third of the work, yet all will receive a grade.

Assignment Airplanes

Purpose— To boost interest in the completion and turning in of assignments



This intervention can be used with individual students or with the work of a group. Youngsters are told that, if they turn their work in complete and on time, they can participate in a paper airplane contest with their homework. They simply fold their finished homework into an airplane then stand

Creating a group of three makes an "odd man out" situation whereby the other two group members can stress compliance. This reinforces the teacher's position without the teacher having to say or do much about it. (That would be a welcomed relief.)

Another advantage of using these groups is that grouping provides a change in the classroom, a type of redirection for everyone, including the teacher.

This idea isn't going to alter the face of education, but it does make the challenge of completing work a bit more interesting and fun. (Would that be one step closer to intrinsic motivation?)

If the teacher needs to monitor this more closely, students could be instructed to get the teacher's permission before they fold their paper. This could be some form of a "pilot's license" (a sticker, stamp or mark on the paper).

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behind a line and toss their airplane into the *Homework Hanger* (a large cardboard box labeled as such). Airplanes that land in the box earn some special benefit, such as extra credit.

This intervention has wide appeal across the grade levels and is easy to implement. Again, like the other interventions, this one should not be overdone.

Heading Stickers

Purpose— To get students to the specifics of a task as quickly as possible

Some students labor just putting a heading on their paper. As a teacher, I've seen youngsters spend way too much time on it. A little boost with the heading helps the student and directs her to the meat of the assignment more quickly.

Mary Sue Tate
Mrs. Johnson - 4th Grade
Jonesville Elementary School
January 9, 2008

A contact file can be built on the computer, retrievable by class. Using an address label program on wordprocessing software like Word, a whole class of personalized labels can be run through a printer quickly.

Another thought might be to give "wings", certificates to all students landing their planes in the box. Certificates could then be redeemed for free time, homework passes or any number of benefits.

Here's a neat idea. Add a photo to the heading sticker.



Jimmy Lee
Mrs. Warren - 2nd Grade
Smith Elementary School
January 23, 2008

When you give a youngster five of these heading stickers to put on his work, it's a message to do something to put them on!

It's interesting, isn't it, how students of all ages are attracted to photos of themselves?

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The whole sheet is passed to the first student who peels off her sticker, applies it to the assignment, and passes the sheet on.

A Picture of Compliance

Purpose— To provide fun and progressive incentives for the especially reluctant and resistant student (writer)

I picked up this idea when I was putting this ebook together. A special education teacher shared how she encouraged task compliance with an adolescent student by letting the girl earn a disposable camera as an incentive.



The student took 27 photos, then realized she had a problem: she didn't have the money to develop the pictures. The teacher had the roll of film processed and offered the girl one photo at a time as she completed assignments and was respectful to staff and classmates.

This is not only a silent process, there's no longer any need to double check papers for a heading. (It frees you to worry about something else!)

*Thanks go to **Mary White**, special education teacher at Marty Indian School in Marty, South Dakota, for this great idea.*

Mary went on to share that, when the student complied on an assignment, she would hold all of the remaining photos out to her fanned out, face down, like a deck of cards. This added to the intrigue and prevented the girl from "cherry picking" a few photos then quitting.

This is yet another example of the many opportunities there are to create incentives to compliance. But they only work if they are of value to the student.

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Comments From the Principal

Purpose— To encourage good work through supportive comments from the school principal

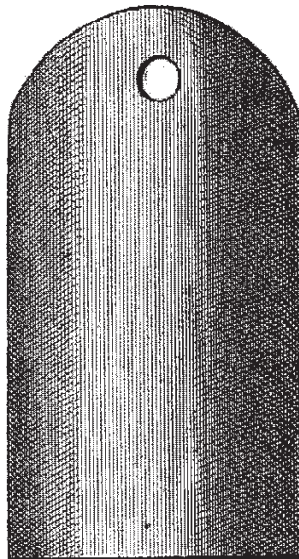
Can you remember a time when you were young and did something that drew positive comments from adults you admired and respected? This intervention builds on this kind of experience.

Joyce Franco shares, “I teach writing skills (essay, narrative). When my students have written an especially nice paper for their ability, I share it with our principal. She writes a note to each child, commenting on something she enjoyed in their paper. They love this, and work harder.”

Dog Tags

Purpose— To provide a tangible validation of achievement

One school awards a dog tag (called a “spirit tag”) for special achievement in math, reading or writing. The students are very proud of them, often wearing all of their dog tags at once!



*This intervention was shared by **Joyce Franco**, fifth-grade teacher at Oliver Elementary School in Seale, Alabama.*

*Positive comments from the school principal are extremely powerful. First of all, they're from the principal. Students know the principal took the time and effort to look at **THEIR** paper when she could have been doing something else.*

Second, comments that are specific tell the student the principal didn't take a quick glance, but really looked at their work. My guess is that students will save these notes.

*The dog tag idea came from **Ruth Rabago**, Assistant Principal at Pomeroy Elementary in Pasadena ISD (Houston, Texas). The tags usually have the school's name on them, plus a statement like “Excellence in Writing”.*

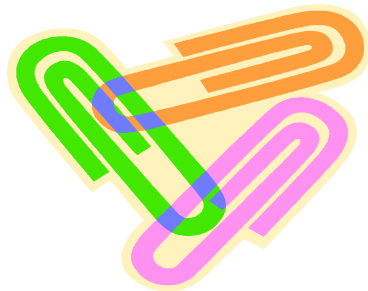
Sources of the tags include School Spirit Products (888-497-7767) or Spirit Line (800-527-4499).

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Clippin' Right Along

Purpose— To provide visual evidence and verification of progress

A simple, plastic-covered, colored paper clip doesn't seem like a big deal, but Lisa Everley shared that students like earning them as they stay focused and do their work.



Students enjoy accumulating the paper clips (jumbo ones work best), adorning their clothing with them or wearing chains made from the colored clips. The clips can be used as an incentive with a challenge like “Whoever can show me two feet of paper clips on Friday gets popcorn!”

You Choose “Where”

Purpose— To achieve compliance by offering the empowerment of choice.

This idea reminded me of a similar strategy I used when I taught junior high school. When I couldn't offer students a choice of task (a writing assignment, for instance), I would sometimes give them a hand in deciding *where* they would do the assignment in the classroom.

Lisa Everley, Special Education ED teacher at Pratt Elementary in Sand Springs, Oklahoma, shared this idea.

Paper clips are very colorful and cheap, making an ideal incentive in the classroom.

Another idea is to have the students work in groups, earning the paper clips for their effort in working together. Attach the first paper clip to the ceiling and let each group contribute to their “compliance chain”. The first group to have its paper clip chain touch the floor wins the big prize!

Elizabeth Montgomery teaches at Pleasant Hill Elementary School in Crossville, Tennessee.

It's amazing how providing a little choice and empowerment adds up to a lot more compliance. The secret to making this strategy work is for the teacher to be fine with any choice a student selects from the “menu”.

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Elizabeth Montgomery (not the one from *Bewitched*) shared that she would have several clipboards in a basket in her classroom. Students could take a clipboard and work on the assignment anywhere in the classroom, so long as it didn't bother or distract others. They could sit at their desk, at a table, on the floor, or even stand, just as long as they worked on the assignment.

The "Great Banana Split Race"

Purpose— To help students incrementally build compliance toward a very tasty treat

This strategy has students working toward a banana split at the end of the reporting period. It's possible to use the weekly parts of the banana split to recognize both academic achievement and positive classroom behavior.

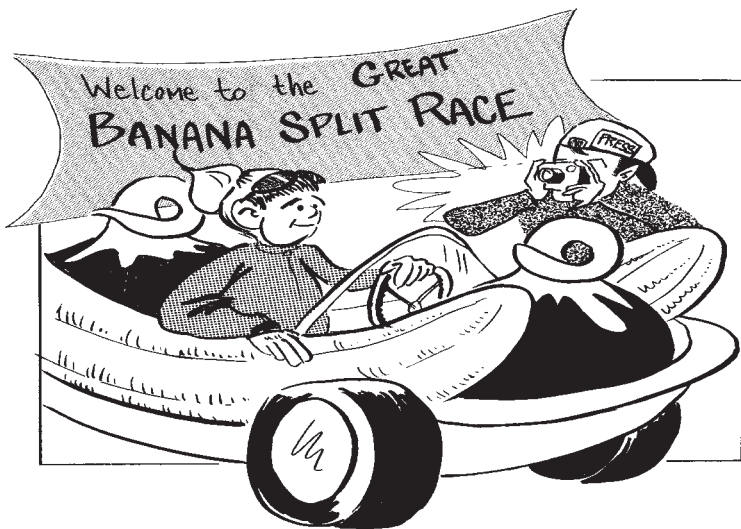


Illustration from *101 Ways to Make Your Classroom Special*. Reprinted with permission.

Progress is charted as each student earns a part of their banana split. (See the list on the right.)

Reluctant students seem to respond especially well to the empowerment of these kinds of choices.

Teresa Chambers shared the strategy of banana splits. She teaches at Sharpe Accelerated Elementary School in Memphis, Tennessee.

Here are the components that must be earned in sequence to get the whole treat:

Week 1: a spoon

Week 2: a dish

Week 3: a sliced banana

Week 4: chocolate scoop

Week 5: vanilla scoop

Week 6: strawberry scoop

Week 7: toppings

Week 8: whipped cream

Week 9: chopped nuts

Teresa adds a cherry on top as a bonus for a perfect reporting period.

Lots of schools and classrooms have enjoyed this intervention.

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The end of the reporting period is a celebration of achievement, with each student getting exactly what they earned for the reporting period.

The “Great Banana Split Race” can be a lot of fun, and it always encourages students to do even better during the next reporting period.

The Privacy Desk

Purpose— To give options to the student who is easily distracted or made uncomfortable

Some youngsters don’t work well in the middle of a crowd; they need some space. In other cases students might need to isolate themselves voluntarily before they get into trouble. This intervention addresses this concern by providing another desk or two in the classroom that are not close to any of the others.

Students typically respond well to this option for privacy. Not only does it redirect emotionally delicate youngsters, it supports and encourages completion of tasks.



Notice that, even if a youngster misses three parts (three weeks out of the nine), he would still earn everything except what goes on top of the ice cream.

*The idea of the privacy desk came from **Karen Ledet**, fourth-grade teacher at Vernon Elementary School in Vernon, Florida.*

Karen always makes it clear that the privacy desks in the classroom are not punitive options, rather just the opposite. They are choices to be made before trouble happens.

She also noted that she does not use the typical teacher’s desk in her classroom. Instead she uses a table. One of the privacy desks is a spot at her table.

The privacy desk is not intended for full-time seating, nor are students to spend all their time there.

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Sources of Fountain Pens and Inks

Fountain pens are all over the internet, especially on eBay. The problem is most of them are made for adults, not young people. But you can find them, especially if you look around.

Fountain Pens

In many countries students still write with fountain pens, so there are plenty of brands and styles that Americans have never heard of. Here are some of the more common ones. This is not an exhaustive list at all, but rather a starting point.

Sheaffer school pen: This one's a hands-down favorite. A lot of Baby Boomers grew up with this inexpensive, see-through, fountain pen that used an ink cartridge. This pen's not being made anymore, but you can sometimes find them on eBay. I understand that the cartridges for this pen are still available.

Pelikan: The Pelikano and Pelikano Junior come from Germany and are made specifically for young people. Pelikan, the manufacturer, is a mainstay in the fountain pen industry. These pens can be found or ordered in shops and stores that carry the Pelikan line of products.

When buying over the internet, be especially mindful of where the pens are coming from and the feedback rating of the seller. Note also that some sellers have a low price for a pen, but an outrageous charge for shipping. Still, there can be plenty of opportunity for great and productive shopping..

You might want to try a Google search on some of these pens.

Pelikan is a very old and established company.

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Lamy: This fountain pen also is made in Germany. One of their pens for young people, the Lamy Safari, is of excellent quality, but not cheap.

Reform: This is another German company. They make several fountain pens that are stylish and popular with kids.

Rotring: Also a German company. The Core is a popular pen with youngsters.

Pilot: Pilot is made in Japan, I understand, and distributed all over the world. One of their pens, the Varsity, is popular because of one very unusual characteristic: it is disposable!

Hero: Hero fountain pens are made in China and Taiwan. There is a very wide range of price and quality, depending on what you want. Their school pens are especially functional, attractive and affordable. I especially like the translucent ones, and the colors are striking.

Stypen: This is a line of fountain pens made in France. I don't know much about their pens for young people, but I was impressed with the ones I saw.

Cost: \$25-30, but worth it if a youngster will stay with it.

I really like those I've seen.

The Pilot Varsity pens come in a pack of three with ink colors of black, blue and purple. Since the pens are disposable, there's no need to purchase ink. The Varsity is not recommended for young children, as the nibs are delicate and easy to bend.

I understand Stypen is owned by BIC.

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Another Source of Youth Fountain Pens

While I was checking sources, I ran across a dealer in Asia that purchases close-outs on all kinds of fountain pens. He does this world-wide, and has a sterling reputation. When I told him about the subject of this ebook project, he became excited about it. He immediately began searching for pens that would be suitable for students of all ages. It would be difficult to come close to them in quality and price, especially if you wanted several.

So here's what I have done. I've had them put up on a website of some folks I know. The site is thetexaspenwright.com. The student pens are in a special link on the homepage: ***Fountain Pens for Kids***. Just be aware that, since these are close-outs and exceptional bargains, selections can change overnight.

And there's even a bonus: a CD entitled *Pull the Plug on Failure*. This is an audio program that supports young people; I recorded it at a studio in Houston a few years back. The site says the CD is for teachers, but parents are welcome to add it to their shopping cart. (It will cost you one penny, because they couldn't put a zero amount on a cart item.) The site again is:

www.thetexaspenwright.com

I suppose you could call this dealer the Global Factory Outlet for Fountain Pens. I was fortunate to make contact with him.

*While I was wrapping up this ebook, this dealer sent me some photos of youth fountain pens he had just received in a large close-out shipment. These were sporty—bright metallic colors and super classy styling. They'd make a kid's eyes pop! I know youngsters who would promise to write a sequel to **War and Peace** just to get their hands on one of these.*

This gift CD is a shortened version of a longer program. It takes a hard look at elements that overcome young people when they continually experience failure. More importantly, I discuss ways to reverse the process and lift youngsters back to success.

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Fountain Pen Ink

Just about all of these fountain pens use the international ink cartridge, which is readily available through the internet and office supply stores. To use a convertor, or for aerometric pens, you'll need bottled ink.

If you're in a hurry, try a crafts store. *Higgins Calligraphy Ink* is available in small quantities and can be purchased for about \$3.00 per bottle or less.

Here are a few reputable sources I checked out:

www.bertramsinkwell.com—
Bertram's Ink Well is a Maryland-based company that specializes in inks and fountain pen-related items. They have a great selection of inks in all colors and prices. The most economical fountain pen ink is Cross (about \$6.50 per bottle), although colors are limited. Prices go up from there. Most notable inks in terms of value and color selection are Pelikan, Sheaffer, Parker and Private Reserve.

Some office supply stores carry bottled ink, but in only one or two colors and one or two brands. Bottled inks in these places are getting harder and harder to find.

Small stationery shops can be an excellent place to find good bottled ink.

NEVER put india ink in a fountain pen. It contains a lacquer substance that will eventually damage the pen.

In the long run, buying bottled ink is much cheaper than purchasing cartridges.

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www.pendemonium.com—

Pendemonium is in Iowa. They have a good selection of inks, but be sure to check out their ink color charts. Someone put a lot of work into these; they're helpful in determining colors.

www.peartreepens.com—

Pear Tree Pen Company is located in Michigan. They are the only merchant I could find that carried the Pelikan ink in one-ounce bottles (\$4.95) with an excellent selection of colors.

Consider ways that you could get the costs of fountain pens and ink donated. What about getting help from area service clubs? Also consider organizations that might sponsor essay writing contests. A few nice fountain pens would make some great prizes.

Some Closing Thoughts

I've covered a lot in this little ebook. I do hope you have found it helpful and encouraging. As I said in the opening, the topic of writing is close to my heart. I am convinced that what you accomplish in helping youngsters do well in putting words on paper will contribute to a lifelong skill and love for the written word. Those efforts always will produce fruit.

I have done business with Pendemonium in the past. They provided excellent service.

I've found that there are plenty of folks within the community who have a heart for kids and would love to sponsor or co-sponsor events that encourage youngsters to write creatively and well.

The hometown newspaper deals in words. They would be an ideal sponsor for something like this.

I started off thinking this little ebook would be 7-8 pages in length, tops. Well, it grew from there. (And I'm pleased it did.)

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I would enjoy hearing from you. I encourage you to check out my website and my blog, ***It's About Them***. The blog is my small way of speaking to old-fashioned family values of decency and responsibility and how we teach these to our children and grandchildren on a daily basis. Often we teach more by example than by lesson. There's no more important job on earth.

My contact information is on this page. It would be my privilege to hear from you.

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About Dr. Sutton— As an experienced educator, Dr. James Sutton has taught everything from grade school to graduate school. As a nationally recognized psychologist, he is in high demand as a consultant to schools, special education cooperatives, regional educational service centers, juvenile justice departments, child service agencies, hospitals, and residential treatment facilities for young people.

Dr. Sutton was awarded the *Certified Speaking Professional* designation by the prestigious *National Speakers Association*, and is in much demand as a keynoter and presenter at school, state and national conferences. He is the author of a number of books, including the best-selling *101 Ways to Make Your Classroom Special* (now in its 9th printing).

*Permission is granted to use the stories and content of my blog, **It's About Them**. That's why it's there. I would appreciate being mentioned as the source.*

*There is another free ebook available from the homepage of my website, **Resolving Conflict with Your Children**. This ebook for parents and teachers has drawn very positive feedback. A new monthly publication, the **ODD Management Digest** is also available from a link on the homepage. (Remember, they are both FREE.)*

*There are three other ebooks that are also available through the website (click on the **Downloadable Guides-Ebooks** link).*

For information about the books Dr. Sutton has written, go to:

www.DocSpeak.com/Books/INDEX.HTM

These materials can be purchased online at this site.

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