



Writing Essentials – Lesson 1

Prewriting

Teacher Background

If you have not already done so, this would be a good time to read the **Introduction to Neilia Solberg and Writing Minilessons**. (MS Cyberbullying-WE Introletter.doc)

Prewriting is the thinking and planning a writer does before drafting and throughout the writing process. Of all the steps involved in the writing process, prewriting is probably the most important. Prewriting develops the writer's thinking and enthusiasm for writing about a topic. During prewriting the writer considers the topic, gathers information, chooses a product he wants to work on, and begins to make a plan for organizing and elaborating ideas. Prewriting also helps a writer clarify thinking and narrow in on a controlling idea or thesis statement. Students who use prewriting strategies are more effective writers because they are more capable of choosing and narrowing a topic.

While prewriting is but one step in the writing process, it's one that you don't want to hurry through. You can give your students a number of prewriting experiences throughout the cyberbullying unit without taking the exercises to full out finished product. It's an exercise to get you started and it's a good one.

There are a number of ways to pre-write. In this curriculum, we'll look at four:

- Clustering
- Planning Elaboration Using Icons
- List, Group, Label
- Alphabetic Taxonomy

Clustering

Clustering is one way to pre-write using circles and color coding ideas that seem to go together into categories. Students will need to practice the clustering model several times before they will think to use it independently.

Here's how you do it: See example, **Teacher Resource 1 – Clustering** (Lesson 1 WR1.doc)

- The writer first chooses a topic of interest and clusters on the topic, adding details and ideas as they come to mind, following them out in subsequent circles.
- Now that the writer has clustered on a broad topic, she needs to consider how to narrow the topic.
- The writer thinks that any of the ideas she worked with might be a manageable topic, but since she knows the most about one specific idea, she chooses it and clusters again on that topic.
- Then she would complete the prewriting process by creating a controlling idea, filtering details, adding icons for elaboration, and determining an order.
- It is not necessary or advisable, to have your students go through the entire writing process with every topic they cluster. Consider clustering as an end unto itself-an exercise and a very good one, to prepare students for writing one final product. Clustering allows the writer to "try out this topic" and see how it might go if they selected it as their final writing focus.

Lesson: Clustering ideas that seem to go together

Preparation

Suggested time: 20-30 minutes

Resources and Materials

- See MS Cyberbullying Teacher Manual, Lesson 1, page 7 for where to insert this writing extension of the lesson.
- Lesson 1 SA 1 (Match real-world and online actions) completed by student partners or teams
- Document camera (or overhead projector) for teacher demonstration

Activity 1: Teaching Clustering to students

In this session, you'll teach students that they can extend their thinking by linking ideas that seem to go together in CLUSTERS. The following is a soft scripting approach to teaching clustering to assist you.

CONNECTION: **Setting the stage with students to summarize the thinking process students used in completing Student Activity 1**

Script: "As you were completing this worksheet, I noticed that many of you were talking excitedly about the topic of *cyberbullying*. I heard some of you making connections on a much deeper level to several of the ideas about cyberbullying. One way real writers and philosophers develop their thinking about important ideas is by jotting down words and phrases and clustering the ones that seem to go together. I start by finding one idea that catches my attention. As I look at the list of Online Actions, one I find important is this one, "sending a mean text message."

TEACHING: **In this case, tell students that essay writers often try out a process called "clustering" to see what thoughts they have about a topic and find out how these ideas seem to go together.**

Script: "Today I'm going to show you a strategy called, "clustering." Instead of taking an idea like, "sending a mean text message" (this example is one of the Online Actions examples on SA1) and progressing straight into drafting, I can use this as an opportunity to explore the ideas I might have about this topic. Any time something catches my attention like this one did, I ask myself, '*And, why is this important to me?*'"

"When you cluster ideas, you use lines and circles to jot down ideas that somehow go together. The ideas you write down will often reveal answers as to why the idea is important in the first place."

At this point, I shift from the role of teacher to the role of a writer and move to the document camera or overhead projector (using blank transparency for drawing the circle diagram).

"I call this work 'planning possible ideas.' First, I write the topic in the middle of my paper and draw a circle around it." *There's nothing fancy about this example, but it is so simple and concrete that I think it works well. I write 'sending a mean text message' and then draw a circle around the words.*

"Now I begin the real work of thinking and allowing ideas to come to mind that I have about **'sending a mean text message.'** The first thought I have when I ask myself that question is **'you're really angry with someone.'** I write this phrase, circle it and draw a line that connects it to my first circle. I continue adding new phrases, circles and lines, following each line of thinking to the end and starting over again. It might feel like a bit of a ramble, but I think you'll get the idea once you give it a try." *Students watch my demo as I lift off the lid on my thinking and write for them as a writer might write and think, using the ideas that come to mind. Feel free to use your own example. If it helps you, use mine as it is, but your own thoughts and examples will of course, be the best classroom demonstration you can present.*

Debrief by articulating what you did that you hope students will also do.

"Notice how I followed each thought all the way out and then I asked myself over and over, ***Why is this important to me?*** Each time I ask and examine my thinking, a new cluster of thoughts seem to come to mind, each one is a new reason or thought I have about sending mean text messages."

REHEARSAL: Have your students turn to each other in pairs and talk about how they might use *Clustering* as a strategy for extending their thinking.

"Turn to a person sitting by you and explain how you can see yourself using the *Clustering* strategy using one of the other ideas from SA1." Give your students just a minute or two to debrief the strategy with each other, before sending them off to try it on their own. Verbal rehearsal offers students a chance to try it out before committing to the real deal on paper."

WRITING TIME: Students will now have an opportunity to try the clustering strategy with partners on paper.

"During your writing time today, I want you to try out *Clustering* using one of the other examples from the Online Actions side of SA1. Work in pairs as you try it out."

Coaching Tip: *Though there are three additional prewriting activities modeled for you, keep in mind the importance of lots of instruction followed by lots and lots of practice. Therefore, you very well might have your students try out clustering over several sessions. You'll want to meet with student pairs during the WRITING TIME. Wander through your room and visit with a couple of pairs as they work, coach them back on track if they are having a hard time getting started. Keep in mind that they'll get better and better at this strategy with additional practice.*

AFTER THE CLASS SHARE: Invite a pair of students to bring their piece up front and share their work with classmates.