California Writing Project

Travel Writing: A Genre Exploration of How Text Types Blend in Real-world Writing

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From Teacher to Teacher

I live and teach in a small, coastal town in northern California. My students like to think that anywhere would be better to live than here, but they are also fiercely defensive of their local hangouts and special spots, especially when outsiders question the size and resources of the area. With this in mind, I created this travel writing project because the bulk of student work at a secondary level seems to focus on textual analysis and typically uses the teacher as the audience; I wanted to give my students a chance to have fun with language (gasp!) and yet have a specific, realistic purpose and a feeling of ownership.

Can I get students to write about the use of imagery in Shakespeare's sonnets? Yes. Will they all enjoy it and find it relevant? No. This lesson capitalizes on two things: students get to write about a topic they know a lot about, and teenagers have a natural desire to be advocates for what THEY like and want to do. Because the topic is familiar, it frees up brainpower to practice some of the elements of writing that can get put off in a typical literary criticism class. Yes, teachers want their students to write with active verbs and vivid imagery, but if said teens are bored by Aldous Huxley and still confused about the difference between a simile and a metaphor, then they may never get to the holy grail of zingy sentences and lively voice. At the heart of it, I suppose, is the fact that I wanted to enjoy reading what my students wrote, and I wanted them to take pleasure in using language.

I taught this project at the beginning of the year. Students didn't need a lot of background knowledge, and the final product conveys a sense of pride, which helps create class unity. It also helped me get to know them as individuals. What I find helpful about the process as a writing instructor is that it seems to motivate students in a way that other writing assignments may not, meaning that I get a better sense of what students are capable of, and I can hold them to higher standards of linguistic dexterity for future writing projects. I can't say that all their writing after this project was interesting to read, but I can say that when I asked students to think about tone and word choice, they had a reference point that they felt confident about, which helped when we got to tougher and drier topics later on.

Ultimately, I collected the articles the students wrote and made a class book using an online publishing company—there are numerous websites out there, such as Blurb.com or Viovio.com. If you are thinking about doing this, I recommend checking for deals and looking at what file types are accepted for uploading before committing to this step. We used Microsoft Publisher to design the pages, and then I converted those files to PDFs so I could upload them. You may want to test out this process before promising to do this in class—it's not hard, but takes some time and a little technical know-how. When we finished, students had the option to purchase the book, which could serve as an actual local's guide for future out-of-town guests or simply as a memento. This step is obviously optional, but when I did it, I combined the articles from all the sections I taught, so it became a sort of poor-man's yearbook for one grade level. Students really enjoyed reading and commenting on each other's work in a glossy, full-color, bound format.

Text Resources

See the Instructional Resources section for a complete listing of the mentor texts I used with my students and the online links to them.

Mentor Texts – The most important thing to do ahead of time is collect a variety of real travel articles that will serve as examples for the students. The travel-writing genre is wide and varied, but in this project I mostly use the type of contemporary travel pieces found in magazines such as *Sunset*, *Via*, and *National Geographic Traveler*. Why? They are short, so we can read and compare a lot of them,

they are typically fun to read, and they usually have a lot of personality. They may not be at the pinnacle of the literary ladder, and some may be downright cheesy, but they clearly illustrate the writing skills I want the students to focus on; after reading and analyzing a few, most students easily "get it." Whatever articles you choose, ideally, each one should have a unique tone, target audience, and theme/motif. I've included the ones I use, but feel free to find your own—you know your students, so find ones that will inspire and interest them. It is a good idea to find at least one about a place that you've visited and have taken photos of—more on that later. I've included links to articles, but if you choose to use these, you would need to format them for photocopying. The focus of this series is on style and language, so it's important that students look closely at the language of the mentor texts, which calls for some space between lines and/or large margins for notes. Cutting and pasting is time-consuming and not my favorite part of teaching, but having students mark up text is invaluable, especially if you want them to notice something and then remember it a few days later!

1. Online reviews (Yelp.com or something similar) of popular, local places that will outrage/animate your students. The best ones are negative reviews of places you know your students like.
2. Pictures of a place you've visited and want to write about, so you can write an article, too (optional, but highly recommended).
3. Computer lab time for typing final drafts, if you require this.

Optional: Students combine their final drafts with photos and design magazine pages (on Microsoft Publisher or something comparable). These can later be combined into a class book that could be used by out-of-town guests who want local recommendations. If you want to do this, you will also need these:

1. Cameras for students to take pictures of their places (if they don't all have cell phones). This is not strictly necessary. They can find pictures online of almost everywhere these days, but I think it improves the buy-in and ownership of the pieces.
2. Time in the computer lab and a design program, such as Microsoft Publisher. As with any assignment, I recommend doing it yourself first, so you can work out the bugs.
3. Money to purchase at least one copy of your future book.
4. Software that will convert your students' articles to PDFs, if required by online publishers. (There are free ones, such as PDF Creator.)

Teaching Context

I developed this lesson for my ninth graders, but it has applicability for grades 9-12.

Because I don't know how long your class periods are or how many times a week you see your students, I've just separated activities by instructional goal and trusted that you will adapt them to your schedule and class composition/pace. I teach in 55 minute periods and this takes me about 10-12 class periods, depending on whether I give class time for typing drafts; class periods need not all be consecutive, especially at the end of the series, when students need time to draft and teachers need time to grade.

Text Type, Genre, Writing Prompt

- **Genre**
  Travel Writing can be persuasive, informational, or narrative or can blend all three

- **Writing Prompt**
  "Great travel writing consists of equal parts curiosity, vulnerability and vocabulary. It is not a terrain for know-it-alls or the indecisive. The best of the genre can simply be an

elegant natural history essay, a nicely writ sports piece, or a well-turned profile of a bar band and its music. A well-grounded sense of place is the challenge for the writer. We observe, we calculate, we inquire, we look for a link between what we already know and what we're about to learn. The finest travel writing describes what's going on when nobody's looking." — Tom Miller

We live in a place that is regularly inundated by tourists. While this may cause frustration, our local economy depends on these visitors. If you were welcoming someone to the area and trying to make sure they would come back, what would you tell them? Choose a location, a reoccurring event, or a business and write a travel article about it that will entice and entertain potential tourists. Decide what your purpose will be and then select an appropriate organizing structure—narrative, expository, or persuasive, or a blend.

As you write, consider your audience and tailor your tone and content to those folks. For example, if you are writing about Cabrillo Lighthouse, your audience would probably be families or history buffs, so your tone could be informative yet friendly, and you would emphasize activities or facts specific to those groups. On the other hand, if you are writing about kayaking in sea caves, your audience may be more adventurous and nature-oriented, so your writing should adapt to that by using vocabulary, description, and information that would appeal to this group.

Finally, as you've seen in the professional examples, many authors choose a theme or motif and weave it into the piece, from the title to the last line. Think about your topic and decide what would be suitable and add an artistic flare that unifies your writing.

Instructional Strategies

- Using and analyzing mentor texts
- Marking up text—use of different colored highlighters makes this easier.
- Comparing and contrasting genres (Venn diagram)
- Using dual prompts for the same text – students read the same thing, but answer different questions, which creates lively discussion between partners and helps students see that the lens readers look through helps determine their opinion/reaction.
- Reading aloud—students read their own work out loud to their peers
- Peer reviewing
- Note-taking guide
- Revising – students work in pairs and alone to revise for target skills
- Writing to an authentic audience

Common Core State Standards

*(**Note:** I first did this project with freshmen, but the standards have changed; the CCSS doesn't emphasize style until grades 11-12, so those are the standards I've included.)*

Standards in bold are focus standards. Those not in bold are important supporting standards.

CCSS Reading Standards for Informational Text, grades 11–12
5. Analyze and evaluate the effectiveness of the structure an author uses in his or her exposition or argument, including whether the structure makes points clear, convincing, and engaging.
    a. Analyze the use of text features (e.g., graphics, headers, captions) in public documents
6. Determine an author's point of view or purpose in a text in which the rhetoric is particularly effective, analyzing how style and content contribute to the power, persuasiveness, or beauty of the text.

CCSS Writing Standards, grades 11–12
2. **Write informative/explanatory texts**, including career development documents (e.g., simple business letters and job applications), to examine a topic and convey ideas, concepts, and information through the selection, organization, and analysis of relevant content.
    a. **Introduce a topic** or thesis statement; clearly, **previewing what is to follow; organize ideas, concepts, and information into broader categories; include formatting (e.g., headings), graphics (e.g., charts, tables), and multimedia when useful to aiding comprehension**.
    b. Develop the topic with relevant, well-chosen facts, definitions, concrete details, quotations, or other information and examples.
    c. Use appropriate and varied transitions to create cohesion and clarify the relationships among ideas and concepts.
    d. **Use precise language** and domain-specific vocabulary to inform about or explain the topic.
    e. Establish and maintain a formal style.
    f. Provide a concluding statement or section that follows from and supports the information or explanation presented.
4. **Produce clear and coherent writing in which the development, organization, and style are appropriate to task, purpose, and audience**.
5. Develop and strengthen writing as needed by planning, revising, editing, rewriting, or trying a new approach, focusing on addressing what is most significant for a specific purpose and audience.

CCSS Language Standards, grades 11–12
2. Demonstrate command of the conventions of standard English capitalization, punctuation, and spelling when writing.
    a. Observe hyphenation conventions.
    b. Spell correctly.
3. Apply knowledge of language to understand how language functions in different contexts, to **make effective choices for meaning or style**, and to comprehend more fully when reading or listening.
    a. Vary syntax for effect, consulting references (e.g., Tufte's Artful Sentences) for guidance as needed; apply an understanding of syntax to the study of complex texts when reading.

English Language Development Standards

Grades 11-12 (Bridging)

PART 1: Interacting in Meaningful Ways

2: Interacting via written English: Collaborate with peers to engage in a variety of extended written exchanges and complex grade-appropriate writing projects, using technology as appropriate.

4: Adapting language choices: Adjust language choices according to the task (e.g., group presentation of research project), context (e.g., classroom, community), purpose (e.g., to persuade, to provide arguments or counter-arguments), and audience (e.g., peers, teachers, college recruiter).

6. Reading/viewing closely
a) Explain ideas, phenomena, processes, and relationships within and across texts (e.g., compare/contrast, cause/effect, themes, evidence-based argument) based on close reading of a variety of grade-level texts, presented in various print and multimedia formats, using a variety of detailed sentences and a range of general academic and domain-specific words.

7. Evaluating language choices: Explain how successfully writers and speakers structure texts and use language (e.g., specific word or phrasing choices) to persuade the reader (e.g., by providing well-worded evidence to support claims or connecting points in an argument in specific ways) or create other specific effects, with light support.

8. Analyzing language choices: Explain how a writer's or speaker's choice of a variety of different types of phrasing or words (e.g., hyperbole, varying connotations, the cumulative impact of word choices) produces nuances and different effects on the audience.

10. Writing a) Write longer and more detailed literary and informational texts (e.g., an argument about free speech) collaboratively (e.g., with peers) and independently using appropriate text organization and register.

PART 2. Learning About How English Works

1. Understanding text structure: Apply analysis of the organizational structures of different text types (e.g., how arguments are organized by establishing clear relationships among claims, counterclaims, reasons, and evidence) to comprehending texts and to writing clear and cohesive arguments, informative/explanatory texts and narratives.

2. Understanding cohesion:
a) Apply knowledge of a variety of language resources for referring to make texts more cohesive (e.g., using nominalization, paraphrasing, or summaries to reference or recap an idea or explanation provided earlier) to comprehending grade-level texts and to writing clear and cohesive grade-level texts for specific purposes and audiences.

3. Using verbs and verb phrases: Use a variety of verbs in different tenses (e.g., past, present, future), aspects (e.g., simple, progressive, perfect), and mood (e.g., subjunctive) appropriate for the text type and discipline to create a variety of texts that describe concrete and abstract ideas, explain procedures and sequences, summarize texts and ideas, and present and critique points of view.

Lesson Objectives

Students will:
- evaluate the usefulness of anonymous, online reviews, such as Yelp
- study the genre of travel writing
- compare and contrast the styles of several travel writing authors
- evaluate the effectiveness of several travel writing articles
- compose their own travel writing articles using tools specific to the genre to entice their readers to visit/experience their location, event, or business:
  - vivid, descriptive language & active verbs
  - tone/word choice appropriate to purpose & audience
  - unifying theme or motif
  - practical information
  - structure that supports purpose
- learn how to use Microsoft Publisher to design pages with text and graphics.

Session One: Understanding the Genre of and Critiquing Online Reviews

1. **Justification: Anecdote about power of writing in the "real world"**
   - I begin by telling students about the time I wrote a persuasive letter to my university, asking for permission to use and alter a school symbol for a t-shirt design. I thought my request might be denied, but I was pleasantly surprised when the school representative told me that she didn't know if it was a good idea, but that I had written about it so convincingly that she was going to grant me permission anyway. I had put a lot of thought into the letter and had received the result I wanted. Wow, writing can make people do things!

2. **Non-professional reviews: Can we trust them? Are they useful?**
   - Next, I ask students if they use yelp.com or sites like it. We have a discussion about the pros and cons of these types of sites. Then, I show them reviews of local places (preferably negative reviews of places they love) and ask them if the reviews are fair. As you can expect, they get very hot and bothered that people from far away would critique their beloved hangouts.

   - I pass out photocopies of several reviews of different places (so everyone will be familiar with at least one business) and ask them to choose one and respond, making sure to consider the following:

     1. Do you agree with the author's viewpoint? Why or why not? Give examples.
     2. Based on the review, what do you know about the author?
     3. Assuming you had never been to this place, would you visit after reading this review? Why or why not?
     4. Is this review helpful? Why or why not?

   - When everyone is finished, I hold a discussion (think-pair-share, groups, whole-class, etc.) about the students' observations, especially with regard to neutrality and trustworthiness. Did the author seem to be an expert? Should we trust yelp.com?

   - The majority of my students felt that the reviews were inaccurate, or, in some cases, they had some good points, but it didn't give the whole picture. For example, in one review, the author rants about bad coffee in a café. Students pointed out that it was late in the day so the coffee probably wasn't fresh, and this particular café's focus was on more than just coffee—it is also a restaurant that features rotating art shows and has live music every night. Thus, if

people want the best coffee in town, they might be better off going somewhere else, but on the other hand, if they want an inexpensive, friendly place to eat with the family and enjoy music, this is still a great choice.

- The danger, obviously, is that if people read reviews like this, they may choose not to patronize a business based on questionable information—but does this actually happen?

3. Non-professional reviews: Do they impact businesses?
- Before passing out these articles, I poll the students (orally, written, etc.) on this question: Do you think online reviews actually make a difference in dollars generated or lost for businesses?

- I then hand out the articles "Harvard Study Finds Positive Yelp Reviews Boost Business" from the *Harvard Magazine* and "Is Yelp Fair to Businesses?" from PC World Business Center. Students read the articles (scaffold as needed) and answer the questions below.

"Harvard Study Finds Positive Yelp Reviews Boost Business" from the *Harvard Magazine*
http://harvardmagazine.com/2011/10/hbs-study-finds-positive-yelp-reviews-lead-to-increased-business
"Is Yelp Fair to Businesses?" from PC World Business Center
http://www.pcworld.com/businesscenter/article/243918/is_yelp_fair_to_businesses.html

1. How does Yelp negatively impact businesses?
2. How does it have a positive impact?
3. Given that it is not a perfect system, do you think the company should be allowed to operate as it has been, or does it need to be regulated (and, if so, how)? Draw on examples from the articles AND your own life (if applicable) to support your opinion.

Note about assigning reading: I find that students are much more able to find what I want them to find if I tell them what to look for. There is certainly a fine line between aiding and enabling, but overall, I get much better results if I give specific instructions and model what I want them to do, even at the upper grades. Doing this also circumvents the problem of slackers who say, "I only wrote half a sentence because I didn't understand the directions and now I don't remember what the reading was about." In this case, I would have students fold a piece of binder paper in half both ways, so that they had four boxes. Then they would write questions 1 & 2 on the top and along one side they would write "examples from the articles" and "examples from my life." As the students read the articles, they would make notes (own words, of course) in the top row and when they're done with the articles they would make notes in the bottom row. This would serve as a graphic organizer, of sorts, that could help them get started on their longer, written responses. A similar strategy could be done with two colors of highlighters or by circling and underlining if you want to skip the note-taking step.

	Negative Impact of Yelp	Positive Impact of Yelp
Examples from the article		
Examples from my life		

The assignment above could be done in class or for homework, but after it's completed, wrap up this section by bringing students back to the idea that the written word can have an impact on

what people do (and where they spend their money). It's important for authors to write with integrity and consideration of possible consequences; knowledge of the subject matters. Clearly, it's also important for readers/customers to watch out for author bias and ulterior motives.

Session Two: Understanding the Characteristics of the Travel Writing Genre

1. **Read professional example #1: Personal reviews vs. professional writing**
   - Before passing out these articles, I poll the students (orally, written, etc.) on this question: Do you think online reviews actually make a difference in dollars generated or lost for businesses?

   - By now, students should be familiar with the online, personal review, but may not have had much experience with longer travel pieces. It's important to look at both so that students won't write rants and think they're creating travel writing. Work in this genre is certainly not expected to have the same level of objectivity as journalism (much of it is persuasive), but the level of professionalism is obviously much higher than that of Yelp reviews, and for good reason.

   - Ahead of time, I prepare enough copies of the two prompts below for half the class to get prompt A and half prompt B. Be careful: this works better if the students don't know they're getting different questions.

     Prompt A:

     Read the article and highlight any sections where the author seems to be trying to make the topic seem attractive to the reader (you). For example, the author could talk about a fun activity or a beautiful view. When done, write 5–6 sentences about whether or not you would want to visit this place and explain.

     Prompt B:

     Read the article and highlight any sections where the author gives you practical information about the topic, for example distances between places or admission prices. When done, write 5–6 sentences about whether or not you would want to visit this place and explain.

   - I then introduce the topic of the article and tell students that they will be comparing and contrasting the travel writing genre with the personal, online reviews. I then hand out copies of an article that exemplifies good travel writing (see my take on this at the end of this section or develop your own criteria) and has a good mix of persuasion (prompt A) and information (prompt B). I use the article "Weird and Wonderful in Humboldt" for several reasons:

     - It contains both elements—persuasion and information.
     - It is about an event that is far enough away that most of my students haven't been, but close enough so that they could go someday, which makes them more excited to read about it.
     - It's short enough for everyone to finish in 10–15 minutes.
     - I have a picture of the event and can give it a personal introduction. (This is not strictly necessary, but I find that being able to speak with excitement about a topic helps garner the interest of my students, so consider searching for an article about a place you've been and would recommend.)
     - After everyone has the article, a pencil/pen/highlighter, and a piece of paper, I hand out the prompts in a way that allows for A-B pairs later and ask the students not to talk; just read and write quietly. If this is done in-class, the early finishers can move on to the next step: thinking about/making notes about the similarities and differences they observed.
     - Once everyone is finished, I ask A-B pairs to share their observations with each other (If you have EL or verbally reluctant students, now is a good time for sentence frames). Students

will probably be surprised that their feelings were influenced by what they were asked to do. Aha! People reading the same thing can have different reactions, based on which words/phrases they focus on! Words have an effect. Moving on.

- Now I bring the discussion back to the first Yelp reviews. Pairs discuss/make notes about the similarities and differences between the two genres. I take notes on chart paper in a Venn diagram (See appendix). Ultimately, the chart may look something like the one I've included, but after reading just one travel writing article, they don't usually notice everything, so we keep adding to it as we read more articles.
- As we do this, I try to facilitate rather than lead, but help as you see fit. When the students run out of ideas, I try to summarize what we learned, framed around the question—Which one is better and in what situations?

My thoughts on the travel writing genre:
To some extent, good travel writing is good writing, but here are the main characteristics I've noticed:
- The language is sensory-rich and highly descriptive.
- There is always a theme or motif that unites the piece.
- Articles are (usually) written in the first person.
- Most pieces negotiate the space between information and persuasion, and often use narration to do it.
- There are (at least) three sub-genres:
  o Some (certainly the commercial ones) try to convince readers to visit a place or do something.
  o Some assume that the reader is already going somewhere and primarily want to educate her/him so that she/he can make good choices after arriving.
  o Some focus on sharing a specific experience so that someone far away can feel like she/he was there, even if she/he never intends to go. These (usually) emphasize "otherness," which leads to a personal observation/revelation.
- The tone and word choice are dictated by purpose (see above) and audience (young, old, rich, poor, rushed, leisurely, etc.).
- The structure often follows a chronological narrative, but if covering a lot of information (or trying to be quirky), it can be organized by topic, location/activity, or something else.
- To the extent possible, articles try to remain timeless—they will still be relevant many years after being written.

2. Example #2 - narrative
- For homework, I give students an example with a stronger narrative emphasis and one that does not try to explicitly sell a place—I use "In the Ladies' Compartment" and ask them to read it and answer these questions:

1. What was your first reaction after reading the piece?
2. Did the piece make you want to visit India? Why or why not?
3. Were the author's ideas about traveling in India confirmed or contradicted by her latest train ride? Explain.
4. What did the author want you to do or believe after reading it?
5. Was there any practical information about traveling in the piece? If so, what?
6. Find two places in the text where a description grabbed you. Write down the quotes and explain what you liked.

Session Three: Reading Critically to Understand Word Choice and Applying Knowledge of Travel Writing Genre

1. **Read professional example #3: Notice the word choice**
   - I begin by asking students to share a few of their responses to last night's assignment with a partner. We discuss their ideas briefly as a group, noticing any similarities and differences between the two travel articles.

   - This leads into a discussion of the travel-writing genre itself. I tell students that travel writing is about trying to impart the flavor of a location, activity, culture, etc. Even more than in literature, authors try to create images and sensations in their readers' minds—this type of writing isn't (always) driven by plot, but by place and experience. We read two contrasting articles next, one that makes everything sound lovely and one that makes everything sound pretty miserable, but worth it in the end, if you're that kind of person.

   - I start with the happy one: "Mendocino, Calif.: Whale Time!" It's about a nearby town, which surprises them. They know tourists come here, but they don't know we're "famous" and in print.

   - The first time is solo—students read the text, again looking for persuasion and information, and then write a short response:

   - *Before reading, choose two colors of pens/highlighters/pencils, one for practical information and one for persuasive words/phrases. As you read, mark those places. When finished, write a half- page response to the article, considering these questions: What is your reaction to this article? Would you want to hang out with the author and do what she did? Why or why not? Explain.*

   - The second time is together—we read it as a whole class, stopping to look in particular at verbs and descriptions. I keep asking them what the author is trying to say and why she didn't just say that instead—in other words, word choice matters. We look at the blend of historical information, practical information (where to walk, eat, shop, & play), and sheer enthusiasm. I like this article because it does not rely on flowery descriptions, although there is some of that. More importantly, it has great verbs. I challenge students to find the verb "to be" and it only appears nine times, three of which are in a quote and are used for repetition. We circle the verbs we like and write synonyms where necessary. We look at helpful adjectives but also notice where none were used.   Students start to see that something as banal as window-shopping can sound interesting when described the right way.

   - I've found that if I ask students to describe something really well and in detail, I get bogged down in a lot of boring "It is/has + adjective" sentences. I know exactly what one object/place looks like, but I have no sense of why this is significant or how it's connected to the main idea. Some students get excited at the opportunity to write about something concrete for a change and go overboard on writing descriptions that showcases their elite knowledge of obscure adjectives, but this is not really what we mean when we talk about imagery and sensory details. For that reason, we really look at the verbs.

   - When we're finished, I ask students to go answer this question: *Whom was the author talking to?* We discuss this until we narrow it down to a) adults (lots of drinking and spending money); b) probably single adults (no mention of kid activities); and c) probably people who enjoy nature (lots of walking, whale watching, kayaking, etc.). I then challenge the students to go back to the text and do this:

     1. *Find two places in the text where you think the author successfully "spoke" to the target audience. Circle these parts of the text and label them #1 and #2.*

2. *Find one place in the text where you think the author failed to interest the target audience.*
   Circle this part and label it #3.
3. *For each part of the text you chose, justify your decision: What words are most/least*
   effective and why? What activities/places would this audience most/least like and why?

Note: This is typically turned in at the end of class, so that I can read their responses and see if they are getting the idea. At the start of the next class, I can use their ideas as a jumping off point.

2. **Students try a mini-version. For homework, they are to try active description:**
   Directions:
   ▪ Find a spot you like to sit—a park bench, the beach, a room, etc. This can be done anywhere, but it may help to be in a place where things are happening and people are moving. Get comfortable with writing instruments (pen/paper, fingers/cell phone, anything as long as you can bring a hard copy to class) and begin to describe what you see around you. Don't worry about making a coherent story—just give the reader a picture of what you are experiencing. As you write, consider what you observed in the articles so far—what made the language fun to read? When possible, let the verbs do the work. Write for 20 minutes and fill up at least a page (300 words +). Bring this with you to class; you will be sharing it with a partner.

Note: I've also seen this kind of activity done at school—students get prior approval from other teachers to observe their classrooms for twenty minutes, during your normal class period. There are benefits to this—you know everyone will come back with something, and there's a thrill to getting out of class that can be motivating. I like the solitude of observation and the challenge of describing something that their classmates are not necessarily familiar with, so I don't use school as the topic for this assignment.

Session Four: Revising for Word Choice and Understanding Tone

1. **Revise for active description**
   I begin the next class by talking about the students' observations about the Mendocino article and bring the discussion around to language. Students then take out their observations and pair up to share and revise.

   1. *Read your piece aloud to your partner.*

   2. *Partners, listen for places that grab you—is it funny? Beautiful? Disgusting? Sad? What images do you see in your head? Share your reactions with your partner after she/he finishes reading.*

   3. *After both of you share, pick a sentence from your piece that you like or think has potential. Work with your partner to revise it until you are proud of it and think it's worthy of publishing in a magazine. Use resources if you need them—a partner, a thesaurus, a teacher.*

   4. *Choose a colored marker and write the sentence on one of the strips of paper at the front of the room for "publishing" on our wall. (Write in big letters, so we can read it!) Turn in your twenty-minute observation piece to the box.*

2. **Read professional example #4: notice the tone-audience connection**
   After the first two articles, many students think that travel writing is all about making a place sound fantastic, so I like to give them an article that does the opposite, yet still makes the reader wish she/he were there. I use the article "A Walk in the Park" and introduce the topic briefly. (The amount of background knowledge that students need to understand this article depends on the class—some just need to know that it's about a wildlife park in Africa, while others need more support. If there were a lot of English learners in the mix, I might show a few images (thank you, Google) and/or have a version of the article for them with simple definitions for key words. I then ask students to do alone what we did as a group during the previous classes.
   1. *Before reading, choose two colors of pens/highlighters/pencils, one for practical information and one for persuasive words & phrases. As you read, mark those places.*

2. *As you read, underline at least 5 strong verbs. Write simple synonyms next to each verb.*
3. *As you read, circle at least 5 effective adjectives.*
4. *After you read, decide what audience the author is writing for. Describe the group in 2–3 sentences and explain your reasoning.*
5. *Once you determine the audience, go back and find two places in the text where you think the author successfully "spoke" to the target audience. Circle these parts of the text and label them #1 and #2.*
6. *Find one place in the text where you think the author failed to interest the target audience. Circle this part and label it #3.*
7. *For each part of the text you chose, justify your decision: What words are most/least effective and why? What activities/places would this audience most/least like and why?*

Students usually start this activity in class and finish it for homework.

I begin the next class by asking students to share what they noticed. Most will point out that this trip doesn't sound like much fun—dirty, hard, dangerous, gross. However, some will point out the humor in the article and the fact that it was all worth it since the author got to "see an elephant dancing in the rain." The point is, the author didn't lie and try to make the trip sound easy. His target audience wants adventures, so that's what he emphasized—along with the rewards of putting up with all the hardship.

(Optional activity: In class, give out a generic, bland paragraph about a location (or show a short video clip) and have students/pairs/groups tweak the description for different audiences. See how outrageous they can be. Remind them that professional texts don't lie, per se, but they editorialize to emphasize certain aspects over others. After reading the Mendocino article, my students told me that the author didn't mention all the homeless people or talk about how over-priced everything is.)

Session Five: Understanding Writers' Use of Theme/Motif

1. **Professional example #5: Notice the theme/motif**
   After three articles, students get the basic ideas, so it's time for the icing on the cake. Professional travel writers don't just give information in a fun way that makes the reader want to be with them; they also use a theme or motif to hold it all together and make the reader go "Ahh."

   The next article I give them for close reading is the one titled "Speed-Dating Rome." (It's written by the same person who wrote "A Walk in the Park," which is nice because it really shows that the author changes his tone to fit the location and audience. However, that's not the focus here.) This time, the task is inquiry based (make sure everyone knows the terms *theme* and *motif* ahead of time):

   Read the article and look for a common theme or motif. Underline any words or phrases that reference or play with that theme/motif. When finished, write two paragraphs:

   ▪ One about your personal reaction to the piece. Did you like it? Do you want to go?
   ▪ One about your professional reaction. What can you say about the quality of this article? Include analysis and/or critique based on the elements of travel writing we've talked about so far: information vs. persuasion, word choice, tone-audience connection, etc.

   What the students will quickly find is that the whole thing revolves around the theme of romance, from the title ("speed-dating"), to the subtitle ("passions high….get intimate"), to later paragraphs ("This is the birthplace of the toga party. Think Animal House with lots of sex scenes." "But today is about getting a taste." "After a couple of hours I realize that in speed dating, when all goes well, you end up wanting more…") to the end ("And if you get lucky—as I did in Rome—it can be love at first sight."). Some students also point out the other common theme: speed. The author

organizes the article into short periods of time, wears running shoes, and writes in compact sentences that blaze through historically significant people and places in very few words.

After this discussion, I ask them to look back at the other three articles and find their themes/motifs. (Hint, it's usually in the title.) Article #1 about the sculpture race: silliness lets adults act like kids. Article #2 about a train ride in India: women helping women (and, if you want to go there, the contrast of women supposedly needing help with women who help/defend/boss around/etc.). Article #3 about Mendocino: drunk…on beauty. Article #4 about the jungle: big adversity leads to big rewards. This part is kind of like a treasure hunt and the students like finding clues.

2. **Pre-writing: Choose a topic**
   Note: I make everyone write about different topics because they are going in a book later—if people are really going to use the book, it would be redundant to include more than one article about a place/business.

   We brainstorm a list of ideas as a class first, and the popular ones quickly become apparent. I tell the students to pick their top five and give me their best justification for why they should be allowed to write about them, in two-three sentences. Later, I sort through the pages and do the best I can to accommodate people. It helps if you tell students to think of obscure places that can't be found in the normal tourist guides and places that they are uniquely qualified to write about. The more connection a student has to the place/event/business, the better the writing will be, and the more choices there are, the better the odds are that students will get one of their top picks and thus be excited to write about it.

Session Six: Understanding Role of Structure in Text

Pre-writing: how to choose a structure — Example #6 (and maybe #7 & #8)
The next day I pass out topics and tell them I have one last piece of advice before they start writing. All the articles so far were first person narratives, but this is not a requirement. I end the professional example section by (briefly) discussing the other models. The article "Haleakala" focuses more on giving information and less on persuading people with enticing descriptions. The format and structure emphasize this: unlike the others, there are section headings, it's organized by location, and names of attractions/amenities are bolded for quick reference. The result is a drier piece that has really practical information for those readers who hope to visit soon. Again, the audience and purpose drive everything.

Note: Because topic choice is somewhat limited in our small town, some students chose businesses. This kind of writing is more like a review, so I also briefly show the article "Old-time Cars," which follows a Q&A format that lets the proprietor do the persuading, and "Who Says the Grill Is Gone?" which is a review, but an entertaining one. I know that this could muddy the water a bit in terms of a genre study, so do as you see fit.

1. **First thoughts**
   Homework that night is to get some preliminary ideas down on paper. I tell them to just start writing and see where it takes them. I give them the writing prompt and an optional pre-writing handout. I tell them that they need to fill up at least a page. I let them know that I will check in with them the following day if they get stuck or have questions, and for now not to worry too much about the theme/motif. Purpose and audience first, content next, tone and word choice will follow, and the icing comes last.

Note: Unless the place is REALLY familiar to them, writing about it will be easier if they visit it. This doesn't necessarily have to be done before they write anything, but it should be done, if possible, before they write the final draft. If you want to make a class book, this is also a necessary step so that students can take pictures.

Session Seven: Drafting

Draft 1

- The next class period is dedicated to writing.
- As students work, I move around the room problem-solving, encouraging, etc.
- By now, the students have a collection of mentor texts to reference and there are pieces of the project on the walls—descriptive sentences, a Venn diagram about the genre. Add whatever else you think would be helpful.
- Students are encouraged to use reference materials, as long as it doesn't distract the group.
- Complete, first drafts are due the following day.

Session Eight: Revising

Revise

Students bring their pieces to class. In pairs, they read their work aloud (so important!) and fill out peer editing sheets. The rest of the period is for revision/addition.

Session 8: Peer Editing Handout

Editor's name: _____   Author's name: _____

Peer-Editing for Travel Writing

Word count: _____ *(If no number, count the first three lines, get average, and multiply by number of lines.)*

NOTE: *Mark any copyedit errors you see! (punctuation, run-ons, spelling, quotation punctuation, apostrophes, Deadly Sins, etc.) Also, if you find 2nd person use (you, your, you're), circle it and write "1st or 3rd?" Usually 2nd person is not acceptable, but in this genre it may be used sparingly, for effect. If you see excessive use, point it out!)*

Purpose & Audience:
1. What group of people was this author writing for? Describe them in as much detail as possible. (young, rich, active, married, etc.)

2. Give three quotes that show how you know this. *(For example, if the audience is retired, rich people, evidence for audience awareness could be when an author talks about shopping in art galleries and eating at expensive restaurants or uses words like 'opulent,' 'decadent,' or 'refined.')*

3. What is the author's purpose? Circle one:
     A) giving information for people who will soon be traveling to a particular place
     B) convincing someone that he/she should travel to a place
     C) recreating the author's experience of a place for readers who may never visit it

Tone, Word Choice, & Content:
5. Describe the author's tone (how the author feels about the topic—excited, admiring, scared, bored, etc.). Give one quote as an example of what you mean and explain whether or not the tone is appropriate to the purpose and audience.

6. Where does the author's word choice (vocabulary, description, sensory details, figurative language, etc.) connect to the audience and purpose? Give two quotes.

7. What content (practical information such as locations, hours, directions, admission prices, etc.) does the author include? Underline this on the printout of the article. Is it enough? Is it appropriate for the identified audience?

Theme & Motif:
8. Does the article include a theme or motif? If so, what is it?

9. Where does it appear in the text? Circle any words or phrases that relate to it on the printout of the article.

Structure:
10. What is the dominant text type? Circle one: narrative, expository, or persuasive.

11. Does this type of text help the author accomplish his/her purpose? Would a different one be better?

12. Are there any places where you felt confused by the organization or order? Put an asterisk next to them on the printout and write a question to the author that will help them understand what is confusing.

Language:
13. Did the author use a variety of sentences and punctuation marks to keep the writing lively and interesting? Circle one: YES or NO
Put a wavy line under your favorite sentence.

14. Look for any instances of passive voice and highlight them. If you have suggestions for rewording, please give them—no guarantees that the author will take your advice, but sometime fresh eyes can help!

Overall Reaction:

What did you think or feel after reading this piece? Would you want to visit this place? Why or why not?

_____

_____

_____

What did the author do well?

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

What advice or constructive criticism can you give the author?

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

Session Nine: Drafting
Draft 2

Computer lab—students type their drafts in MLA format (for now).

Note: I love Google Docs for several reasons: it saves work as I type (which eliminates the fear of computer crashes) and files can be shared, which means I can write comments on student papers online, rather than wasting paper. I do copy-editing on a paper draft, but until it's at that stage, I find online comments work just fine.

Session Ten: Designing Layouts to Make Writing Public
1. **Teacher comments & article design**
    - As soon as possible, I read the drafts for content and target skills (audience awareness, appropriate tone/word choice, active description, use of theme/motif, appropriate structure) and write comments to students (although some programs now record audio, which I'm curious to try—some students seem oblivious to written comments, so perhaps this would improve communication in those cases). As I go, I pull out examples of the target skills—both emerging and accomplished.

    - While I'm doing this, students are designing their article pages using Microsoft Publisher—they need time to upload pictures, choose colors/graphics, and play with placement and fonts. They will import the final draft of the text later, but they can play around with columns using their rough draft. (Again, this step is optional.)

Session Eleven: Revising With Focus

HOW to revise

When I'm done writing comments and collecting examples—but before I ask students to revise using my comments—we look at student work together. I explain where each example would be on the rubric (see appendix), in which category and why. Then we work together to improve them (Note: I am lucky enough to have a document camera, which makes this process much easier).

These are mini lessons to connect the analysis we did with professional models to the students' work, and they need not take long. They are invaluable though because students need to see how to bridge the gap between their own writing and those professional, mentor texts. It's usually not enough to show them where to go—we have to show them how to get there too.

Then we go back to the computer lab to revise a second time. When students complete this task, I ask for a printed hard copy, on which I note editing errors—spelling, grammar, and the like. I also give it a preliminary score using the rubric, so students know where they stand.

After that, they're on their own for revising—I give them a few days before the FINAL copy is due. Some students want one-on-one time, and it could take a few days for us to have free time in common, due to after-school meetings, sports practices, and other commitments.

Session Twelve: Making Writing Public

Publish

There are already ideas out there about how to publish student work, so I don't want to take too much time discussing it here. You probably already have ideas or know people at your school who can help you make it work. I used an online website that usually makes photobooks, but will print anything as long as its from a PDF version. Check around for deals and specifications if you want to take the project this far.

What worked in the project was the relevance (Yelp, articles about local places, end product was professional and could be used by visitors), student choice of familiar topics, and using mentor texts to show students how professional authors use language to create different effects on readers. I did see students try to experiment with language, and I really felt that this was possible primarily because the topic of the project was familiar, concrete, and (somewhat) inspiring.

When teaching more analytical writing, I spend the bulk of class time discussing and modeling how to delve into texts and use them to craft arguments. We rarely have time to talk about doing so in an artful way because the texts themselves are challenging and need more time to be understood. We also have to keep looking at editing essentials like punctuating quotations and citing sources. Of course the elements of voice and style are still usually on a rubric, so I refer to them and talk to students about them during peer editing sessions. But I don't often have the time to show examples. In this project I have both, and as students experiment and find success, I get the chance to praise their writing skills, not just their thinking skills. For many students, writing is merely a tool, not an art. This is fine, but I hope that through this project students begin to see that being a skilled writer gives them the power to mold and shape people around them. This project gives students a jaunt into a genre with real-world applications and implications.

As with most classrooms in California, my students bring a wide variety of skills and come from vastly different backgrounds. To the extent possible, I've tried to suggest where I would modify the lesson for different groups as I went along, but here are my thoughts about working with English learners, in a general sense (I work primarily with Spanish speakers). English learners need more background information (visuals are great) and help with vocabulary when reading; the mentor texts are good examples for writing, but these students may need further scaffolding (Cloze paragraphs, for example) or one-on-one editing work. It would also be very important to check for comprehension of an article before zipping into style. Asking students to write down their ideas and share them with a partner first always helps EL students who would like to be more vocal in the classroom, but feel intimidated (sentence frames are also incredibly helpful with this). I would use the same rubric I use with everyone to give the student feedback and show her/him where she/he is in relation to the class expectations.

Another thing that many teachers seem to forget is that new language learners can often do one of the following activities at a time, but they cannot do them simultaneously: listening, reading, writing, or speaking. In other words, if you are giving directions and writing notes that students are supposed to be copying, they may only be getting half of the information. I am a huge fan of marking up text, because it allows the students to hear and see what I'm talking about—and it slows down the pace long enough for students to take it all in. Above all, check for understanding because this group is often quiet, obedient, and asks few questions, so teachers think they are getting everything just fine. In my experience this is not always the case, and it's better to know sooner than later.

As I reflect back on this project, I see that it could be modified or extended in several directions. The use of Yelp and social media is relevant with teens, and there is currently a lot of controversy about the ethics of sites like these—see the instructional resources section for links to a few articles. It would be easy to go from this "light" genre to a more demanding research paper or persuasive essay about the pros and cons of online reviews. There are also some outstanding travel pieces by well-known authors of literature who respond clearly (and sometimes controversially) to issues of their time in journals and writing collections. It would be easy to create assignments that required historical analysis and criticism, and reading short pieces like this could lead into a richer

understanding of an author before the class reads a novel by the same writer. Finally, if a connection to career readiness is important, students could research the job of a travel writer or magazine writer and work on mock resumes or cover letters.

Ultimately, two of the most important things I can do as a writing teacher are to show that writing is an essential tool for success in the world and provide opportunities for students to embrace it. I hope that this project does a little bit of both.

Instructional Resources

Mentor Texts:

(#1) "Weird and Wonderful in Humboldt" from *Sunset* magazine
- Topic: the annual kinetic sculpture race in Arcata, CA
- Tone/word choice: zany, informal, sensory
- Structure: chronological narrative of the three-day competition, as a participant
- Audience: not your average traveler/do-it-yourselfers
- Theme/motif: adults feeling young again

Sunset. 2006. "Weird and Wonderful in Humboldt."
http://www.sunset.com/travel/california/weird-and-wonderful-in-humboldt-00400000015478/
(accessed July 3, 2012).

(#2) "In the Ladies' Compartment" from the book, *A Woman Alone: Travel Tales from around the Globe*
- Topic: riding trains in India, sitting in the ladies' compartment as a foreigner
- Tone/word choice: highly descriptive; varied sentences; sensory details; humorous
- Structure: chronological narrative
- Audience: armchair travelers (Unlike the others, it's not about a place: you feel like you're in this experience with the author.)
- Theme/motif: women helping women

Google Books. 2001. A Woman Alone.
http://books.google.com/books?id=EbhrWkhips4C&pg=PR3&dq=%22in+the+ladies'+compart
ment%22+thalia+zepatos&hl=en&sa=X&ei=dF7MT5D1DKTg2QWurbHZCw&ved=0CEEQ6AEwAg
#v=onepage&q&f=false (accessed July 3, 2012).

(#3) "Mendocino, Calif.: Whale Time!" from Via magazine
- Topic: visiting the town of Mendocino
- Tone/word choice: gushing, enthusiastic, informative
- Structure: snapshot of destinations in and around town
- Audience: people planning to visit soon
- Theme/motif: intoxicating beauty

VIA. 2009. "Mendocino, Calif.: Whale Time."
http://www.viamagazine.com/destinations/mendocino-calif-whale-time (accessed July 3,
2012).

(#4) "A Walk in the Park" from *National Geographic Traveler*
- Topic: hiking through the Gabonese jungle to see gorillas
- Tone/word choice: scientific, in-over-my-head, admiring-of-ultra-guide
- Structure: chronological narrative of the trip
- Audience: those who really want to be hard-core and celebrate nature
- Theme/motif: tough but worth it

National Geographic Traveler. 2009. "A Walk in the Park."
http://travel.nationalgeographic.com/travel/traveler-magazine/unbound/a-walk-in-the-park/
(accessed July 3, 2012).

(#5) "Speed-Dating Rome" from *National Geographic Traveler*
- Topic: seeing Rome in a day
- Tone/word choice: humorous & friendly
- Structure: organized by time of day

- Audience: readers, not travelers (Who would PLAN to do this?)
- Theme/motif: love/dating voice

National Geographic Traveler. 2009. "Speed-Dating Rome." http://travel.nationalgeographic.com/travel/traveler-magazine/unbound/speed-dating-rome/ (accessed July 3, 2012).

(#6) "Haleakala: Hawaii's House of the Sun" from *National Geographic Traveler*
- Topic: hiking the volcano
- Tone/word choice: educational
- Structure: bolded sections with information about logistics and nearby options
- Audience: people who will visit soon and need/want to plan
- Theme/motif: sun

National Geographic Traveler. 2009. "Haleakala: Hawaii's House of the Sun." http://nationalgeographic.pny.com/images/travelers/HawaiisHouseoftheSun.pdf (accessed July 3, 2012).

(#7) "Old-time cars on Mr. Toad's San Francisco Tours" from the *San Francisco Chronicle*
- Topic: a tour of San Francisco given in antique cars
- Tone/word choice: playful
- Structure: written in a kind of Q&A format, but cuter
- Audience: quirky tourists who want something different
- Theme/motif: nostalgic, unique, Mr. Toad

http://prewcm.sfgate.com/cgi-bin/article.cgi?f=/c/a/2009/03/01/CME615D4NM.DTL (accessed July 17, 2012)

(#8) "Who says the grill is gone? Juban Sizzles" from *San Francisco Chronicle*
- Topic: a review of a Japanese BBQ restaurant
- Tone/word choice: direct, informative, fairly objective; uses foody vocabulary
- Structure: each paragraph covers a different type of food/aspect of the restaurant
- Audience: people who live nearby and are considering eating at this restaurant
- Theme/motif: BBQ/grill

SFGate. 2003. "Who Says the Grill is Gone? Juban Sizzles." http://www.sfgate.com/restaurants/article/Who-says-the-grill-is-gone-Juban-sizzles-2301453.php (accessed July 3, 2012).

Analytical Texts:

"Harvard Study Finds Positive Yelp Reviews Boost Business" *from the Harvard Magazine http://harvardmagazine.com/2011/10/hbs-study-finds-positive-yelp-reviews-lead-to-increased-business*

"Is Yelp Fair to Businesses?" *from PC World Business Center http://www.pcworld.com/businesscenter/article/243918/is_yelp_fair_to_businesses.html*

Extension Possibilities regarding ethics of Yelp:

Chicago Tribune. 2009. "Chicago Proprietors Add to Yelp Allegations." http://articles.chicagotribune.com/2009-03-09/entertainment/0903080140_1_unique-visitors-reviews-salespeople (accessed July 3, 2012).

The New York Times. 2011. "In a Race to Out-Rave, 5-Star Web Reviews Go for $5." http://www.nytimes.com/2011/08/20/technology/finding-fake-reviews-online.html?_r=2 (accessed July 3, 2012).

Bloomberg Businessweek. 2011. "A Lie Detector Test for Online Reviewers." http://www.businessweek.com/magazine/a-lie-detector-test-for-online-reviewers-09292011.html (accessed July 3, 2012).

Professional Resources

Fox, Tom. "Linking Genre to Standards and Equity" *The Quarterly of the National Writing Project* 26.4, 2004. http://www.nwp.org/cs/public/print/resource/2140 (accessed July 5, 2012).

Digital Resources

Digital Texts and Digital Publication are integral to this lesson.

Scoring Rubric - Travel Writing Rubric

	I've already booked a flight and I can't wait to go!	I'd really love to go as soon as I get the chance.	I'd go if I had the time and money—and if I didn't have any other plans.	Thanks, but I'm comfortable right here on the sofa.
Purpose & Audience *To what extent did you identify a purpose and a specific audience?*	Article shows **clear knowledge of what the reader will/should do** after reading this article (visit ASAP, consider visiting, or just share the experience); **clearly written** for a specific audience.	Article **attempts to convince the reader to visit** by explaining how fun/cool/beautiful/etc. a place is (purpose is showing **general enthusiasm**); **written** for a specific audience.	Article **has a purpose, but it does not relate to the prompt**; shows **awareness of an audience** besides the teacher or author.	Article's **purpose relates to school**, not outside readership; shows **no awareness of an audience** outside the teacher or author.
Tone, Word Choice, & Content *How well did you match these to your audience & purpose?*	Tone and content **successfully and perceptively tailored** to audience & purpose **throughout whole piece;** word choice (vocabulary, description, sensory details, figurative language) **specifically crafted to inspire audience connection** and **emotional response**.	Tone and content **successfully tailored** to audience **in most of piece**; word choice (vocabulary, description, sensory details, figurative language) **crafted** to **create audience connection**.	**Attempts to tailor** the tone and content **may be inconsistent or unsuccessful**; word choice (vocabulary, description, sensory details, figurative language) **occasionally creates audience connection**.	**Does not tailor** the tone or content to anyone; word choice (vocabulary, description, sensory details, figurative language) **does not vary from author's conversational language.**
Theme/Motif *Did you artfully include a theme or motif?*	Article contains **appropriate theme or motif** that is **skillfully woven throughout the piece**.	Article contains **appropriate theme or motif** that is **included in the piece in several places**.	Article **contains theme or motif** that is **included in the beginning and end**.	Article **does not contain theme or motif.**
Structure *Did you purposefully and skillfully match your organization to your purpose?*	**Structure** follows dominant text type (narrative, expository, persuasive) **appropriate to purpose; movement of the piece and organization** of individual paragraphs **is effectively controlled**.	**Structure** follows dominant text type (narrative, expository, persuasive**) appropriate to purpose; organization** of individual paragraphs **is logical**.	**Structure follows dominant text type** (narrative, expository, persuasive); individual paragraphs are **organized**.	**Dominant text type** (narrative, expository, persuasive) **does not match the purpose** and/or the piece **lacks organization.**
Language *Did you successfully and correctly use language to create the effect you wanted?*	**Successfully uses** a variety of sentences and punctuation **for effect; avoids** passive voice; **makes no** grammatical, spelling or punctuation errors; **no** sentence fragments, run ons, or comma splices.	**Uses** a variety of sentences and punctuation; **mostly avoids** passive voice; **makes few** grammatical, spelling or punctuation errors; **few** sentence fragments, run ons, or comma splices.	**Occasionally varies** sentences and/or punctuation; **mixes** active and passive voice; **makes several** grammatical, spelling or punctuation errors; **several** sentence fragments, run ons, or comma splices.	**Rarely varies** sentences and/or punctuation; **uses** passive voice **excessively; makes many** grammatical, spelling or punctuation errors; **many** sentence fragments, run ons, or comma splices.

Student Sample A

Student Text	Teacher Annotations
Concrete Jungle I believe everyone has their own personal paradise. For some of us it's the beach, while for others it can be a massage parlor. Mine happens to be the Willits Skate Park. My love for skateboarding constantly has me searching for new spots to practice. Just like every other skateboarder, I began skating on the streets of my home town, Fort Bragg, California. Starting off on the streets was great because I was able to apply my skills to all my surroundings, even if they were not built for skateboarding. However, learning on the streets had its disadvantages too. Along with the glory of learning new tricks daily, came the hassle of trying to avoid police officers and the tickets they seemed so happy to give out. By the age of 13, I was well-known by local law enforcement simply because I was a skateboarder. Within a year's span, I must have received fifteen warnings for trespassing and around three tickets for not wearing a helmet and pads. Little did I know, a solution to my problem was in the making: the construction of an 18,000 square foot skate park in a neighboring town called Willits. Rumors had been going around Fort Bragg that the park was in fact being built and should be complete by spring of 2003, but it sounded too good to be true. After all the trouble I had gone through just for skateboarding, it was hard to believe I would soon have a place to skate and not worry about getting arrested. Spring came faster than I could have ever expected, and my mother surprised me by inviting a group of my friends to the park. The trip was on. When we finally arrived, my friends and I were overwhelmed by the size and structure of this magnificent skate park. In awe, we sat down and soaked in the beauty of it for at least ten minutes. After a brief look at all the possibilities, we all strapped on our gear and began with our first skate session. Up until that moment, I wasn't a fond believer of the saying *love-at-first-sight*, but Willits definitely changed my perspective on it.	The author was clear that his audience was other skaters. Here he's trying to establish his street cred, as well establish the reasons he really appreciated the park he discovers later on. Notably, he never acknowledges the other side of the coin--those who see skaters as a nuisance. If this were a persuasive essay to that audience, this would be a problem. Here it seems acceptable because he's not writing for the general public. However, I'm not sure he did this deliberately, so I would point it out to him. Good sentence variety/punctuation use here. In general, this piece uses the passive voice way too much. The author is not a wordsmith, so changing that was hard for him. I consider this sentence a success: "came" and "surprised" are verbs that help him show his story, not tell it. If time had allowed, I would have liked to work with him more on this issue. The author's style is certainly not overly-flowery. This sentence breaks from that, which is appropriate because it emphasizes the importance of the moment. Good active verb: "strapped."

Throughout that first day, we must have skated a total of twelve hours. As physically fit as we all were, we each had three or more muscle cramps on the way home, which was hilarious if you were not the victim.

As long as I live I don't think I will ever forget the layout of this particular park. As I drove towards the park I got a sense of Willits' athletic community as I passed multiple baseball fields and even a rodeo. Once I entered the parking lot, I really got a good look at the modern-day skate park. Surrounding the park is a six-foot high chain link fence, which helps regulate the hours of the park. Just like most California skate parks, it is open from dawn until dusk.

The entrance is simply a gate on the southern side of the park. Upon entering the park, I couldn't help but notice the twelve-foot high roll-in to the right of me, which is primarily used to pick up speed. This roll-in leads to a six-foot high wedge, on which I personally learned a handful of air tricks. The park itself it is split up into three main sections: a northwest corner, a southwest corner, and a transition-based eastside.

The northwest corner is dedicated to urban-like features such as stairs, ledges and rails. The southwest corner is a cross between street skating and ramps known as wedges. However the eastside of the park is my favorite: the north and south parts of the eastside are completely dedicated to pools and half pipes. The half pipe sizes vary from four to eight feet; this provides something to ride for beginning and veteran skaters.

One of the most shocking things about this park would definitely have to be the locals. Their skill level is off the charts, yet they do not have cocky attitudes like a lot of southern California skaters. In fact, as I was struggling on the eight-foot half pipe, one of the locals rolled up, giving me advice that really helped boost my confidence. Evidently this was useful because soon I was skating as if I were one of the locals. Within my first few visits to the park, I met more skaters than I did in my whole life in Fort Bragg. Willits became my home away from home. Willits really seemed like the perfect

In terms of sensory detail, the author primarily relies on the visual. Here he included another--the physical pain of being sore.

I like that he embedded practical information--operating hours--naturally in the narrative.

He uses audience-specific jargon ("roll-in" and "wedge") and content here. I don't care about heights and types of contours, but this is important for other skaters.

Again, playing to his audience, whether experienced or novice.

Apparently the attitude of skaters at public parks is an issue--he wants to reassure his audience that they don't have to worry here.

Good sentence variety and active verb "rolled."

skate park to my friends and me, but the locals were not yet satisfied. The Willits skate crew got together and proposed a couple of new ideas. Some of these ideas consist of lights, drinking fountains, and of course shaded areas for the scorching hot summers. The park has not yet completed these proposals, but the city has taken them into serious consideration. In my opinion, if this were done, it would be a flawless skate park. In the end, what makes this park so amazing is the design and the locals. No park will ever be able to simulate the atmosphere of this park. All and all, Willits is my paradise.	He shows audience awareness and subtle persuasion--the park could get even better soon. The author did notice and remember the idea of a theme or motif and attempted to use it. He uses the word "paradise" in both the first and last sentences and paints the park as a paradise for skaters due to its all-around value. I can't say that he used this literary device very artistically, but I was pleased to see that he understood the idea and gave it a try.

Final Teacher Comment:
Overall, this piece was a big step for a student who doesn't like to write, so I was fairly pleased. I saw him step outside his comfort zone and try to be artistic with language. The resulting narrative is strong in some places and adequate in others, but the majority reads a little flat. Next time I would ask him to focus on avoiding the passive voice and choosing active verbs to create a more sensory-rich experience. As a reader, I saw this story, but I did not feel it. I think that conveying a sense of excitement in a more visceral way would grab his audience better, considering that they are skaters and seek out action. I would also ask him to look at how other authors used a motif in a creative way—his has potential, but it could use some style.

Student Sample B

Student Text	Teacher Annotations
Bubbling Up More than Just Great Coffee	
Fifteen different sumptuous coffees, zesty music, and a crowd all of its own: Headlands delivers for a town otherwise dead when the sun banks and stars claim their rightful place.	Nice use of a structural element common in this genre--the subtitle.
Headlands is a small coffee shop in a quaint town in northern California called Fort Bragg. After you enter Headlands, the waft of fresh coffee beans awaits you and conversation is gratis and, of course, plentiful. Etched along the walls are incredible local paintings that will challenge you to gaze off into an aromatic high. As your eyes drift towards the ceilings there are skylights tactfully placed that truly make you feel you are in San Francisco--but do not forget about the live music or the fifteen different types of coffees.	Good use of sensory details and word choice here--it gives an immediate sense of place.
The coffee at Headlands is, of course, of utmost importance: it is lightly brewed and isn't that strong, so if that's your thing, you're in for a real treat. If you like your coffee strong, then don't worry; the tempting desserts and entrees are sure to change your mind. There are not that many other coffee shops in Fort Bragg--there is a Starbucks but they don't have live music and their coffee is just like any Starbucks anywhere. Along the main drag in Fort Bragg there is a little espresso stand that is near a small restaurant called Fish and Chips. Their coffee is alright, but it does not compare to that of Headlands.	The audience is clearly tourists, and I can see the author trying to anticipate their desires and complaints; the dominant text type is persuasive and he provides a counter argument (despite the weak coffee, this is still the best choice in town). However, the tone is inappropriately conversational.
The ambience of Headlands shines because there is not one single place in Fort Bragg open as late to the general public. Headlands is also the central hub for all the musicians in Fort Bragg to show all of their wonderful local talent. This is the only place in town that provides consistent late-night attractions.	This is important content for tourists to know, but I wish the language could have been revised to show lively music, not tell about it.
If you desire food, consider venturing into this delightful little town gem and take a look at some of the crisp, crunchy paninis sitting temptingly in the open glass refrigerator. Fresh Belgian waffles loaded with fresh fruit are available until 11 a.m. and don't be surprised if they melt in your mouth and crack your face into a wide-eyed grin. There is also pizza, lasagna, samosas, enchiladas and much more, all of which come	The author does a better job here of using active verbs and sensory details for description.

from Fort Bragg's finest restaurants and stores.

After you have had all this local flavor, wouldn't you like a dessert? Your sweet tooth will not leave unhappy because Headlands has a huge dessert selection with an array of tarts, cakes, pies cheesecakes, and of course tiramisu. All are locally made (except for the tiramisu) and all are locally loved. But most of all you will love it to. Devouring this food is only complimented by friendly clerks and killer cappuccinos, sometimes with a smiling sun sitting merrily in their frothy goodness.

From what I have told and explained to you about this coffee shop, wouldn't you like to go and try it all out for yourself? Fort Bragg is a very great place to visit in the day, but in the night when the lights are dimmed and the stores leave nothing but ghosts, Headlands is the place to be. Next time you plan your visit to Fort Bragg, California I hope you consider Headlands for your refreshing cup of Joe. You will see that it is more than just a coffee shop on Laurel Street.

Amid the emphasis on wonderfulness, there is quite a bit of practical information in this article.

I'm not sure it was intentional, but I like the alliteration here. I also like the verbs "devouring" and "sitting merrily." "Frothy goodness" is too casual, but I appreciate that the author was trying to play with language.

Appealing directly to the reader, as the author does several times, is clumsy and should have been reworded in the revision process. In contrast to the other piece, this author explicitly makes his article persuasive, almost to the point of an advertisement. When I talked to him about it, he felt that, unlike the Yelp reviewers, he knew what the town had to offer and thus wanted to make his point very clear. At the very least, I appreciate his enthusiasm.

The idea of 'more than coffee & after-hours entertainment' is more like a claim than a theme. However, he did carry it throughout the piece, which helps. There is an emerging motif of night imagery that appears in the beginning and end, but it could use development.

Final Teacher Comment:
Overall, this piece was mixed. The text type choice was effective and the content was very appropriate for the target audience, but the tone was too casual and the use of 2nd person awkward. What I do like about it are the moments of lively language and the student's willingness to commit to his purpose. In the future, I would ask this student to focus using an appropriate tone, improving the use of a motif, avoiding the use of passive language, and using more subtle forms of persuasion. The intent was clear and I know that the student understood the connection between audience, purpose, and word choice—the result just wasn't incredibly artful or effective.