

HOW TO USE THIS COURSE

The Writing Life from SchoolhouseTeachers.com is a thirty-four-week writing class in five units designed to open students' eyes to the importance of writing no matter which lifepath they take and then to look more closely at the three major genres: nonfiction, fiction, and poetry, along with a final project in the genre of their choice. Students will be required to keep a daily journal.

Each unit will include instructional material; writing assignments, including a book report/review; required learning activities, learning activities for extra credit, and optional enhanced learning activities, often outside the home.

There is also a booklet with additional resources such as interviews, book report forms, and unit tests. The answers are given in a just-for-teacher answer booklet.

I refer to the thirty-four lessons as “weeks,” although I understand the teacher may modify the timeframe.

Lessons will present the skills of brainstorming ideas, writing a piece and editing it, and utilizing these skills with each new genre. Students will also be encouraged to submit their work to magazines. By the end of the course, they should have a better understanding of the opportunities open to people who write well. They will also have a better sense of themselves as writers and what writing genre(s) they prefer. Ideally, they will continue the habit of keeping a journal.

The two longer units—Introduction and Final Project—must be completed at the beginning and the end of the course. The teacher may wish to shift the three genre units—Nonfiction, Fiction, Poetry—around, although I recommend that the Nonfiction unit follow the introductory unit.

Help students to understand they don't have to worry about what everyone else is writing. No one else's stories will be just like theirs, even if they start out with exactly the same story outline. Throughout the year, your high schooler will find his own writing voice and learn how to use it effectively.

Much of what is taught in the first two units applies to the communication skills essential across many career paths. The remainder of the year focuses not only on how to write well, but also how to write manuscripts that will sell. Students will also learn writing skills specific to writing careers and spend the final unit writing a longer project of their own choosing, where they can put what they've learned throughout the year into practice.

UNIT 1

Introduction to Writing: Writing for Life, for school, and for basic skills

Week 1: The importance of writing well in all walks of life

Welcome! You are starting a year-long curriculum that will help prepare you for your future careers in two ways:

1. Writing with publication in mind: becoming a professional writer
2. Writing well: good written skills will improve your performance in whatever career you choose

Let's start with point #2. The better you can express yourself verbally and in writing, the further your career can progress. You can speak for yourself, sell your product, train others, verbalize ideas, write reports, make sense of statistics, or even prepare a speech that helps a candidate win an election.

The written word also increases your chances for success at school. As you complete high school, and possibly go on to college and graduate school, you will do more and more writing. We'll spend a week in this unit reviewing writing skills needed for a successful education.

Before we learn how to write better, however, we have to begin at the starting line. You probably already have the first two writing tools in your possession. First, a writer must first read, read, read. Secondly, a writer must write, write, write.

To that end, you will be asked to read one book during each unit and to write a book report (later we'll ask for a book review). For this first unit, I recommend a book of between 250–300 pages. For this unit, I place no restrictions on your choice of book.

The best way to establish the writing habit is to keep a daily journal. Writing longhand or typing online, it's your choice. I like to work with a pretty journal cover myself. Write a minimum of five minutes a day or up to three pages. Turn them in at the end of each week.

Your teacher may choose to give you a journal prompt. My suggestion is to learn to simply let your thoughts flow, and they don't have to make sense. It's even okay to write, "I don't know what to write about." Your entry might read something like "I was going to have the last packet of bananas and cream oatmeal, but my brother ate it first. He's always borrowing my things. Boy, that football game he played in was exciting. I wonder if my favorite team will go to the Super Bowl this year."

Weekly Assignments:

1. Write and turn in your daily journal pages.
2. Choose your book for this unit's book report.
3. Choose five career fields. Research the job requirements and skills. Is communication of some sort included, whether video, written, or spoken. If so, what are they looking for?
4. Write a 500-word essay detailing what you learned about writing as part of adult life.

Extra Credit:

- Write a 500-word essay about how writing well would improve your grades and help you to learn more.

Enhanced Learning Activities:

- Interview two or three people in different occupations. If possible, find someone in the field you are interested in pursuing as a career. Ask them about the role of writing/communication in their job.
- Study resumes online (<https://www.livecareer.com/resume-search/>) and track the importance placed on writing, such as: research assistant, fleet maintenance supervisor, patient communication specialist, fresh food associate at Walmart, national television copy coordinator.

UNIT 1

Week 2: An overview of writing-related careers

What jumps into your mind when you hear the word “writer”? Perhaps you think of a best-selling novelist such as C.S. Lewis or Tracie Peterson. Maybe your thoughts turn to the classics such as William Shakespeare, Jane Austen, Walt Whitman, or Charles Dickens.

Did your mind stray to newspaper editors? The person who writes your favorite blog? Or even me, the author of this course on writing?

This week we’re looking at writing careers. They run the gauntlet from the novelist working alone to people writing on assignment to people writing for a company.

Before we go any further, list as many writing careers as you can think of off the top of your head.

Now look at the Occupational Outlook Handbook from the Bureau of Labor Statistics (<https://www.bls.gov/ooh/>). This site provides information about hundreds of various job/career possibilities. Choose a letter from the index and scroll through some of the jobs. Choose some that sound interesting in order to determine whether or not strong communication/writing skills are required. The easiest way to do this is to choose the job and then click the “How to Become . . .” section. There is a section entitled “Important Qualities.” How did your lists compare? Writing careers might be further classified by subject matter, such as sports travel, entertainment, news.

This year we’ll be covering three broad categories, which fit into a variety of careers: poetry and prose, which breaks down into nonfiction and fiction. We’ll focus almost exclusively on writing in traditional mediums. I won’t teach script writing, although it’s an exciting and competitive career. It’s a writing style that involves a knowledge of stage and screen. Neither will I teach about social media, since, though that involves writing, those endeavors are taught primarily in marketing and mass communication courses. However, once you have mastered basic writing, you may wish to continue by studying specialized fields of writing.

A writing professional may work exclusively in one field. They also may bounce back and forth between genres. Once you’ve mastered the material in this course, you’ll be better prepared to head down whatever career path you choose.

Writers are paid in a variety of ways. Many opportunities provide “exposure” without formal payment. Some authors choose to self-publish, absorbing all the risk as well as the rewards. Traditional book publishers mostly pay royalties (a percentage of selling price), with or without an advance. Others pay on a “work for hire” basis, a single sum regardless of eventual sales.

Magazine and newspaper articles and poetry are often paid per inch, per word, or per line. We'll explore this more under the different genres.

Weekly Assignments:

1. Write and turn in your daily journal pages.
2. Read in your chosen book.
3. Research three of the writing occupations from the Department of Labor website. Compare things like job tasks, where they work, payment (how often, how, how much), on assignment or freelance, education, unique job requirements. Write a 500-word report, comparing and contrasting the three occupations you researched. Which one sounds the most interesting?

Extra credit:

- Research two additional writing occupations.

Enhanced Learning Activities:

- Read the relevant page from my booklet.
- Interview other writing professionals with questions similar to the ones I raised in your weekly assignment, as well as other questions of interest to you. Summarize your findings in a report.