

Grade 11 ▶

Unit Two

PRE-INSTRUCTION CHECKLIST

MECHANICS	ACQUAINTANCE & ANALYSIS
Review as necessary to enable revision skill use	<input type="checkbox"/> Expository: Biographical Article
	WRITING ON DEMAND
	<input type="checkbox"/> ongoing, all disciplines

REVISION SKILLS

Ladder of Abstraction

GENRE FOCUS

Expository: Biographical Article

NOTES

“...the more you wish to describe a Universal,” claims author Brenda Ueland (1987), “the more minutely and truthfully you must describe a Particular” (p. 104). Many writers refer to this continuum as the “ladder of abstraction” with the “absolutely concrete” at the bottom of the ladder and the “cosmically abstract” at the top. “At the bottom are bloody knives and rosary beads, wedding rings and baseball cards,” explains author and writing teacher Roy Peter Clark (2006). “At the top are words that reach for a higher meaning, words like freedom and literacy” (p. 107). Most of the time, revisions that move writing DOWN the ladder strengthen the writing because writing “that produces mental pictures almost always comes off the abstraction ladder’s bottom rung” (Hart, 2006, p. 170). A good story not only holds large truths and concepts but also is magnified by the minute details. The color of the mulch matters, the refreshing sunshine brings warmth to the page, and the drooling dog brings texture to the surface.

Certainly there are pieces where the writer should climb up the ladder of abstraction to convey truth with wider meaning. But, in general, writing that’s lower on the ladder generates much more emotion in the reader. As with most elements, balance is the best approach. “**You engage emotions and illustrate generalizations with concrete detail,**” explains Hart (2006). “**You make your writing meaningful by including abstractions**

that connect your specifics with other examples drawn from different places” (p. 172).

PATTERN STATEMENT

The concrete cultivates caring; the conceptual cultivates meaning

ADDITIONAL NOTES

The pattern, *The concrete cultivates caring; the conceptual cultivates meaning*, can be illustrated by preparing two different passages for students to read. For example, Passage A may say the following:

Freedom requires courage and, sometimes, taking risks. Lives that lack the daring needed to overcome constraints are often lives of bondage. And bondage possesses power. Even when distanced from domination, bondage still holds thoughts captive. Will something or someone reconnect the chains? Will this liberation last? Can freedom remain the frame of my life? Overcoming these lingering doubts can take the same bravery that fleeing to freedom required.

Passage B may read as follows:

As she stood waiting for the train, Ellen inwardly shuddered. They had done the best they could to make her look like a southern gentleman. William, standing near, reminded her to breathe. She looked at the train tracks. Could these parallel rails carry them beyond the stifling embrace of bondage? Would the tickets in her hand truly be two tickets to freedom? She closed her eyes, stood up straight, and whispered one word to herself: *courage*.

11
gradeunit
TWOREVISION
SKILLSLadder of
Abstraction■
GENREExpository:
Biographical
Article

Divide the class into small groups and give each group only one of the passages to read and discuss (EX-ex). Then repeat the process, giving each group the other passage to read and discuss. For each passage, have students discuss the following:

- Describe the passage. Does it deal with big ideas? If so, what are they?
- How does the passage address its ideas? More lofty and general? or more concrete and specific?
- In what type of article would you expect to find this passage?

After the groups have discussed each individual passage, give them copies of both passages. Have them discuss the following (EX-co):

- Compare and contrast the passages. How are they similar? different?
- What ideas do the two passages share? How do they differ in their presentation of the shared ideas?
- What would happen if the passages were both used in the same article? What would the reader gain?

Continue to use questioning to guide students to recognize the pattern: *The concrete cultivates caring; the conceptual cultivates meaning* (EX-el). Draw a ladder and write “conceptual” at the top and “concrete” at the bottom. Have students select a topic (e.g., home) and generate an example statement that illustrates both extremes of the continuum represented by the ladder (EX-ap).

REVISION SKILLS

LADDER OF ABSTRACTION			
Objective		Checklist	
<p>Student independently reviews paragraphs/portions of a draft to note levels of abstraction and revises as necessary to “climb up” or “climb down” the ladder of abstraction for optimal effect.</p>		<p><input type="checkbox"/> Read your draft to note the levels of abstraction it contains. Identify places where movement up or down would strengthen the writing. (Remember, the bottom rung engages the reader while the top rung widens the meaning of your message.)</p> <p>Revise accordingly.</p>	
Rubric			
EXEMPLARY	PROFICIENT	ADEQUATE	NOT YET
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▶ Writing features effective use of levels of abstraction, using more abstract terms for higher ideas (e.g., freedom) and concrete illustrations to clarify meaning and interest the reader. ▶ All illustrations seem appropriate for the text. ▶ Movement between all higher ideas and concrete illustrations flow smoothly. ▶ Additional revision may improve some elements, but issues abstraction/concreteness have been effectively addressed. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▶ Writing features effective use of levels of abstraction, using more abstract terms for higher ideas (e.g., freedom) and concrete illustrations to clarify meaning and interest the reader. ▶ All illustrations seem appropriate for the text. ▶ Movement between most higher ideas and concrete illustrations flow smoothly. Only occasional breaks cause the text to lose flow. ▶ Additional revision could strengthen the writing by improving flow between some ideas and illustrations. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▶ Writing features effective use of levels of abstraction, using more abstract terms for higher ideas (e.g., freedom) and concrete illustrations to clarify meaning and interest the reader. ▶ Some illustrations, though concrete, seem out of place or inappropriate within the text, AND/OR ▶ Movement between higher ideas and concrete illustrations is often choppy. Transitions from one to the other would help the reader better connect ideas. ▶ Additional revision could strengthen the writing by including better illustrations or by improving flow between ideas and illustrations. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▶ Writing features several examples of ideas presented in overly abstract or general terms. More concrete illustrations are needed to give the writing clarity and/or reader interest. ▶ Significant revision could strengthen writing by making ideas more easily understood through increased concreteness.

11
gradeunit
TWOREVISION
SKILLSLadder of
Abstraction

■

GENRE

Expository:
Biographical
Article

11
grade

unit
TWO

REVISION
SKILLS

Ladder of
Abstraction

GENRE

Expository:
Biographical
Article

GENRE

EXPOSITORY: Biographical Article			
Definition		Objective	
Retelling of a subject's experience, usually focused on one event or a related series of events, that reads like a story.		With teacher prompting and support, student writes a biographical narrative article (not autobiographical) detailing an event or series of events within an individual's life.	
Rubric			
EXEMPLARY	PROFICIENT	ADEQUATE	NOT YET
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▶ Writing presents a cohesive (unified and complete) and informative biographical narrative article detailing an event or series of events within an individual's life. ▶ Writing reads like a well-written story, connecting events and details so that the reader follows the subject's experience from beginning to end. ▶ Writing maintains a consistent storytelling flow, never lapsing into academic reporting. ▶ Additional revision may minimally improve the report. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▶ Writing presents a cohesive (unified and complete) and informative biographical narrative article detailing an event or series of events within an individual's life. ▶ Writing reads like a well-written story, connecting events and details so that the reader follows the subject's experience from beginning to end. ▶ In some places, the writing lapses into an academic tone, as if presenting a report rather than a biographical article with a narrative feel. ▶ Additional development or revision may give the text a consistent storytelling flow. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▶ Writing presents a cohesive (unified and complete) and informative biographical narrative article detailing an event or series of events within an individual's life. ▶ Writing reads like a list of events, lacking flow and connections between details and/or events so that the reader can easily follow the subject's experience from beginning to end. It does not read like a well-written story. ▶ Additional development or revision may improve the storytelling nature of the text. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▶ Writing fails to present a cohesive (unified and complete) and informative biographical narrative article detailing an event or series of events within an individual's life. ▶ Additional development or revision could significantly improve the writing's content and/or flow.

PRACTICE TEXT

“Show me a hero,” wrote F. Scott Fitzgerald, “and I will write you a tragedy.” Tragedy influences those it touches for years and even lifetimes.

Johnny Cash was familiar with tragedy. From an early age he worked and sang with his family. After some tragic events, he eventually became a well-known musician.

While working with his brother Jack in 1944, Johnny watched as a saw misfired and killed Jack. Jack died. Johnny felt sad and guilty. Cash left home a few years later to work in several odd jobs before getting into the music business...

A POSSIBLE REVISION

This is not THE correct revision, but one possibility. Accept any justifiable revisions.

“Show me a hero,” wrote F. Scott Fitzgerald, “and I will write you a tragedy.” A stone thrown into a pool of water ripples outward in seemingly endless waves. Tragedy ripples similarly, influencing those it touches for years and even lifetimes.

Walking the line between the ring of fire and heavenly hosts, between tragedy and triumph, defines Johnny Cash’s life. From an early age he worked the fields and sang church and folk songs with his family. His journey to musical legend began one dreadful afternoon.

At the end of a scorching hot work day in 1944, Johnny and his older brother Jack were finishing one last project. The table saw’s sharp teeth whirred dangerously. Any unsteady movement or unfocused moment could be fatal. As the two youngsters labored, calamity struck. The machine misfired, tearing into Jack’s body. Within a week, Jack was dead. Ripples of guilt and sadness, but also faith, cut into Johnny’s life. Cash left home a few years later on a mission, a mission that would take years to define...



11
grade