

U.S. HISTORY-BASED WRITING LESSONS

Volume 1

in

*Structure, Style, Vocabulary, and
Grammar*

2nd Edition

By Lori Verstegen

Explorers to the Gold Rush

Student Book

Second Edition ©January 2008

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U.S. HISTORY-BASED WRITING LESSONS, Volume 1

2nd Edition, January 2008

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ISBN 978-0-9801005-6-3(S)

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CONTENTS

| | |
|--|--|
| INTRODUCTORY LESSON & THE STUDENT BOOK | 7 |
| POETRY | |
| Lesson 1 | America / Quality Adjectives & Alliteration 9 |
| Lesson 2 | Native Americans & European Explorers / Strong Verbs & -LY Words 13 |
| WRITING FROM KEY WORD OUTLINES (IEW UNITS I & II) | |
| Lesson 3 | Jamestown / Key Word Outlines 19 |
| Lesson 4 | Mayflower / Using Action Verbs & Imagery 23 |
| Lesson 5 | Jamestown / Who/Which Clause, Sentence Openers, & Titles from Clinchers 29 |
| Lesson 6 | Mayflower / Grammar Rule 1, Commas, & #2 Sentence Opener 33 |
| SUMMARIZING REFERENCES (IEW UNIT IV) | |
| Lesson 7 | Colonial Life / Topic Sentences & Clinchers 37 |
| Optional | Colonial Life / Preparing Oral Reports 45 |
| Lesson 8 | Colonial Life / Two or Three-Paragraph Reports 47 |
| Lesson 9 | French and Indian War / Choosing Topics 51 |
| Optional | Thanksgiving Poetry 59 |
| NARRATIVE STORIES (IEW UNIT III) | |
| Lesson 10 | Boston Tea Party / Story Sequence Chart 61 |
| Lesson 11 | “Shot Heard ‘Round the World” / Using Quotation Marks in Dialogue 71 |
| Lesson 12 | Boston Tea Party / Decorations: 3sss, Similes, Metaphors 76 |
| Lesson 13 | “Shot Heard ‘Round the World” / Emotion Words & Refining the Who/Which Clause 79 |
| RESEARCH REPORTS (IEW UNIT VI) | |
| Lesson 14 | Declaration of Independence / Notes & Fused Outlines 83 |
| Lesson 15 | Declaration of Independence / Grammar: Ellipses, Semicolons, Colons 93 |
| Lesson 16 | Declaration of Independence / Dramatic Openers & Closers and Bibliographies 95 |
| Lesson 17 | Biography of a Revolutionary War Figure / Basic Essays & More Comma Rules 101 |
| Lesson 18 | Biography / Adverb Clause 105 |

FORMAL REPORTS/ESSAYS (IEW UNIT VIII)

| | | |
|-----------|---|-----|
| Lesson 19 | Biography / Introductions & Conclusions | 107 |
| Lesson 20 | Biography / Anecdotal Openers & Closers | 113 |
| Lesson 21 | Biography / Presenting Oral Reports | 115 |
| Lesson 22 | Preamble to the Constitution / Transitional Words | 119 |
| Lesson 23 | U.S. Constitution / Review of Structure | 125 |
| Lesson 24 | U.S. Constitution / #4 Sentence Opener | 131 |

CREATIVE WRITING (IEW UNIT VII)

| | | |
|-----------|--|-----|
| Lesson 25 | The Bill of Rights—Freedom of Religion / Writing from a Prompt | 137 |
| Lesson 26 | Francis Scott Key and the Flag / Grammar: Avoid the Indefinite “You” | 145 |

CRITIQUES (IEW UNIT IX)

| | | |
|-----------|---|-----|
| Lesson 27 | Lewis and Clark Expedition / Critique Model | 149 |
| Lesson 28 | Lewis and Clark Expedition / Avoid the Indefinite “You” | 155 |
| Lesson 29 | Historical Fiction / More Critiquing | 161 |
| Lesson 30 | Historical Fiction / Finishing Critiques | 161 |

WRITING FROM PICTURES (IEW UNIT V) AND DESCRIPTIVE POETRY

| | | |
|-----------|--|-----|
| Lesson 31 | Pictures: Oregon Trail / Grammar: Past Perfect Tense | 169 |
| Lesson 32 | Poetry: Alamo / Dual Verbs, -LY Words, Adjectives | 173 |
| Lesson 33 | Pictures: Oregon Trail / Personification | 177 |
| Lesson 34 | Poetry: California Gold Rush / Haiku | 179 |

VOCABULARY QUIZZES

| | | |
|--------------------|-----------------------------|-------|
| APPENDIX I: | Sample Student Compositions | A-183 |
|--------------------|-----------------------------|-------|

| | | |
|---------------------|------------------|-------|
| APPENDIX II: | Vocabulary Cards | A-185 |
|---------------------|------------------|-------|

INTRODUCTORY LESSON

The Institute for Excellence in Writing (IEW) is a writing program unlike most others. In this course you will learn how to write with both *structure* and *style*.

STRUCTURE

The dictionary defines structure as “the manner in which anything is built; the arrangements or relationships of parts, elements, or organs.” To understand this a little better, think of a house: it has structure. What had to happen before the house was built? The architect had to draw out the plans for the builder to follow. Without those plans, the builder might put a sink in the middle of the living room or place stairs where the bathroom should go. We wouldn’t want that, so we plan how everything will be arranged and in what order each part will be built.

Writing a paper is much the same. If we were just to begin writing without planning, our facts and details would probably not be arranged in the most logical way. Our composition would not be structured well and would not communicate our thoughts effectively. In this course, you will “draw plans” for everything before you write. Your “plans” will be outlines, and they will follow a particular model for each type of composition.

STYLE

What comes to your mind when you hear the word *style*? Many people think of clothes. Clothes come in a variety of styles. You would dress differently to go to a wedding or other formal occasion than you would to go out to play baseball. That’s because formal events require a formal style of clothing, whereas casual events do not.

There are also different styles of language, both written and spoken. Below are two sentences that communicate the same information in different styles. Which do you like better? Why?

He hit the ball!

The determined little leaguer firmly smacked the spinning baseball with all his might!

You probably like the second better because it is more descriptive. However, what if you were at the baseball game with your friend and the batter was your little brother who rarely hits the ball—which of the two sentences would be better for you to yell? Obviously, the first would be more appropriate. Your friend would probably think you were crazy if you jumped up and shouted, “The determined little leaguer firmly smacked the spinning baseball with all his might!” Why the difference?

Spoken language is more casual than most written language. Also, when you are speaking to people, they are there with you, experiencing the same scene and event as you are. You do not need to fill in the details. When you write, however, you must realize that the readers are not with you and cannot “see” what is in your mind. You must help them see, hear, feel, and experience the scene you are writing about. In this course, you will be learning some techniques that will help you do this. Before you begin the lessons, you should understand each of the components of the course.

THE STUDENT BOOK

This Student Book contains the lesson pages, source texts, and checklists for each assignment. Some lessons have instructions for three levels. Follow the appropriate level.

Level A students are elementary (4th–5th grade).

Level B students are junior high (6th–8th grade).

Level C students are advanced junior high and early high school (8th–10th), who will complete both Volume 1 and Volume 2 in the school year.

The back of this book contains an appendix of student sample compositions. It also contains a sheet of vocabulary cards for most of the lessons. The lessons will instruct you when to cut out each sheet. You will be required to learn these words and use some of them in every composition you write for this class. You will also be quizzed over them periodically.

The Resource Notebook: Throughout the year, you will be building your own Resource Notebook from The Student Resource Notebook Pages (see below). It will be filled with all kinds of writing helps. The pages must be placed into a one-inch three-ring binder, with tabs labeled as instructed below. *Before each lesson, you should place the Resource Notebook pages needed into your binder behind the appropriate tab.* These pages will be listed at the beginning of each lesson. The appropriate tabs will be indicated in parentheses.

SUPPLIES

There are a few supplies you should bring to every class:

1. **Student Resource Notebook Pages**, printed on three-hole-punched paper and stored in a large envelope. These are downloadable at www.excellenceinwriting.com/srn. You will **not** need to download the checklists, pages 94–109.
2. **A one-inch three-ring binder** with eight divider tabs for your own Resource Notebook. Label the tabs: VERBS, -LY, ADJ, SENSES/EMO, DEC'S, TRANSITIONS, GRAMMAR, and CHARTS.
3. **A one-inch three-ring binder** with four divider tabs labeled NOTES, ROUGH DRAFTS, VOCABULARY, and PAPER. You should also have a three-hole-punched folder or pocket divider to place in the binder for storing your final drafts. This will keep them neat. It will also allow you to store them without having to hole-punch them, which will make spiral binding them easier at the end of the year.
4. **A thesaurus** such as *The Synonym Finder* by Rodale or a quality electronic thesaurus.

A PERSONAL BOOK OF AMERICAN HISTORY

In this course, all of the writing topics will focus on early American history. You should save your final drafts so that at the end of the year you can have them bound into your own personal book of American history. For this reason, the assignments ask you to illustrate much of your work. If you do, and also make your final drafts as neat as possible, you will have a finished product you can be proud of.

LESSON 1
QUALITY ADJECTIVES & ALLITERATION

Resource Notebook pages 5–6 (place in front of tabs), 29–34 (ADJ), and 42 (DEC'S).
Place each behind the appropriate tab in your Resource Notebook (the one-inch binder).

QUALITY ADJECTIVES

In this lesson, you will begin to learn some elements of style. These are listed on page 5 of the Resource Notebook, which is entitled Stylistic Techniques. At the top you see a section labeled Dress-ups. Dress-ups include a variety of special kinds of words and phrases that you will learn to add to your writing. The first dress-up is the quality adjective.

Adjectives are words that describe nouns (people, places, or things). They tell *which one*, *what kind*, and *how many*.

In this lesson, you will practice adding the adjective dress-up to your writing. However, not all adjectives qualify as dress-ups. You must use *quality* adjectives. Do you think the adjectives in the sentence below are quality adjectives?

The trees were *big* and *pretty*.

Big and *pretty* are adjectives, but they are boring and overused words. In fact, adjectives like these are so boring that we are going to ban them from your writing. Turn to the back of your Stylistic Techniques page and find the section that says Banned Words. In the adjective column, notice the boring adjectives: *good*, *bad*, *pretty*, *ugly*, *nice*, *mean*, *big*, *a lot*, *interesting*. You may not use these words when you write for this class. Try to memorize them.

To help you avoid these words, your Resource Notebook has lists of substitutes for them on pages 29–34 behind the tab labeled “adjectives.” When you are tempted to use one of the banned adjectives, turn to these lists or a thesaurus and find a better one.

By choosing quality adjectives, improve the sentence that used banned adjectives.

The trees were _____ and _____.

THE ASSIGNMENT

Use the model on page 11 to help you write a poem about America that is filled with quality adjectives. You may make some changes to the model; it is meant to be a general guide. Before you do, brainstorm on page 10. Find possible adjectives for each line in the poem. Use the adjective lists in your notebook and a thesaurus for help.

| seashores | forests | mountains |
|-----------|---------|-----------|
| | | |
| | | |
| | | |
| | | |
| rivers | plains | people |
| | | |
| | | |
| | | |
| | | |

Alliteration is listed under the Decorations on your Stylistic Techniques page. It is simply using two or more words together that begin with the same sound. Here are some examples:

rapid, raging rivers majestic mountains

Page 42 in your Resource Notebook explains alliteration further. Read it and try the exercises.

Try to use alliteration in the poem you will write for this lesson. Do not overuse it. Unlike dress-ups, decorations should be used sparingly or your writing will be unnatural. Can you find the examples of alliteration in the sample poem on page A-3?

The poem will be the cover of your book, so place your name and the school year toward the bottom of the page. Make the title very large and bold, as it will be the title of your book. See the sample poem in the Appendix, page A-3. Illustrate your final draft or copy it onto specialty paper. Be sure to include everything on the checklist, page 11. **Attach the checklist or a copy of it to your final draft for grading.**

Remember to make and learn your vocabulary word cards for Lesson 1. Cut them out, punch a hole in the right corner of each one, and attach them to a metal book ring.

MODEL

America,

Land of...

- 1 or 2 adjectives seashores (*that, of, or with*) _____ *
- 1 or 2 adj forests (*that, of, or with*) _____
- 1 or 2 adj mountains (*that, of, or with*) _____
- 1 or 2 adj rivers (*that, of, or with*) _____
- 1 or 2 adj plains (*that, of, or with*) _____

(You may add others, such as cities, towns, farms, churches, historical landmarks, etc.)

America, Land of...

1 or 2 adj people who _____

1 or 2 adj people who _____

“The free and the brave.”

“God Bless America,

My Home Sweet Home.”

* *That, of, or with* phrases are optional. To include them, choose one of the three words and follow it with a phrase to complete a thought. Notice the examples in the sample poem on page A-3.

Lesson 1

Name _____

CHECKLIST: AMERICA

- Title of poem “America” is large and bold (3 pts) _____
 - Written in poetry form (see page A-3) (2 pts) _____
 - Name & school year follows poem (2 pts) _____
 - At least 10 quality adjectives (10 pts) _____
 - Alliteration (3 pts) _____
 - Picture/Neatness (10 pts) _____
 - No banned words (-1 ea) _____
 - (*good, bad, nice, mean, pretty, ugly, big, a lot, interesting*)
- TOTAL: _____ /30**

WRITING FROM KEY WORD OUTLINES: MAYFLOWER

**LESSON 4
USING ACTION VERBS & IMAGERY**

Resource Notebook pages 6, 36–40 (SENSES/EMO)

Take Vocabulary Quiz 1.

STORIES FROM KEY WORD OUTLINES

In this lesson you are going to write a story, but don't worry, you won't have to make up the plot. You are going to outline a source text just as you did for the report on Jamestown. As you write your own version of the story, you will learn to make it interesting to read. Look at the two versions of a sentence from a story. Which do like better?

When John hit a home run, his team was excited.

When John hit a home run, his team bolted out of the dug out, screaming and jumping all over one another.

The second version is much easier to picture. It is difficult to picture “was excited,” but you can easily picture bolting, screaming, and jumping. These are **action verbs**—verbs that show action we can picture. Look at the sentences below, which use state-of-being verbs rather than action verbs:

The jet was hit by a missile. The pilot was afraid.

Are they interesting to read? The above sentences would be more interesting if they included action verbs that describe what the pilot experienced and how he showed his fear. Read the revision below and notice the use of words that appeal to the senses as well as the action verbs. Do they paint a clearer and more interesting picture?

Suddenly he heard a deafening bang. He smelled smoke, and the jet began to tremble violently. The ground was getting closer and closer. Frantically he pushed, pulled, yanked, and tugged every button and switch in sight.

Today you are going to take key word notes from a very boring story. When you rewrite it, you are going to make it more interesting by using action verbs and describing scenes in such a way that the reader can see, hear, feel, taste, or smell them. You will also add dress-ups and openers, and you will avoid banned words.

To be sure you do not use any banned words, list them below. Do you remember them? Check yourself using the Resource Notebook, top of page 6.

Adjectives: _____

Verbs: _____

THE ASSIGNMENT

1. Read the source text, “The Mayflower,” paragraph I. On the blank outline that follows it, write three key words from each sentence.
2. Fill out the Brainstorming page (page 25).
3. Use your outline and the brainstorming to write your own exciting version of this paragraph. Double space. This is a rough draft. You will do a final in Lesson 6.
4. On another day, repeat these steps with Paragraphs II and III (pages 26–27).
5. Cut out and learn the vocabulary words for Lesson 4.

Level A students may need to spend a week on each paragraph.

Level B and **C** students, especially those already familiar with the IEW dress-ups and openers, may combine Lessons 4 and 6.

THE MAYFLOWER

Paragraph I

In 1620 a group of English people who wanted to be able to worship God freely decided to come to America. They are now known as the Pilgrims. They went on a boat called the *Mayflower*. During the trip there was a storm. The Pilgrims stayed below in the gun deck. It was crowded, and seawater came in through the cracks. They were wet and cold. They were scared.

KEY WORD OUTLINE

- I. _____
1. _____
 2. _____
 3. _____
 4. _____
 5. _____
 6. _____
 7. _____

I. ROUGH CHECKLIST

- _____ quality adjective
- _____ strong verb
- _____ -ly word
- _____ vocab word
- _____ no banned words
- _____ double-space

BRAINSTORMING

The best writers use strong action verbs to show what is happening. Notice that there are not many exciting action verbs in the source text paragraph. Your job is to add some.

Describing the Storm (Action Verbs & -LY Words)

The paragraph simply informs us, “There was a storm.” What action verbs could you use to describe the storm? What did the storm *do* to the sky, the water, the boat, and the Pilgrims? Add -ly word ideas as well.

Examples: Waves *crashed* on the deck. The boat *rocked violently*.

Quality Adjectives

The best writers also use quality adjectives that describe what the characters see, hear, feel, smell, or taste. Fill in the chart below with quality adjectives to describe what the Pilgrims experienced during the storm. The five-senses section of your Resource Notebook (pages 36–40) might be helpful.

| SEE | HEAR | FEEL | SMELL OR TASTE |
|-----------|-----------------|-----------------|----------------|
| black sky | booming thunder | splintered wood | salty waves |
| | | | |
| | | | |

Showing Feelings

The best writers also reveal the feelings of their characters, not just by telling what they feel, but by showing their emotions. The paragraph you are working on ends by saying that the Pilgrims were scared. Describe the scene so that the reader knows they are scared without your saying so. What do you think the Pilgrims did that showed they were scared? Write your ideas below:

What did the men do? Example: Men tried to comfort their families.

What did the women do? Example: Women held tightly to their children.

What did the children do? Example: Children cried.

THE MAYFLOWER

Paragraphs II and III

One day Goodman John Howland became tired of being cooped up. He decided to climb to the upper deck. Without warning the ship rolled, and he fell into the ocean. As he fell, he grabbed a hanging rope. He was afraid.

Luckily the sailors saw what had happened. They were able to get him with a boat hook. Goodman Howland was relieved and grateful to be back on the boat. He thanked the sailors for saving his life and then returned to the gun deck. The Pilgrims were glad to see that he was safe. However, they knew that this journey to the New World would be a long and difficult one.

KEY WORD OUTLINE

II. _____

1. _____

2. _____

3. _____

4. _____

II. ROUGH CHECKLIST

____ quality adjective

____ strong verb

____ -ly word

____ vocab word

____ *no* banned words

____ double-space

III. _____

1. _____

2. _____

3. _____

4. _____

5. _____

III. ROUGH CHECKLIST

____ quality adjective

____ strong verb

____ -ly word

____ vocab word

____ *no* banned words

____ double-space

BRAINSTORMING

Paragraph II

John Howland on the rope:

Paragraph II ends with John Howland hanging from a rope in the storm. The source text simply says that he was afraid, but it does not describe the scene very well. Use *action verbs*, *quality adjectives*, and *-ly words* to describe what was happening to him on the rope and what he was doing as he hung there.

What was happening to him? Example: *Huge, cold waves mercilessly slammed him against the boat.*

What did he do? Example: He *cried* out *helplessly*.

Paragraph III

John Howland rescued:

After being rescued, how did John Howland act, and how did he show that he was grateful? Use *action verbs*. Example: He *fell* to his knees *trembling*.

Pilgrims seeing Howland:

When he returned to the gun deck, what did the Pilgrims do? How did they show how they felt? Use action verbs. Example: His friends *embraced* him. The Pilgrims *praised* God.

Sample