

Literacy Tips



Tips for middle school educators on various topics such as grammar, writing, reading, spelling, vocabulary, cooperative learning and more.

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Tip #43: RAFT(S)

No, this tip is not referring to white-water rafting or even Huck Finn floating down the Mississippi River on his homemade raft. The RAFT strategy (Santa, 1988) is an acronym that stands for role/audience/format/topic. It is a way for students to learn and retain new information by using creative writing opportunities. RAFT keeps students “afloat” by forcing them to process new information from unique perspectives. It’s also a lot of fun and will certainly motivate your students.

Role of the writer

What is the writer’s role: reporter, observer, chef?

Audience

Who will be reading the writing: the teacher, other students, an editor?

Format

What is the best way to present the writing: in a letter, an article, a recipe?

Topic

Who/what is the subject of this writing: a scientist, pollution, an explorer?

Strong verb

How do you feel about the topic: enraged, elated, disappointed?

This strategy is cross-referenced in lots of professional books and is recommended to use in content area classrooms. The *Step Up to Writing* guide (second edition, 6-27 - 6-35) has

an excellent mini-unit on RAFT writing. [Attached are pages](#) which include more information about the *Step Up to Writing* unit, a 7th grader’s RAFT paper that you can make into a model, and a high school RAFT paper that could also be used as an “upper end” model. The 7th grade paper is on black bears; the high school paper is on the role of the dollar bill in economics.

How to use it

Think about the big ideas that you want your students to learn from your selected reading passage. Model RAFT writing with your students using the examples above. Based on the reading you have selected, brainstorm possible roles students could assume in their writing. Decide who the various audiences could be as well as a variety of formats for writing. Generate possible topics and the strong verbs associated with them. Finally, assign the entire class the same set of words from which to write, let cooperative groups work together on their own choices, or let individual students choose from the wide array of possibilities. Students will be able to show off new knowledge in a unique way, which will strengthen their understanding and long term retention of the material.

There is a RAFT web site which has pull down menus for each of the RAFT categories to get students started. (This is also where I found the above 7th grade sample.) The

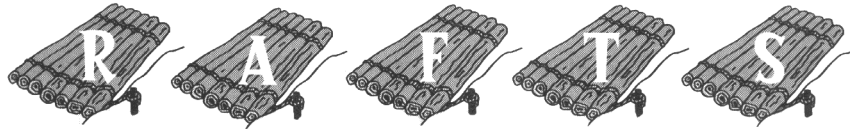


choices are not linked to any particular subject matter, so it makes a good introduction to this kind of writing. Be sure to follow up and apply this new writing strategy on specific content knowledge after experimenting at this web site. Once learned, RAFT writing can be used by all of the teachers on your team as an on-going strategy throughout the year.

Come aboard a raft!

www.geocities.com/writingprocess/raftchoices.htm





R ole	Dentist
A udience	Patients
F ormat	Brochure
T opic	The brochure will list all the reasons I want my patients to floss their teeth. The brochure will also have illustrations to show how to correctly floss your teeth
S trong Verb	Encourage, warn

This graphic and the above example come from the second edition of the *Step Up to Writing* program. Section 6-30 is a poster of the “R” and “A” combined. On this blackline master, you will see an alpha list of various roles and audiences for writing. Section 6-31 is an alpha list of a variety of writing formats. 6-32 is a blackline master explaining how to write a one-sentence topic. The example above shows how students write a complete sentence for their topic, which helps them better define their writing task. 6-33 is a two-sided blackline master listing strong verbs. Even if you choose not to do RAFT writing right now, this would be an excellent poster to display to help students improve their effective word choice.

ROLE	AUDIENCE	FORMAT	TOPIC	STRONG VERB
bear	park ranger	letter	bear killings	outraged

Dear Park Rangers,

I am outraged with the amount of black bear killings that have occurred in the last few months. In the last two months in Banff National Park, hunters and driver have killed 38 of my friends. That is not counting the other 343 in the rest of Alberta and the other 745 in British Columbia. In the next three months, I expect the following to be done or I will be forced to take legal action.

- ❑ Make sure not to let hunters into the park unless accompanied by a park ranger.
- ❑ Do not let people shoot or attack black bears unless one is posing a threat.
- ❑ Build barbwire fences around all of the highways that go through the national and provincial parks in all of the provinces/territories.
- ❑ It must be law not to kill black bears by two months after the date stated at the top of this letter.
- ❑ Put signs up throughout the parks. Each must say, *“It is illegal to kill black bears unless one is posing a threat to someone. If you or someone else knows a person who has killed a black bear, please contact a park ranger at (the number) or contact police.”*

Sincerely,

A concerned black bear

ROLE	AUDIENCE	FORMAT	TOPIC	STRONG VERB
William Dollar	U.S. Mint	memorandum	time off	pleading

TO: Personnel Director
FROM: William Dollar
DATE: April 15, 2003
RE: Request for Vacation

My name is Dollar, Bill Dollar. I've been on the job for the last twelve months without a break, and I am writing to request a two-week vacation. In considering my request, I think it's essential that you understand exactly how much work we dollar bills have to do during our time of service for the United States Treasury. One-dollar bills are the more prevalent, most used, and most abused of all the paper currency. Our life expectancy is only about 18 months. By comparison, the average \$100 bill has been in circulation around nine years!

My journey through the many hands that hold me begins after I leave the Bureau of Engraving and Printing and get sent out to a Federal Reserve Bank. I was shipped to Richmond, Virginia, although I could have been sent to any one of the 12 Federal Reserve Banks located throughout the country. While it's nice to travel and see the country, that first trip involves being bundled in currency "bricks" and chunked into armored trucks...no daylight or sunshine for us there! Then we get sent to regular banks when they need to increase the cash they have on hand for their customers. So while it seems like our job is pretty easy to start with, let me assure you it gets much worse from there.

In my case, I went out of our bank with a whole lot of other bills to become part of the day-laborer payroll of a construction company. It turns out there's a lot of house-building going on in the fast-growing Research Triangle area of North Carolina, and a lot of temporary help is hired on that has to be paid at the end of each day. I was paid out to a guy who'd been hauling sand all day to the cement mixers. On his way home, he stopped by the Better Burger place for a buffalo burger and fries, and I ended up going into the cash register there. When they were closing up that evening, the manager divided up tip money among the wait staff, and I was off again.

I went into this very nice woman's purse, but I didn't stay there long. In fact, I didn't stay any place too long; I was in and out of cash registers, fed into soft drink machines, passed back and forth between husbands and wives and kids, folded into swans and other strange shapes at late-night dinner tables, crumpled up and wadded into jeans pockets, and even washed a few times in laundromats.

But I know how crucial we are: employers use us to pay their workers, and the workers use us to buy food and medicines and clothes and gas, and then we're used to pay the people who work in the grocery and drug stores, the malls, and the gas stations. Then those people use us all over again to pay not only for goods but also for services like haircuts and car washes.

It is true that in some ways my life is easier than it was for dollar bills that came before me, because people use checks, credit cards, debit cards, and other electronic transfers more and more all the time. But there will always be a need for good old hard cash like me. It's just that I'm awfully tired from all my travels, and I may only have another year at the most left in me before I'm recalled, retired, and shredded into thousands of tiny pieces. I'd like to have time to recover from all this wear and tear so that I can keep on circulating until I'm in no condition to continue. Will you consider my request?

Sincerely,

William P. Dollar