

From Copywork to Composition: Learning Writing through Imitation

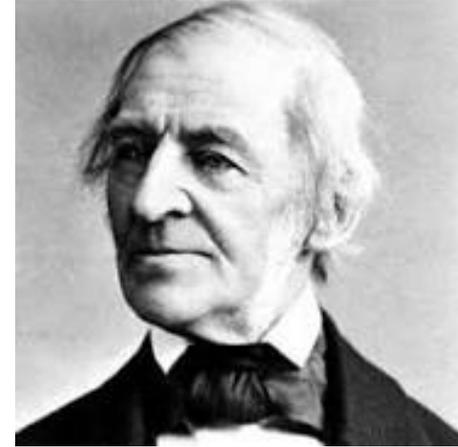
Andrew Pudewa
Institute for Excellence in Writing



Two Views of Imitation

“Envy is ignorance. Imitation is suicide.”

Ralph Waldo Emerson
(1803–1882)



“Innovation without imitation is a complete waste of time.”

Mike Rowe (Dirty Jobs)



SKILLS: THINGS YOU MUST DO TO LEARN

- Imitation – a natural human faculty
- Improvement requires a model.
- The foundation of creativity is basic skills!



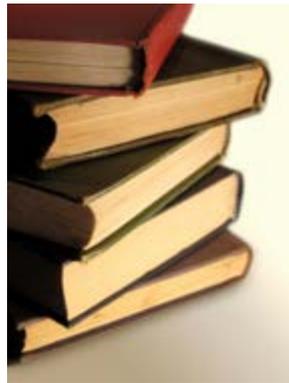
“COPYWORK” IN THE ARTS

- Painting: DaVinci’s students copied Mona Lisa.
- Architecture: Allan Greenberg – one hundred great buildings
- Music: Bach’s childhood



THE FIVE CANONS OF CLASSICAL RHETORIC

- Invention – ideas and content: what to say
- Arrangement – structure: how to organize it
- Elocution – style: how to say it
- Memory – “furnish the mind” and technique
- Delivery (specific to public speaking)



WHAT IS WRITING?

1. Having ideas
2. Putting those ideas into words
3. Getting those words out of the brain
4. Recording those words in a way that others can see, hear, touch, and understand them



IMITATION IN WRITING: BEGINNING STEPS

Memorization and Recitation

“Furnishing the mind” and building verbal fluency!
(vocabulary, poetry, scripture, songs, speeches)

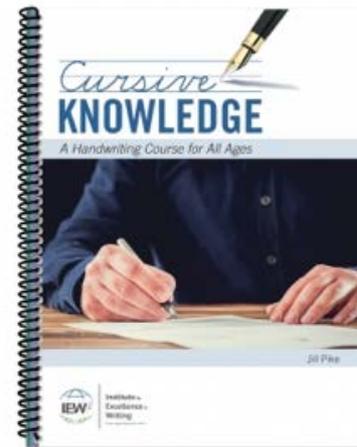
*Linguistic Development
through Poetry Memorization*



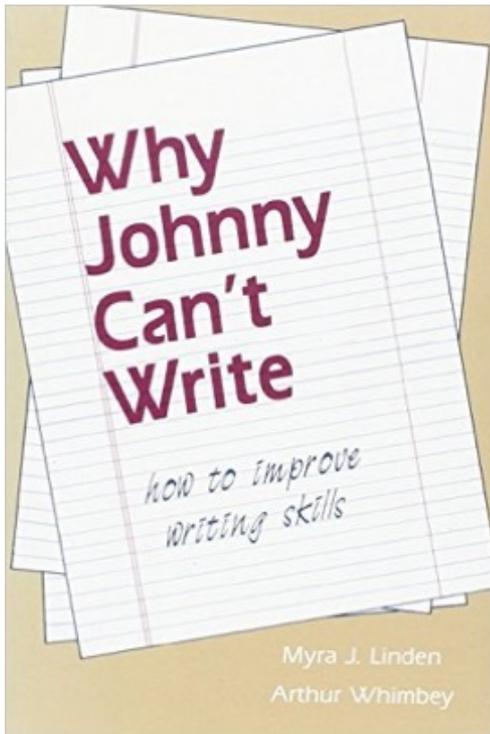
IMITATION IN WRITING: BEGINNING STEPS

Simple Copywork

Builds stamina, patterns language, and creates confidence



IMITATION IN WRITING: BEGINNING STEPS



The Two Best

- Text Reconstruction
- Sentence Combining

The Two Worst

- Overreliance on grammar
- “Freewriting”



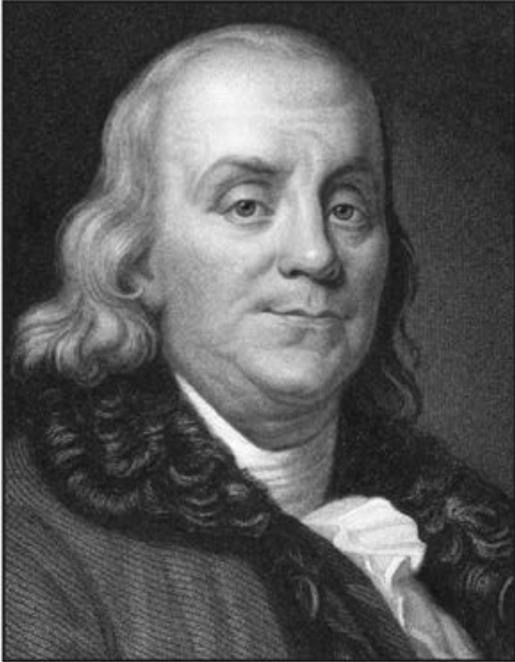
TEXT RECONSTRUCTION

- Transfer “key words” from first sentence into an outline format. (Parent or aide may serve as scribe if necessary.)
- Continue with each sentence of a short “source text.”
- Verbally retell ideas from key words in complete sentences.
- Write sentences from key word outline, learning conventions.



NOT A “NEW” IDEA...

BENJAMIN FRANKLIN’S AUTOBIOGRAPHY:



When my Father happened to find my papers . . . he took occasion to talk to me about the manner of my writing, and observed that although I had the advantage of my antagonist in correct spelling and pointing (which I owed to the printing house), I fell far short in elegance of expression, in method and in perspicuity, of which he convinced me by several instances. I saw the justice of his remarks, and thence grew more attentive to the manner in writing, and determined to endeavor at improvement.

FRANKLIN, cont.

About this time I met with an odd volume of the “Spectator.” It was the third. I had never before seen any of them. I bought it, read it over, and was much delighted with it. I thought the writing excellent, and wished, if possible, to imitate it. With this view I took some of the papers, and making short hints of the sentiment in each sentence, laid them by a few days, and then without looking at the book, tried to complete the papers again, by expressing each hinted sentiment at length and as fully as it had been expressed before, in any suitable words that should come to hand.



IMITATION THROUGH “TEXT RECONSTRUCTION”

Let's try one together!



Source Text: The Hare and the Tortoise

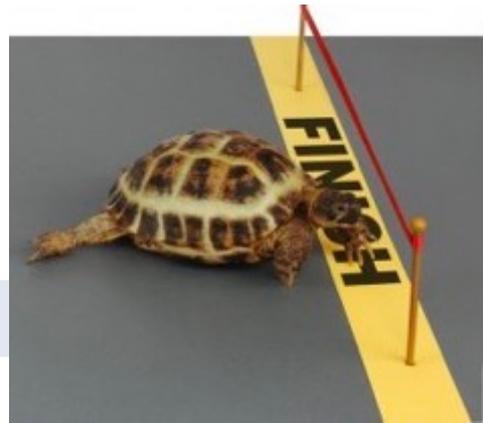
One day, a Hare was making fun of a Tortoise for being so slow upon his feet. The Tortoise, annoyed with this teasing, offered to run a race with the Hare. The Hare laughed and said it would be no contest, but he agreed to race anyway. It was decided that the Fox should set the course and be the judge. Although they started at the same time, the Hare was soon so far ahead that he thought he might as well have a rest, so he lay down and fell fast asleep. Meanwhile, the Tortoise kept plodding on, and in time, reached the finish line. The Hare awoke with a start and ran to the finish, only to find that the tortoise had already won the race.



KEY WORD OUTLINE

The Hare and the Tortoise

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



Source Text: The Hare and the Tortoise

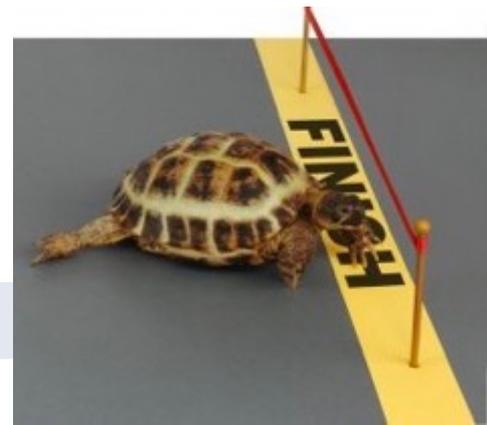
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KEY WORD OUTLINE

The Hare and the Tortoise

1. making, fun, slow
2. _____
3. _____
4. _____
5. _____
6. _____
7. _____



Source Text: The Hare and the Tortoise

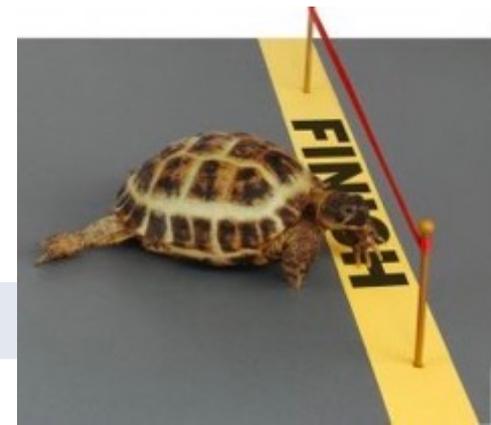
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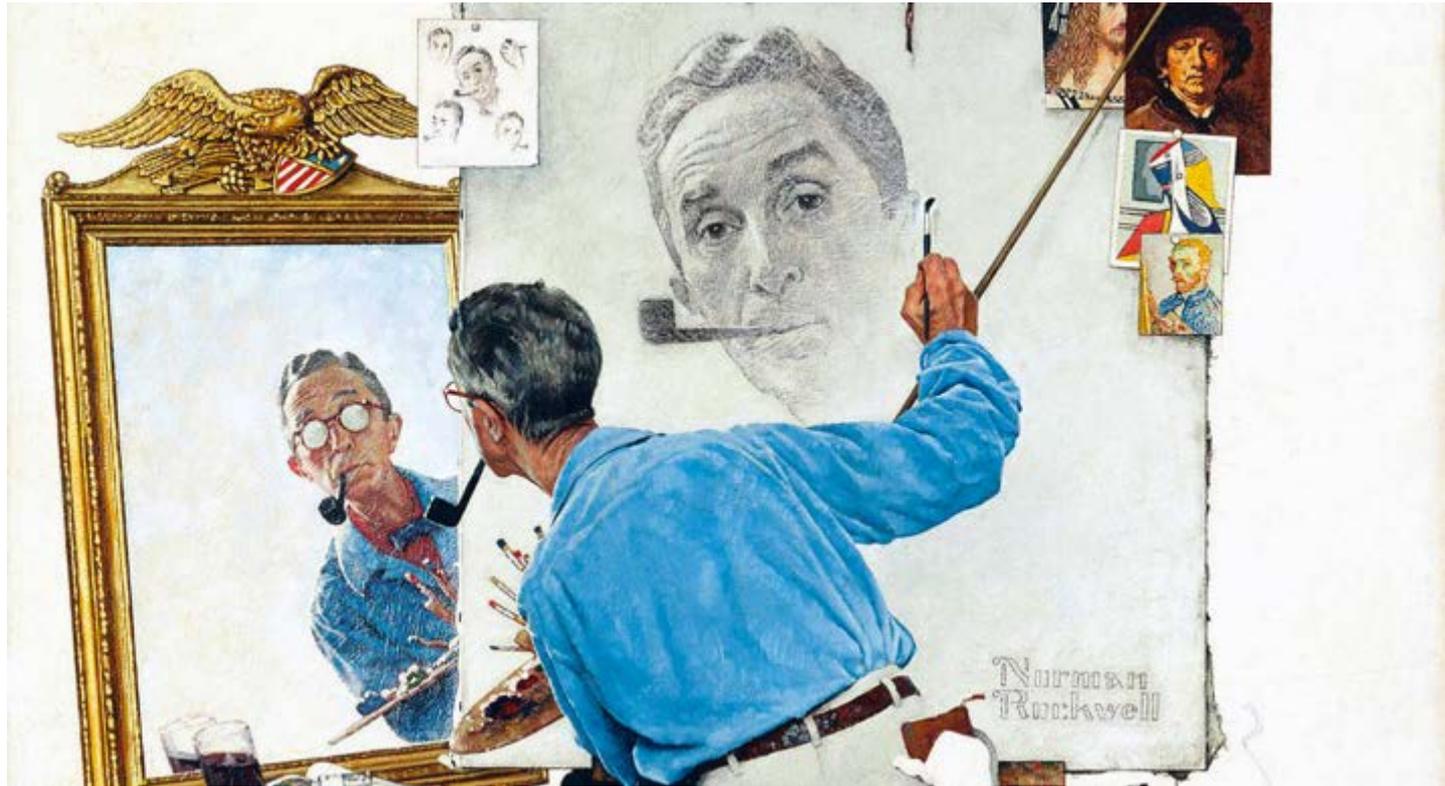
KEY WORD OUTLINE

The Hare and the Tortoise

1. making, fun, slow
2. annoyed, offered, race
3. _____
4. _____
5. _____
6. _____
7. _____



MODELS AS SOURCES OF IMITATION



The Hare and the Tortoise

1. making, fun, slow
2. annoyed, offered, race
3. H laughed, contest, agreed
4. Fox, course, judge
5. started, H ahead, rest, zzz
6. meanwhile, T plodding, reached
7. awoke, finish, already

UNIT
1

Note Making and Outlines

Name
Date
I. _____
1. _____
2. _____
3. _____
4. _____
5. _____

3
words
max!

Read.
Think.
Look up.
Speak.



UNIT
2

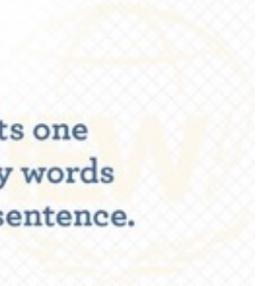
Writing from Notes

Name
Date
Title
~~~~~
~~~~~
~~~~~
~~~~~
~~~~~
~~~~~
~~~~~

INDENT

Double  
space!

Title repeats one  
to three key words  
from final sentence.



## 3 Retelling Narrative Stories

### Story Sequence Chart

#### I. CHARACTERS/SETTING

*Who is in the story?*  
*What are they like?*  
*When does it happen?*  
*Where do they live or go?*



#### II. CONFLICT/PROBLEM

*What do they need or want?*  
*What do they think?*  
*What do they say and do?*



#### III. CLIMAX/RESOLUTION

*How is the need resolved?*  
*What happens after?*  
*What is the message/lesson?*  
 Title repeats one to three key words from final sentence.

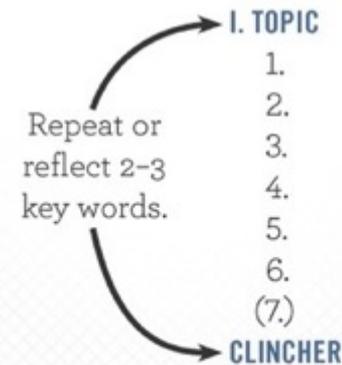


## 4 Summarizing a Reference

- key words from facts
- choose 5–7 facts
- 3 words maximum
- 1 topic per ¶



### Topic-Clincher Rule



## 5 Writing from Pictures

<b>I. CENTRAL FACT</b> 1. 2. 3. (details) 4. Clincher	
----------------------------------------------------------------------	--

<b>II. CENTRAL FACT</b> 1. 2. 3. (details) 4. Clincher	
-----------------------------------------------------------------------	--

<b>III. CENTRAL FACT</b> 1. 2. 3. (details) 4. Clincher	
------------------------------------------------------------------------	--

### ASK QUESTIONS

Who?  
 What?  
 When?  
 Where?  
 Why?  
 Before?  
 After?  
 Outside?

### ADVANCED

**Central Fact:** past tense  
**Details:** past perfect  
 (*had been, had done, had _____*)  
**Clincher:** past tense

## 6 Summarizing Multiple References

- find multiple sources
- choose topics
- 1 outline/topic/source
- create fused outline

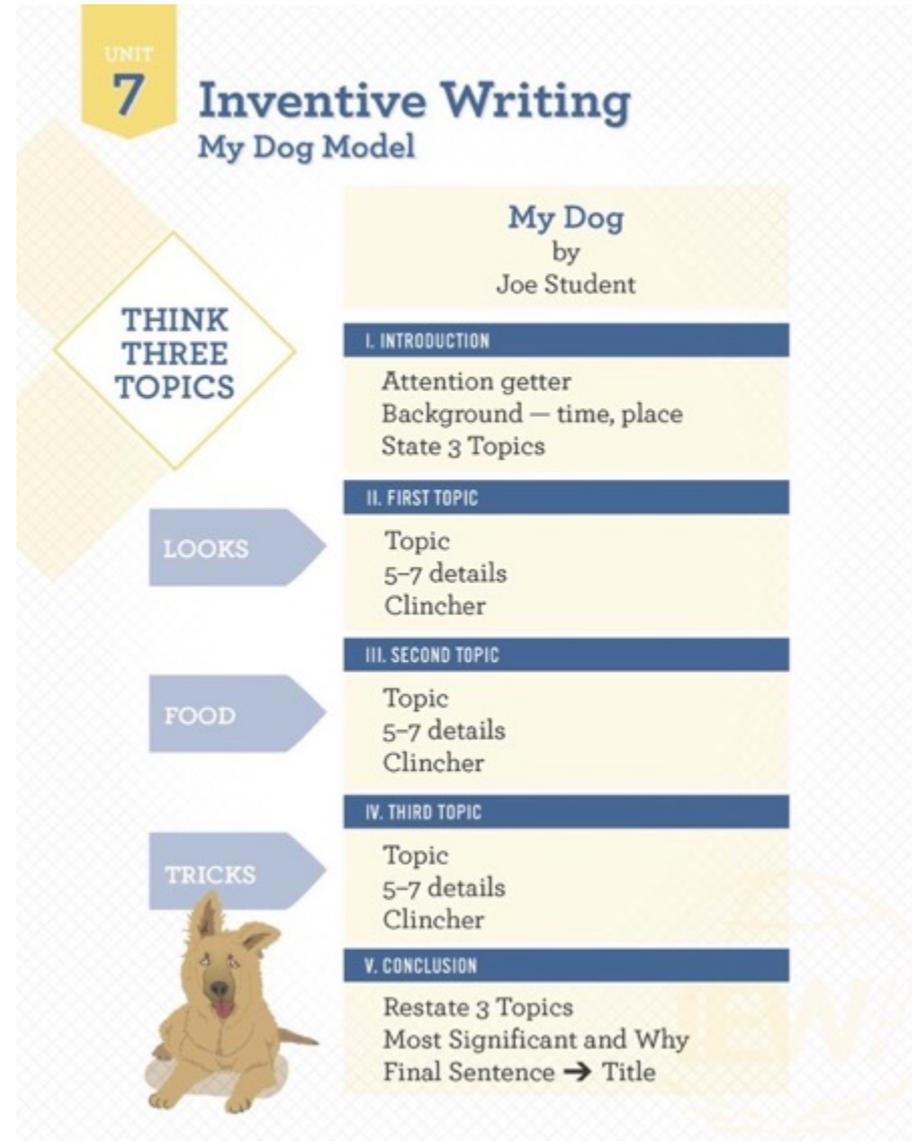


SOURCE 1 (info on source)	SOURCE 2 (info on source)	SOURCE 3 (info on source)
I. Topic A 1. 2. 3. (4.)	I. Topic A 1. 2. 3. (4.)	I. Topic A 1. 2. 3. (4.)
<b>USEFUL INFORMATION</b> <i>quotes</i> <i>due date</i> <i>or more notes</i>	<b>FUSED OUTLINE</b> I. Topic A 1. 2. 3. 4. 5. 6. (7.) Clincher	<b>STYLE LIST</b> <input type="checkbox"/> <i>-ly adverb</i> <input type="checkbox"/> <i>who/which clause</i> <input type="checkbox"/> <i>strong verb etc.</i>

Other writing programs start here.

Assignments include

- brain inventory
- prompt, e.g., “Write about your home.”
- letter
- author imitation



UNIT

8

## Basic Essay Model

THINK  
THREE  
TOPICS

EXPLORER

SETTLER

SOLDIER



Champlain  
by  
Joe Student

I. INTRODUCTION

II. TOPIC A

III. TOPIC B

IV. TOPIC C

V. CONCLUSION



UNIT

9

## Formal Critique



INTRODUCTION

I. Introduction

- Attention getter
- Type of story
- Title
- Author

UNIT 3 STORY SEQUENCE

II. Characters/Setting

- People or animals in story
- Place, time, mood

III. Conflict/Problem

- Problems that must be solved
- What characters think, say, and do

IV. Climax/Resolution

- Turning point of story
- Outcome of main characters

CONCLUSION

V. Conclusion

- Liked? Disliked? Why?
- Message/Theme





# IEW's Nine Units

Unit 1: Note Making and Outlines

Unit 2: Writing from Notes

Unit 3: Retelling Narrative Stories

Unit 4: Summarizing a Reference

Unit 5: Writing from Pictures

Unit 6: Summarizing Multiple  
References

Unit 7: Inventive Writing

Unit 8: Formal Essay Models

Unit 9: Formal Critique



## A FEW EXAMPLES OF IEW STYLISTIC TECHNIQUES:

### Dress-Up Examples

-ly adverb  
strong verb  
who-which clause

### Sentence Opener Examples

[2] prepositional opener  
[4] -ing opener  
[5] clausal opener

### Decoration Examples

alliteration  
similes and metaphors

1. Note Making and Outlines
2. Writing from Notes
3. Retelling Narratives Stories
4. Summarizing a Reference
5. Writing from Pictures
6. Summarizing Multiple References
7. Inventive Writing
8. Formal Essay Models
9. Formal Critique



*Teaching Writing: Structure and Style*

[IEW.com/TWSS](http://IEW.com/TWSS)

# STYLISTIC IMITATION

- “Power Tips for Planning and Writing a College-Level Paper” (Actually, “How to Spy on Your Professor ...”)

- Analyze: D  
*Correct Bedti*  
(What makes

- Rewrite a fa



arner's *Politically*

?)



## The Race

Once upon a day quite cheerful, there was no soul one bit tearful,  
Save a weak but not quite weary little terrapin of yore.  
For he had received an earful, from a rabbit who was fearful,  
That his record of great running had become forgotten lore,  
A memory, and nothing more.

Hence, the tortoise challenged Rabbit for a chance to show his habit,  
Of great running and to save it in the books forevermore.  
The rabbit instantly agreed to this chance to show his speed,  
To the terribly naive turtle of quite famous lore,  
Remembered now forevermore.



# AUTHOR IMITATION

- Advice to a college student ...
- Imitate the structure of an essay by Twain, Chesterton, etc.
- Build the repertoire of Structure and Style ideas through exposure, memorization, imitation.
- These become the tools and material which make greater creativity possible!



Edmund Burke



It is by imitation, far more than by precept, that we learn everything; and what we learn thus, we acquire not only more effectually, but more pleasantly.

AZ QUOTES





Imitation, if noble and general, insures  
the best hope of originality.

– Edward Bulwer-Lytton

AZ QUOTES





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# Institute for Excellence in Writing

Listen. Speak. Read. Write. Think!



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