



Listen. Speak. Read. Write. Think!



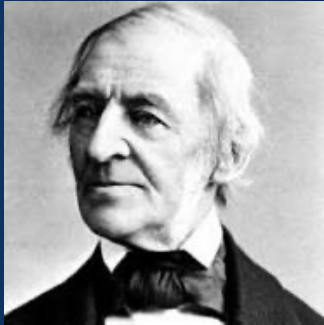
# From Copywork to Composition

*Learning Writing through Imitation*

Presented by Andrew Pudewa

Founder and Director of the Institute for Excellence in Writing

“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 is a natural human faculty.
- Improvement requires a model.
- Progressivism discourages imitation.
- 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
- Elocutions  
style: how to say it
- Memory  
“furnish the mind” and technique
- Delivery  
specific to public speaking



# How Does Anyone Write Something?

1. The writer must find an idea (usually part of a sequence).
  - Ideas can preexist inside the mind (memory/imagination) or outside the mind.
  - Ideas can preexist primarily in words or in images and sensory impressions.
2. The writer must speak the idea into existence (aloud or internally).
3. The writer must hear the words spoken.
4. The writer must hold the words in memory.
5. The writer must use previously acquired skills to make letters and spell words.
6. The writer must remember the sequence of words to convey the idea.
7. The writer must check to see that what was written correctly reflects the idea.
8. Repeat until finished (or exhausted!).

# 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*

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# Imitation in Writing: Beginning Steps

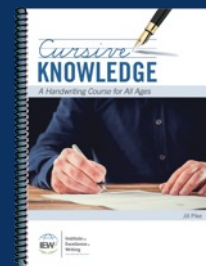
## Simple Copywork

Builds stamina and patterns of language

Creates confidence

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[IEW.com/CK-S](http://IEW.com/CK-S)





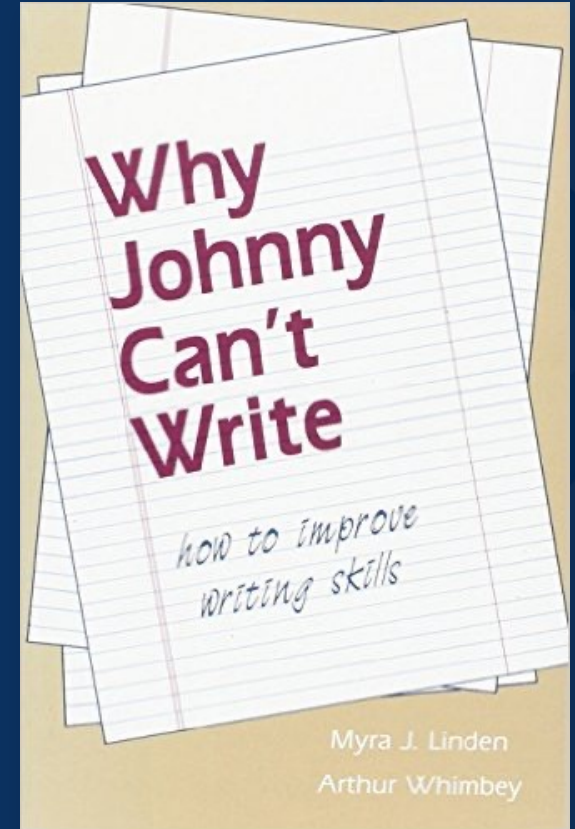
# Why Johnny Can't Write

## The Two Best

- Text reconstruction
- Sentence combining

## The Two Worst

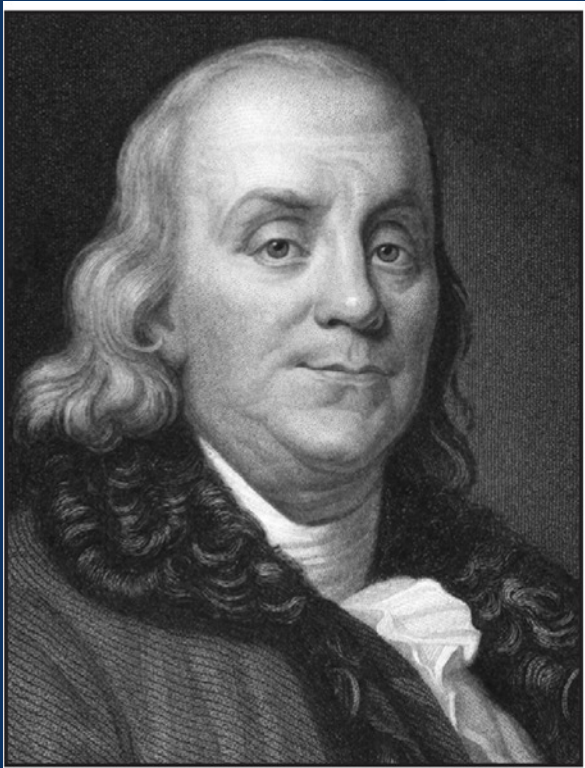
- Overreliance on grammar
- Freewriting



# Text Reconstruction

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

# Not a “new” idea; Benjamin Franklin used it! Excerpt from his 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 in Writing: Beginning Steps

## Imitation through Text Reconstruction

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# 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. \_\_\_\_\_
8. \_\_\_\_\_

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# Key Word Outline

## The Hare and the Tortoise

1. making, fun, slow
2. \_\_\_\_\_
3. \_\_\_\_\_
4. \_\_\_\_\_
5. \_\_\_\_\_
6. \_\_\_\_\_
7. \_\_\_\_\_
8. \_\_\_\_\_

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# Key Word Outline

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3. H laughed, contest, agreed
4. \_\_\_\_\_
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6. \_\_\_\_\_
7. \_\_\_\_\_
8. \_\_\_\_\_

## Unit 1: Note Making and Outlines

## Unit 2: Writing from Notes



# 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

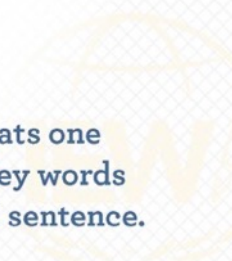
## Writing from Notes

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

INDENT

Double  
space!

Title repeats one  
to three key words  
from final sentence.



# Using Models as a Part of Imitation

## UNIT 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.*



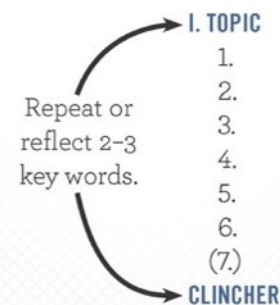
## UNIT 4

### Summarizing a Reference

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



#### Topic-Clincher Rule





# Using Models as a Part of Imitation

UNIT

5

## Writing from Pictures

### I. CENTRAL FACT

- 1.
- 2.
3. (details)
- 4.
- Clincher



### ASK QUESTIONS

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

### II. CENTRAL FACT

- 1.
- 2.
3. (details)
- 4.
- Clincher



### III. CENTRAL FACT

- 1.
- 2.
3. (details)
- 4.
- Clincher



### ADVANCED

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

UNIT

6

## Summarizing Multiple References

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

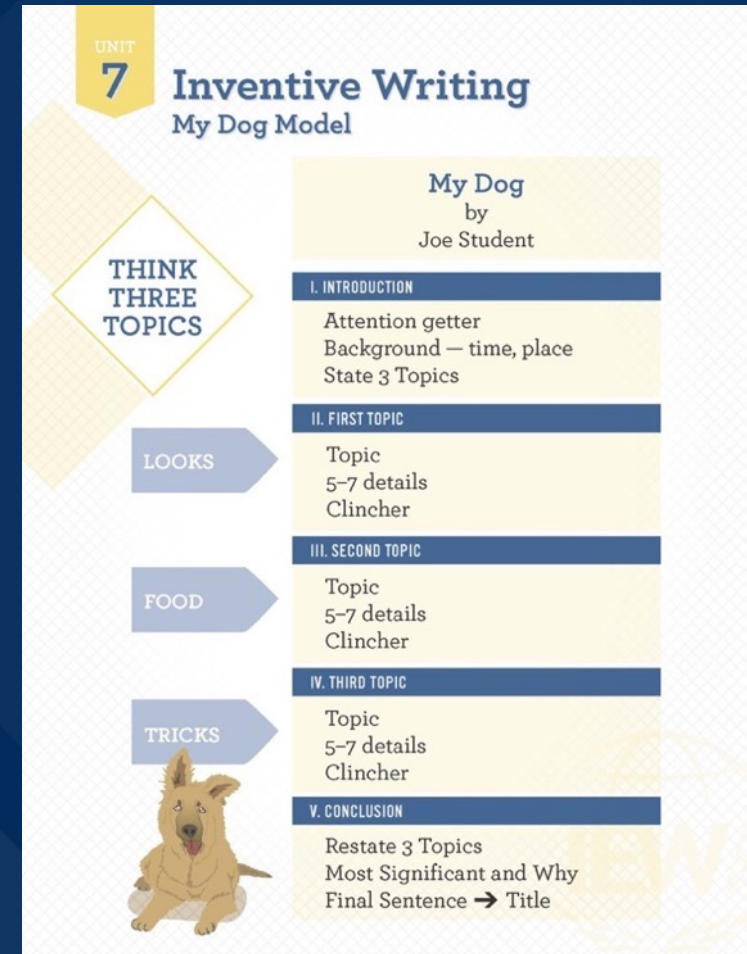


SOURCE 1 (info on source)	SOURCE 2 (info on source)	SOURCE 3 (info on source)
I. Topic A	I. Topic A	I. Topic A
1.	1.	1.
2.	2.	2.
3.	3.	3.
(4.)	(4.)	(4.)
USEFUL INFORMATION	FUSED OUTLINE	STYLE LIST
quotes due date or more notes	I. Topic A	<input type="checkbox"/> -ly adverb
	1.	<input type="checkbox"/>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

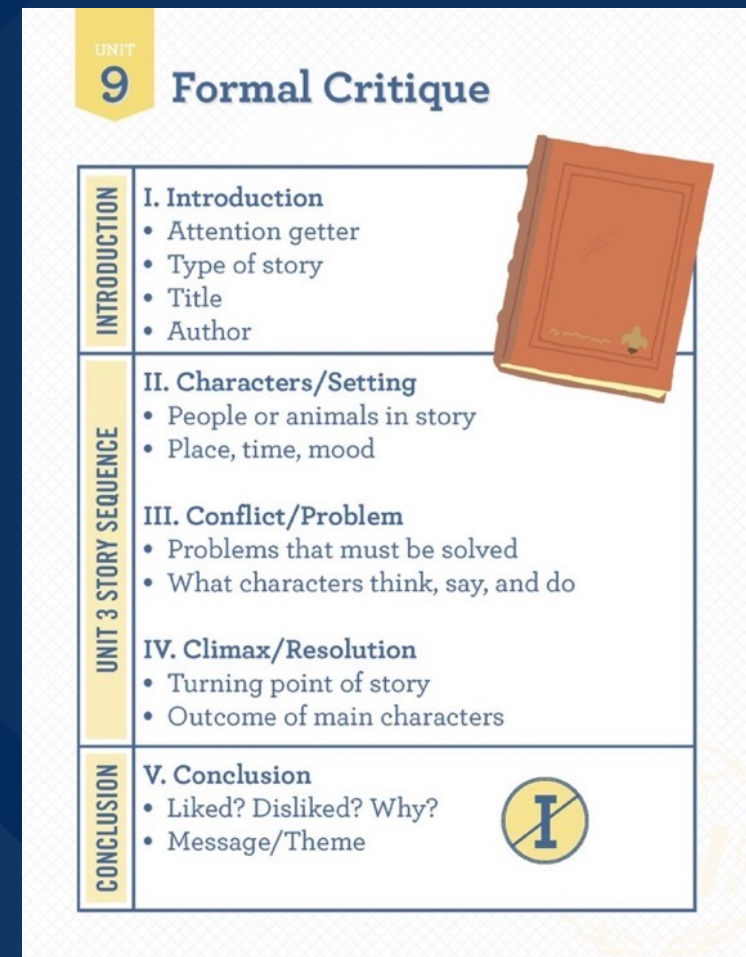
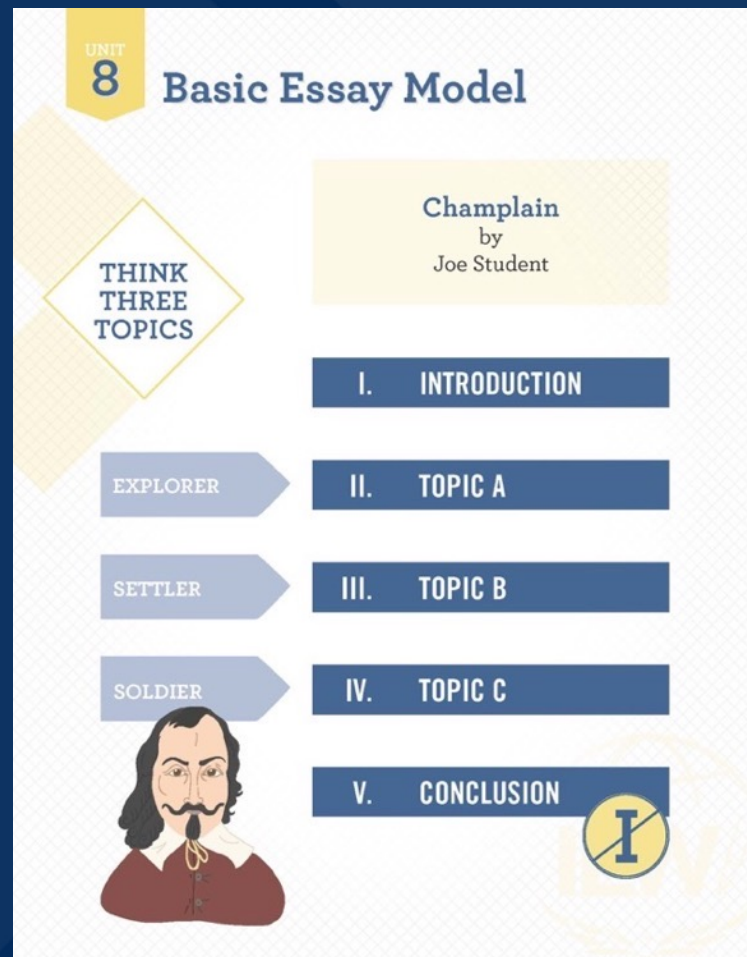
# Where Other Writing Programs Start

Assignments include

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



# Using Models as a Part of Imitation



# Stylistic Imitation

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

Analyze Dickens, Twain, and James Finn Garner’s *Politically Correct Bedtime Stories*

(What makes Dickens sound like Dickens?)

Rewrite a fable in the style of ...



# 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!

# Author Imitation

“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.”

– Edmund Burke (1756)

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

– Edward Bulwer-Lytton (1803–1873)

“Imitation is not just the sincerest form of flattery—it’s the sincerest form of learning.”

– George Bernard Shaw (1856–1950)



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