

MAKING WRITING FUN

For students learning English, writing can be a great way to express oneself, explore interests, and communicate opinions. However, writing can also cause anxiety about grammar, spelling, or making mistakes. Some students enjoy writing and some find it challenging or have difficulty thinking of topics to write about. This week's activity, and its variations, can help inspire students who need fresh ideas or have concerns about creating perfect pieces of writing.

ACTIVITY: GRAB BAG WRITING

In this activity, students will choose story elements from grab bags and then write a creative story containing all of them. Stories can be revised and published, and students can share their writing with the class.

LEVEL

High beginner and above

GOAL

To improve students' creative writing skills by having them incorporate random elements into a cohesive story.

MATERIALS

- Grab bags/containers for each of the story elements you plan to use
- Paper cut into small slips
- Pencils and writing paper for students

PROCEDURE

1. Decide which story elements you want students to choose at random. This could include characters, setting, and a problem/conflict, or any other elements you would like to include.

2. For each element, create a grab bag using any containers available that are large enough for students to reach into. Label each of the containers with one of the elements.
3. Record ideas for each element on the slips of paper (one idea per slip), fold them, and put them into the corresponding grab bags. The ideas should be creative and out of the ordinary in order to encourage students to write unusual stories. Below are some ideas for what to include in the grab bags:

Characters	Setting	Problem/Conflict
an alien from Mars	the school cafeteria	someone is chasing the main character
an octopus	a shopping mall	the main character has lost something important
a famous actor	a very quiet library	the main character is accused of a crime
a person from a country very different from ours	a crowded beach	everyone's hands have disappeared
a police officer	a busy hospital	there is an overflowing river of green slime taking over the city
a snowman	a child's birthday party	the main character has suddenly become invisible to everyone else
a government official	a farm	
a famous singer	a large city	

4. Once the grab bags are created, explain the activity to students. Tell the students that they will be writing a story, but that some parts of the story will be things they choose from the grab bags. Show them the grab bags and explain that each has different slips of paper with creative ideas for characters, setting, and problems that they will need to include in their writing.
5. If your students need explicit instructions, you can model choosing items from the grab bags and creating a short story on the board or chart paper to show them how to complete the activity.
6. Here are some options for how to use the grab bags:
 - Have each student choose an item from each of the grab bags and individually write a story.

- Allow students to choose only one element from the grab bag. For example, they may choose a random setting but create their own characters and problem in the story.
 - Choose one slip from each of the grab bags and write them on the board for the whole class to use in writing individual stories. In this instance, every student will have the same character, problem, and setting, but their ideas for how the story progresses will be different.
 - Group students and have each group select elements from the grab bags to use in individual stories. This way there will be several stories with the same elements, but different plots.
7. After students have finished writing their stories, they can share them with the rest of the class or in small groups. The best part of this activity is hearing the creative ways that students have incorporated the different elements they chose!
8. If it is appropriate for your class, you can continue the activity by allowing students to work in groups or pairs to revise and edit their stories. Have them create a final copy and even add illustrations of a scene from their writing. These can be displayed in the classroom or shared in a class book for others to read.

VARIATIONS

- Instead of having individual students choose one element from each of the grab bags, you can conduct this activity in other ways. One way is to choose characters, a setting, and a problem that the entire class must use in their writing. In this instance, every student will have the same character, problem, and setting, but their ideas for how the story progresses will be different. Alternatively, choose one of the elements, such as a set of random characters, for the whole class. Additionally, you can group students and have each group select elements from the grab bags to use in individual stories. This way there will be several stories with the same elements but

different plots. Groups can also work together to write one story. All of these ideas create interesting pieces for students to share and compare after their writing is complete.

- Have students choose pictures or photographs instead of story elements. Students can find their own pictures in magazines or on the internet and then use them to write a fictional story based on what they see happening in the image. A grab bag of pictures can also be prepared ahead of time and students can randomly choose a picture to use for their writing.
- Place a random assortment of objects in a grab bag instead of story elements. Have students choose one object to inspire their story or a set of objects to incorporate into their story. As an added challenge, you can choose a setting where students' object-based stories must take place.
- This activity can also be used for advanced students to practice argumentative writing. In this variation, prepare two grab bags. One contains community members/roles and the other contains questions about specific issues. This is challenging to students because they must consider the point of view the community member might have based on the question they choose from the second grab bag. Students must use their ideas to formulate an essay. Before students begin writing, allow them to meet in small groups to brainstorm their ideas with classmates. Some ideas for community members and questions are:

Community Members/Roles	Questions
a teacher	Do you think social media is helpful or harmful?
a secondary school or university student	Do you think recycling should be mandatory?
a recent immigrant	Do standardized tests show students' abilities?
a police officer	Should university education be free?
a government official	Are online classes as effective as learning in a classroom?
a parent	Do violent TV shows cause violence in real life?
a school headmaster or principal	Should healthcare be free?
a farmer	Should cell phones be allowed in classrooms?

a religious official	Should the school day be longer?
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