

– Teaching Writing in Elementary School and Middle School –

Ten Types of Writing Prompts and Various Genres on State and District Writing Assessments

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Ten Types of Writing Prompts and Various Genres on State and District Writing Assessments

Do you have a writing assessment around the corner? If so, what should you do? Many teachers hop on the writing-assessment treadmill and target that writing assessment. Then when the writing assessment is over, they sigh relief and get in line to hop on the next writing-assessment treadmill.

If time is of the essence, perhaps you do want to target your current writing assessment. But when that's all done, you may want to devote a little time to understanding all types of writing assessments. This eBook is an excellent place to begin.

Here are three types of writing that I monitor closely and on which I want to see writing results and writing progress:

1. daily writing across the curriculum
2. writing assignments across the curriculum
3. state and district writing assessments

Everything that I teach my students about writing should improve these three types of writing. The reverse is also true—I use these three types of writing to teach writing and to improve my students' writing. Although writing assessments are just one thing I look at, when we understand writing assessments, we are starting with the end in mind. Unlike so much in teaching writing, writing assessments are objective and concrete, which makes them a useful tool.

This eBook addresses every type of writing-assessment prompt I have come across. At the same time, this eBook covers many of the most important genres of student writing. In short, we will look at ten types of writing prompts and ten genres of writing. In the process, we will examine many examples of released writing prompts from actual state writing assessments. Here are the prompt types that we will cover:

1. Narrative: Realistic/Personal
2. Narrative: Imaginative
3. Expository: Informational/Explanatory
4. Persuasive/Argument/Opinion
5. Descriptive
6. Summarize
7. Response to Literature/Literary Analysis
8. Constructed Response: Brief
9. Constructed Response: Extended
10. Tricky Prompts: Mixed Genre or Blended Text

Examining Ten Types of Writing Prompts and Various Genres

This eBook is an examination and analysis of two things:

1. writing prompts on state writing assessments
2. the genres required on state writing assessments

The first thing that you want to do is download a few collections of **Released Writing Prompts from State Writing Assessments** here. My goal is to help teachers see exactly what is on these writing prompts. Sometimes these prompts are straightforward, and sometimes they are complex. It's important to note that on many writing assessments, students can write well but still score low if they don't address every aspect of the prompt.

Also worth mentioning, I've seen plenty of prompt techniques and strategies that simply do not work and some that actually distract students and take them off track. By the time you finish here, that won't be a problem for you or your students. I teach my students to see what's right in front of them on the prompt, along with how to break down the prompt and create prewriting.

Each type of writing prompt elicits a specific type of writing. This means that as we look at ten types of writing prompts, we will look at ten genres of writing. Our analysis of each prompt type will contain three parts:

1. An explanation of the type of prompt and the genre.
2. Commentary and analysis.
3. One or more samples of released writing prompts.

Once again, some prompt types are pretty straightforward, but others require more explanation and analysis.

The Genres

All writing prompts target a genre. For a piece of writing to be in a genre, the piece of writing must meet the requirements of the genre. Put simply, a piece of writing must contain many or at least some of the commonly accepted qualities and characteristics of the genre to be in the genre.

Here are three important categories of genre for student writing across the curriculum:

1. **Fiction/Non-Fiction**
2. **The Four Main Genres:** Narrative, Descriptive, Expository, Argument

3. **Format Genres:** Essay, Article, Report, Research Report, Story, Letter, Journal, Summary, Short Answer, Constructed Response, Response to Literature/Literary Essay, Review/Critique, Advertisement, Directions, Sketch/Passage, Note, E-mail, Poetry.

Although writing prompts on state writing assessments don't target all of these genres, the prompts do target well more than half. More importantly, the prompts often target several genres in one prompt. How can that be? To answer that question, be sure to read "#10 Tricky Prompts: Mixed Genre or Blended Text." You may also want to read "[The Common Core's Writing Genres and Blended Text.](#)"

The Four Main Genre and the Six Traits of Writing

Human beings have an amazing talent for creating categories. However, in writing, many of these categories are tools, not rules.

The four main genres are an extremely helpful tool. I think about these four main genres on four different levels: 1) whole composition, 2) paragraph, 3) chunk, and 4) sentence.

1. Expository: We inform and explain.
2. Narrative: We tell what happened.
3. Description: We create pictures in the mind of our readers.
4. Argument: We provide evidence and give reasons to prove things and persuade.

When we examine professionally written text, we often find that one minute the writer is narrating and describing, and the next minute the writer is explaining the significance of the event. Later, the writer is arguing for change. If you read my free [Ten Stages of Paragraph and Multi-Paragraph Mastery](#) eBook, you will see that I call this kind of writing ORGANIZED and NATURAL writing. In short, the writer communicates what is necessary, important, and interesting in an organized and natural way.

Many writing prompts on writing assessments are designed to encourage ORGANIZED and NATURAL writing. Of course, all rubrics penalize unorganized writing even if it's naturally unorganized writing.

As I analyze and break down writing prompts with students, I teach students the qualities and characteristics of the whole-composition genre, but I also teach students to use the four main genres as tools. And all of this goes hand in hand with the Six Traits of Writing: 1) Ideas, 2) Organization, 3) Sentence Fluency, 4) Word Choice, 5) Conventions, and 6) Voice.

How Does this Relate to **Pattern Based Writing: Quick & Easy Essay**?

I put **Pattern Based Writing: Quick & Easy Essay** down on paper for one reason—it works. The first time I threw out these patterns I could see on my students' faces that they got it. It was shockingly obvious. Two months later, my students were saying, "I finally get it! I can't even read what I was writing before!"

Naturally, I didn't throw away everything I had learned about teaching writing over the previous decade. Why would I? After all, I had developed a nice repertoire of strategies and techniques for teaching writing. However, **Pattern Based Writing: Quick & Easy Essay** became my foundation and my framework for teaching writing. I now use the program and create competent, confident writers fast. Then I build on that success. **Pattern Based Writing: Quick & Easy Essay** is what makes teaching writing easy.

Because the curriculum is a systematic methodology, if I wanted to teach the curriculum with just these **Released Writing Prompts** on the front board—I could. Or I could teach the methodology entirely by **Teaching Writing Across the Curriculum**. In fact, I created the program teaching writing across the curriculum. To some degree, I do both. However, I also use many parts of the curriculum page by page because it's easy and foolproof.

Teaching the qualities and characteristics of genre is an important part of how I build on the program. As you will see, much of what follows relates to genre.

How I Marked the Genres in the Following Examples

You will notice that I include a few different example prompts for each of the ten prompt types. Of course, it would be rather pointless to include prompts in each section that were exactly the same. For this reason, I found different kinds of prompts from within each main prompt type.

If the prompt says LETTER, ESSAY, or ARTICLE, I will label it as such and underline the word. I also underline words and label words like these: DESCRIBE = DESCRIPTIVE and EXPLAIN = EXPOSITORY.

When you see "Expository Persuasive," it means that the prompt is a persuasive writing prompt, but that the prompt also asks students to EXPLAIN, which is expository. Point being: the genres are often interconnected. I make this point clear in prompt type #10 "Tricky Prompts: Mixed Genre or Blended Text." For now, think about the main genre, but also think about the four main genres as tools for creating organized and natural writing.

The Truth: A Note on Essays and Stories on Writing Assessments: Except for the Summary Prompt, all of these writing prompts require that students write an essay or a story.

1. **Story:** As far as story goes, some story prompts require a true story, some require an essay story, and some require a story essay. In short, the more the writer must structure the events into a story format and use story elements, the more it is a story. The more personal reflection that the writer must communicate, the more the story is an essay. If a story comes completely from the imagination, even if it seems real and reflective, it's a story—not an essay.
2. **Essays and Narrative Essays:** Although some of these essays and narrative essays are in letter or article format, they are still essays. Put simply: If the analysis, commentary, or reflection comes directly from the writer, it's an essay. An essay communicates a personal interpretation, understanding, or reflection on a topic or experience. On writing assessments, if it's not an imaginative story, it's an essay of some kind.

The Prompt Formats: For the most part, I left the formatting of the writing prompts intact. Writing prompts on writing assessments tend to skip lines between different parts of the prompt.

Once again, here are the prompt types that we will cover:

1. Narrative: Realistic/Personal
2. Narrative: Imaginative
3. Expository: Informational/Explanatory
4. Persuasive/Argument/Opinion
5. Descriptive
6. Summarize
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Let's begin!

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Ten Types of Writing Prompts and Various Genres on State and District Writing Assessments

1. Narrative: Realistic/Personal

These are personal narrative essays. Personal narrative essays can range from more of a reflective, expository narrative essay to a realistic story.

Tennessee: Grade 4 Narrative Story

Writing Situation: Forgetting can cause problems. Think about a day when you forgot something.

Directions for Writing: Before you begin to write, think about what you forgot and what happened.

Now, write a story about what happened the day you forgot something.

Pennsylvania: Grade 9 Narrative Story

You can probably remember a time when you or someone else tried to prepare food.

Tell a story about a time when the experience was a complete success or a total disaster.

Kentucky: Grade 5 Narrative Article

Situation: A “Special Memories” booklet is being published at your school to hand out to all students. Think about an interesting event or a special time to include in the booklet.

Writing Task: Write an article for the “Special Memories” booklet telling about an interesting event or a special time. Be sure to include details that help the students understand why you chose this time or event.

IMPORTANT NOTE: The Kentucky assessment annotation labels this writing assignment “*Narrate an Event for a Transactive Purpose: Article.*”

So, what genre is this? Make no mistake about it—it’s a personal narrative essay article. It requires that students include qualities and characteristics from all four genres.

How important is this fact? Here is how Kentucky penalized a student on a similar Grade 12 prompt: “The writer identifies the response as an article at one point, but it seems likely the writer has merely

used the wrong term to refer to the response. The introductory and concluding statements seem to suggest that the response is actually a speech.” Elsewhere in the analysis, Kentucky uses the term “speech genre.” Point being: *Articles* and *speeches* are both genres, and students must meet the requirements of the genre.

In case you are wondering, yes, I could have included this prompt (and many other prompts) in the “#10 Tricky Prompts: Mixed Genre or Blended Text.” However, since I make this point here, I hope you will think about this aspect of writing and genres throughout all ten types of writing prompts.

2. Narrative: Imaginative

These are usually pure story. The more students create an effective story structure and use story elements, the better the story will be. However, some students will write more of an imaginative personal narrative essay. Keep this in mind: many story techniques are advanced skills that should be rewarded, but on a writing assessment, they do open the door for errors in grammar, mechanics, and conventions. Rubrics often don’t take this into account, but they do penalize for errors.

California: Grade 4 Narrative

One day while you are out on a walk with a dog, the dog suddenly starts talking about where he used to live and how he would like to visit that place again. Write about what happens that day.

Pennsylvania: Grade 9 Descriptive Narrative

You are a pair of shoes. You may be any kind of footwear.

Describe yourself in detail and tell about your most memorable experience.

Oregon: Grade 10 Narrative Story

Make up a story that uses one of the following: “The Fork” or “It’s Too Light” or “The View.”

3. Expository: Informational/Explanatory

I’ve always said that “Explain + Inform = Expository.” It’s just what made sense to me, and for all practical purposes, I was correct. Of course, some texts are more informational than explanatory (e.g., newspaper articles, encyclopedia articles, resumes, etc.), and some are more explanatory. Having said that, we almost always inform while we explain, but the reverse is not quite so true.

Most informational writing prompts are actually expository writing prompts, as they ask students to both inform and explain. Here's a question: Is informational writing different than expository writing? To answer this question, we must answer this question: Does the word *inform* mean the same thing as *explain*? No, it doesn't. If an informational writing prompt asks students to explain, then it is an expository writing prompt. To clear up the confusion, here are three important definitions from Google.com:

- ➔ **Expository:** intended to explain or describe something.
- ➔ **Explain:** make (an idea, situation, or problem) clear to someone by describing it in more detail or revealing relevant facts or ideas.
- ➔ **Inform:** give (someone) facts or information; tell.

Expository writing is the traditional term for informational/explanatory writing; however, the Common Core chose the term informational/explanatory. Years ago, Pennsylvania used Informational writing prompts, so let's compare the two types of prompts (informational vs. expository) and see the difference. Let's also see how Pennsylvania defines Informational writing compared to how the Common Core defines Informational/Explanatory writing. Hint: They look pretty much the same.

Pennsylvania: Informational: "Informational writing is used to share knowledge and convey messages, instructions or ideas by making connections between the familiar and unfamiliar. It is assessed because it is used as a common writing strategy in academic, personal and job-related areas; as a tool that spans a range of thinking skills from recall to analysis and evaluation, and as a means of presenting information in prose. This type of writing has many functions: *to present information through reporting, explaining, directing, summarizing and defining; to organize and analyze information through explaining, comparing, contrasting and relating cause/effect, or to evaluate information through judging, ranking or deciding.*"

– Pennsylvania System of School Assessment - 2001-2001 Writing Assessment
Released Writing Prompts

Pennsylvania: Grade 6 Informational Essay

Think about different weather conditions such as snow, rain, heat, cold, and wind. What one specific weather condition affects you the most? Why? Write an essay explaining the effects of this weather condition.

Pennsylvania: Grade 9 Informational

High school is the time when some students begin to look for part-time employment. What is a good part-time job for someone your age? Why would this job be appropriate for a teenager?

The Common Core: Informational/Explanatory: “Informational/explanatory writing conveys information accurately. This kind of writing serves one or more closely related purposes: to increase readers’ knowledge of a subject, to help readers better understand a procedure or process, or to provide readers with an enhanced comprehension of a concept. Informational/explanatory writing addresses matters such as types and components; size, function, or behavior; how things work; and why things happen.”

– *The Common Core’s Definitions of the Standards’ Three Text Types*

Please note: The following expository writing prompts are from before the Common Core.

Oregon: Grade 3 Expository

Sometimes classrooms have a class pet. Explain what animal you would choose for your class pet and why.

Oregon: Grade 10 Expository

Common fads or trends in music, clothing, and recreation come and go. Choose one fad or trend that is popular now and explain why it is popular and if you think its popularity will last.

Tennessee: Grade 8 Expository Essay

Writing Situation: Most students have a person they want to be like someday. Who is your role model?

Directions for Writing: Before you begin writing, think about what qualities your role model has and why these are important to you. Now write an essay telling who your role model is and explaining why. Support your reasons with specific examples and details.

Need help teaching beginning writers or struggling writers? If so, be sure to check out
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on the homepage!

4. Persuasive/Argument/Opinion

On state and district writing assessments, persuasive, argument, and opinion writing are all the same thing. Everything each student writes comes straight from the student's own mind, life, and experiences. Most are probably not arguments in the Common Core or academic sense of the word.

In 1909, Fred Newton Scott said, "Between exposition and argument it is often hard to distinguish." In a sense, argument is expository writing with an agenda. Looked at another way, argument is two things: 1) giving reasons, and 2) explaining. On writing assessments, student essays are typically short essays. This means that students must create a clear argument structure that makes their points clear. Furthermore, students must provide proof, support, explanation, examples, or evidence for these points.

On writing assessments, everything is built around what the reader SHOULD or SHOULD NOT do or believe. Here is a five-step process that explains how this works:

1. The writer figures out what the reader SHOULD do or believe. To do this, the writer must first figure out what he or she believes SHOULD be done or believed.
2. The writer explains the situation, provides background information, and explains what the reader SHOULD do or believe.
3. The writer gives reasons to convince the reader to do or believe. (Some of these reasons may directly refute the other side's position and reasons.)
4. The writer explains and supports each reason. (Part of this explanation and support may directly refute the other sides position and support.)
5. The writer powerfully concludes.

Note: On writing assessments, we are not told what the other side's argument is. We can only imagine it. For this reason, students should spend most of their time arguing strongly for their own position and points. Although refutation is often a natural part of our own argument, we don't want to get off track and create a meandering essay. On writing assessments, we want a strong offense.

Kentucky: Grade 3 Expository Persuasive Letter

Situation: Your parents want to take you on an African safari for three weeks, but you would have to miss school.

Writing Task: Write a persuasive letter to your teacher explaining all the reasons you should be excused from school to go on an African safari for three weeks.

Pennsylvania: Grade 5 Persuasive Essay

Think about the four seasons. Choose which season is your favorite. Write an essay that persuades your classmates to agree with you.

Virginia: Grade 8 Expository Persuasive

Your principal is considering replacing all physical education classes with study skills classes. Write to explain why you agree or disagree with this idea.

Pennsylvania: Grade 11 Persuasive Article

Your social studies class debated the issue of students working at after-school jobs. You felt so strongly about your ideas that you decided to write an article for the school newspaper.

Write the article to persuade readers to accept your views.

When Given a Choice, Students May Want to Argue Against:

If students are given a choice to argue for or against, it's usually easier to argue against. Just look at the two examples provided above where students are given the choice of arguing for or against. For most students, choosing the negative will be easier:

1. Should we replace all physical education classes with study skills classes? NO! Absolutely not!
2. Should students work after-school jobs? NO! Absolutely not!

I'm not saying that this is a rule, but students should definitely consider which is the easier choice to write about.

5. Descriptive

True descriptive writing tasks are not common on state writing assessments. As a rule, description is an important tool that writers use in the other genres of writing. Here are a few released descriptive writing prompts; however, I would classify the first two otherwise.

Virginia: Grade 5 Descriptive Narrative

Write about a place where you have had fun. Describe what you did there and why it was so much fun.

Virginia: Grade 5 Descriptive Expository

Describe one of your favorite activities. Tell what you like to do and explain why this is your favorite activity

Nebraska: Grade 8 True Descriptive Essay

Think about your dream house. It could be any place you wish. Write an essay describing your dream house by creating a vivid mental picture using sensory details for the readers so that they can see it, experience it, and be able to understand why you would want to live there.

6. Summarize

Summarizing is a special kind of expository text, and these prompts are not common on state writing assessment. In short, students read a passage and then summarize what they have read. Although summarizing tasks are not common, California used summary writing prompts in 2002 in both Grade 4 and Grade 7. Here is what California required on the Grade 4 assessment:

California: Grade 4 Expository Summary

Write a summary of the article. Your writing will be scored on how well you:

- state the main ideas of the article;
- identify the most important details that support the main ideas;
- use your own words in writing the summary; and
- use correct grammar, spelling, punctuation, and capitalization.

7. Response to Literature/Literary Analysis

On assessments, this kind of writing is often called Constructed Response. In short, students read a passage and then answer the prompt by citing evidence and/or by providing examples from the text. This kind of writing is a combination of expository and argument writing. Writers need to argue for and explain their interpretation at the same time. Three popular patterns (that are all the same pattern) for this type of writing are:

1. PQC: Point, Quote, Commentary
2. PQA: Point, Quote, Analysis
3. PQE: Point, Quote, Explanation

When writers are required to “cite evidence,” the writing is certainly related to argument. Here is an example from a California Grade 7 writing assessment:

California: Grade 7 Response to Literature Essay

Write an essay in which you present your understanding of the characters and the overall meaning of the story. Support your ideas with examples and/or evidence from the text. Remember that your writing will be scored on how well you write an essay that:

- shows your understanding of the author's message and your insight into the characters and ideas presented in the story;
- is organized around several clear ideas and/or images from the story;
- justifies your interpretation by giving examples and citing evidence from the text; and
- uses correct grammar, spelling, punctuation, and capitalization.

8. Constructed Response: Brief

As a rule, this is a short-answer essay where students analyze a text and respond to a question about the text. Students should incorporate the question into their answer and cite evidence or examples from the text to support their answer. Although constructed response is usually a writing assignment, this type of writing is also used to assess knowledge in various subjects, including writing, reading, math, and science.

Maryland: Grade 4 Reading Brief Constructed Response

Reading - BCR Rubric - Grades 3-8

High Score: The response demonstrates an understanding of the complexities of the text.

- Addresses the demands of the question
- Effectively uses text-relevant information to clarify or extend understanding

1. Read the story 'The River' and answer the following question.

Explain how the author's use of words and phrases helps reader understand the setting. In your response, use words and phrases from the story that support your explanation. Write your answer on your answer document.

2. Read the story 'The River' and answer the following question.

Describe the relationship between Cory and Elisa and their dog, Minnie. In your response, use details and examples from the story that support your description. Write your answer on your answer document.

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9. Constructed Response: Extended

This is often just a longer version of the above, but sometimes it's a longer, more complicated version of the above. I've come across Common Core constructed response examples that were quite involved and even daunting.

In **Constructed Response: Extended**, students read and examine one or more texts or resources and answer a question. Once again, although constructed response is usually a writing assignment, this type of writing is used to assess knowledge in various subjects. In the New York example below, students are evaluated based on the requirements of both the "Reading and Language standards."

New York: Grade 7 ELA Extended Constructed Response

Extended-response questions are designed to measure a student's ability to write from sources. Questions that measure Writing from Sources prompt students to communicate a clear and coherent analysis of one or two texts. The comprehension and analysis required by each extended response is directly related to grade-specific reading standards. Student responses are evaluated on the degree to which they meet grade-level writing and language expectations. This evaluation is made by using a rubric that incorporates the demands of grade-specific New York State P-12 Reading and Language standards. The integrated nature of the standards for ELA and literacy requires that students are evaluated across the strands (Reading, Writing, and Language) with longer pieces of writing, such as those prompted by the extended-response questions.

Directions: Read this passage. Then answer question 45.

45. The author learns a lesson about culture from his grandmother. How does the author learn this lesson? How does the author show that this lesson has remained with him into his adult life? Use details from the passage to support your response.

In your response, be sure to

- identify the lesson about culture that the grandmother teaches the author
- explain how the author learns this lesson
- explain how the author shows this lesson has remained with him into his adult life
- use details from the passage to support your response

10. Tricky Prompts: Mixed Genre or Blended Text

Some writing prompts are straightforward because they ask for one clear genre. Here is one example:

California: Grade 4 Narrative Story

Imagine that you are asked to keep an elephant for a week. Write a story about your unusual experience with your elephant.

Other prompts are tricky because they are vague as relates to genre. Furthermore, many prompts use words that imply or elicit more than one genre. In reality, these prompts are not tricky if students simply read the prompt and follow the directions. However, students must address every part or aspect of the prompt, and teachers need to teach students how to do this. The outcome may be a Mixed Genre or Blended Text form of writing. What does that mean?

In the Common Core's "Three Text Types," it states the following: "Skilled writers many times use a blend of these three text types to accomplish their purposes." This should be no surprise because back in 1909, Scott and Denny said, "The four main types occur sometimes in the pure form, sometimes commingled. A composition which as a whole is narrative, may contain, and generally does contain, especially if it is long, a great deal of description, more or less exposition, and not infrequently passages of argument." Point being: Blended text is a reality. Do you teach your students that?

I teach students both **concrete writing strategies and natural writing strategies**. Well, when we teach students to break down writing prompts, it's a natural strategy. We are teaching students to approach an assignment that is right in front of them—just like in the real world.

Many writing prompts have mixed genre or blended text built right into the prompt. We don't have to teach students about mixed genre or blended text, but we do have to teach them how to break down these writing prompts so that they address every part of the prompt.

What Genre Is This Prompt Asking For?

Virginia: Grade 5

- **Describe** one of your favorite activities. **Tell what you like to do** and **explain why** this is your favorite activity.

Requirements of the Assignment: Here is an abbreviated version of the requirements that students are told to consider.

1. The central idea of my paper is clear.
2. The central idea of my paper is elaborated.
3. My paper is logically organized.
4. My words and information make my paper interesting to readers.
5. My sentences make sense, sound like me, and read smoothly.
6. I edited my paper to be sure that I used good grammar [and mechanics].

My Analysis: In the Virginia prompts that I have, Virginia does not state the required genre. So what genre of writing is required in the prompt above? After all, we should be able to classify the writing product as PRIMARILY one type of writing or another, especially since a “central idea” is required.

Students have two choices: 1) informational/explanatory, and 2) narrative. In reality, informational/explanatory is the best choice, but it is certainly possible to write a high-scoring essay that is primarily a narrative essay. Regardless, according to the prompt itself, students are required to include three genres: 1) informational/explanatory, 2) narrative, and 3) descriptive.

This prompt break down into three distinct parts with various genre implications:

1. Describe one of your favorite activities. (Description / Expository / Narrative)
2. Tell what you like to do. (Narrative / Informational)
3. Explain why this is your favorite activity. (Expository)

If your students address these three parts and write well, they will score high. It’s that simple. Although this prompt breaks cleanly into three parts, students can approach the prompt more as a whole and weave together all three parts. In fact, that’s what I would expect from advanced writers.

As I mention above, I teach both **concrete writing strategies and natural writing strategies**. I teach students to create organized and effective writing, but I don’t encourage stilted, unnatural writing. Here are five steps that reveal the truth about prompts like these:

1. Teach students how to analyze and break down prompts like this.
2. Teach students the qualities, characteristics, and implications of genre.
3. Teach students to consider the Six Traits as they write.
4. Let students write.
5. Compare the different outcomes.

What Genre Is This Prompt Asking For?

Kentucky: Grade 4

- **Situation:** You and your friend made plans a long time ago to spend this evening together playing. Now, because of the weather you must play inside.
- **Writing Task:** Write a letter to your friend describing a game that you would like to play. Explain why this is the best game for two people to play indoors.

My Analysis: Like Virginia's prompt, this prompt does not state the main genre; however, it does state that it is a LETTER. This prompt is quite similar to the Virginia prompt above. This means that much of what we discussed about genre above applies here.

- **Virginia:** 1) describe activity 2) explain why favorite activity.
- **Kentucky:** 1) describe game 2) explain why best game

Being that this Kentucky prompt is so similar to the Virginia writing prompt, how would you classify this prompt? Did you answer that it is *explaining and presenting a persuasive argument*? That's how the **Kentucky Teacher Annotation** describes the writing prompt:

- "The student shows awareness of an informal audience (a friend) and focuses on explaining the selection of a game and presenting a persuasive argument of why it's the best choice. The student organizes the writing by describing the game while providing some reasons for why this is a good indoor game for two people to play."

In both the Virginia and Kentucky prompts, when students "explain why," they are required to "provide reasons." Providing reasons is the heart of argument and common in exposition. This is why Scott and Denny (1909) said, "Between exposition and argument it is often hard to distinguish."

A Final Note to Teachers

I hope this eBook helps all teachers understand the nuances of the writing prompts and the genres found on writing assessments. However, if you teach beginning writers or struggling writers, I strongly believe you will get farther in teaching writing and create more effective writers if you use the **Pattern Based Writing: Quick & Easy Essay** curriculum as your foundation and framework. You will create a classroom full of confident writers who are interested in writing. You will discover that you can build on that kind of success and confidence and create more writing growth in a single year than you have ever done before. I guarantee it!