

What is Guided Fluency Writing? Why is it important? How can I include it in my program?

Janice GT Penner, Consultant
AACE.English.JGTP@gmail.com

Metro Vancouver ELL Ministry Network
www.AACE-English.com

Materials in this document are informed by a self-published book & CD Rom.

Penner, J.G.T. & Barnes, H.A. (2005). *Think First, Then Write: 101 Writing Topics to Photocopy/on CD Rom*. Vancouver, BC: AACE [Winner of the 2007 TESOL Mary Finocchario Award for Excellence in the Development of Pedagogical Materials/ Non-published materials]. Contact Janice for more info.

Document content

- A. What is Guided Fluency Writing (GFW)?
- B. Benefits for the learner
- C. Fitting fluency writing in a free, low stakes English learning program
- D. Preparation & Logistics
- E. How to design Fluency Writing Prompts
- F. What do these prompts actually look like?

A What is Guided Fluency Writing (GFW)?

GFW is not Proficiency Writing which is “reflected in characteristics such as accuracy, grammatical and lexical complexity, and appropriateness”

Chenoweth, N. A. & Hayes, J. R. (2001). Fluency in writing: Generating text in L1 and L2. *Written Communication*, 18 (1), 80-98.

GFW is not Process Writing: This is a more formal process when ELLs write a draft, get feedback from a peer and/or teacher and write a 2nd draft in order to incorporate the feedback. Evaluation is usually based on all the steps, not just the final “product.”

GFW is not Dialogue Journals: These require the teacher/ tutor to write the same amount as the learners do. They interact by asking questions, etc.

Fluency Writing is writing without considering grammar nor organization of content. In academic contexts, it is the pre-writing stage.

Most teachers believe that writing practice helps learners consolidate their learning. Instructions often include “Write about anything you want” or “Write at least 1 full page every day” or “Write for 20 minutes at the same time every day.”

However, learners tend to flounder after a few pages because they don’t know what to write about!

Guided Fluency Writing uses prompts so that writers can focus on a topic. I have designed my prompts as “Think First, Then Write.” Plus, the product of the writing need not only be paragraphs. The format can be lists, sentences, collages, charts or poems to name a few.

B Why is Guided Fluency Writing important?

Benefits

Enhances Self-Reflection

- Opportunity to reflect on personal experiences
- Personal experiences and feelings are validated
- Increases involvement in the learning process (if reflection topics are given)
- A safe, private place to express ideas (if confidentiality is promised).
- Writers have a permanent “record” of their perspective at this stage in their lives
- Writer’s inner critics are decreased

Facilitates Self-Expression skills

- Writers express their “English self,” which can be liberating
- Writers use their own voice, so there is no need to plagiarize or use AI
- Writers can take more risks and thus build confidence
- Writers decide how much personal info they want to share
- Writers are relaxed because low stakes writing can decrease anxiety
- Writers might search their dictionaries for words that are meaningful for them.

(As an academic prep instructor, I found that students could speak fairly well, but their writing skills did not match. Their former program focused on speaking only. Practicing both skills concurrently can help to fill that gap.)

Excerpts from some English learner reflections

| | |
|---|---------------------------|
| <i>I will keep this journal forever. I am sure my children will enjoy reading this “picture of me” when I was 25 in Vancouver.</i> | Female, Poland |
| <i>I enjoyed journal because it gave me challenge.. I learned how to think, many country’s culture, and some vocabulary. I was very interested in topics. .</i> | Male, Korea |
| <i>When I come home to Korea, I’ll do this journal topics in Korean writing. This homework is good for my writing but also my mind.</i> | Female, Korea |
| <i>This was tough for me. When I started this course, I could not write anything! These topics helped me relax and encouraged me to write more.</i> | Male, Russia |
| <i>I feel that the topics teacher gave us are very good because I can write my thoughts and opinions. I put all my heart to write the journal. Whenever I saw feedback from you, I feel so happy because I can feel the teacher was looking at my journal with her heart, too. Fluency journal is just like writing a letter to your best friend that you don’t have to check the grammar or worry about anything wrong or not.</i> | Female, ROC |
| <i>The journal is a very good way to keep teachers know what students are thinking and doing, which makes a necessary guide to teaching goals. A prompt and to the point response from you to each entry gives students much encouragement and positive assessment. ... The fluency writing is a communication between oneself and his inside goal. It builds up confidence. It’s a dialogue with your soul rather than homework. I like it! I can’t decide the title for my journal – “The Road to Success” OR “The Steps to Winning.”</i> | Male English teacher, PRC |

C Fitting fluency writing into a free, low stakes language program

1. All the prompts can just be used for discussions, but writing truly does help consolidate their learning and memory.
2. For some prompts, they could discuss their ideas during class and write later.
3. You can decide to make the writing prompts an option. There are usually a few learners who want extra work. I assigned Guided Fluency Writing over and above all the academic writing tasks they had to complete. Very few students complained.
4. You can use their writing for future lesson or tasks or discussions.
You may see that many make similar errors. You could make a short editing task for them. They all thought through the topic, so it's not too onerous for them.

Be very sure to delete/ change any personally identifying info

Example: Task from Ten Cultural Questions (Intermediate ELLs)

- The learners wrote the questions. I collected some I knew that at least some ELLs could correct and made a task they could do in pairs or groups of 3.

For your info

Writing Prompt: **Ten Cultural Questions**

Think First: What do you want to know about a country or culture before you move there? What questions did you have before you came here? Is some information more important than other info?

Then Write: Write 10 questions that you would ask about a country or culture before you moved there.

Learner page – spacing would be different

Questions about another culture or country

- These questions were taken from your fluency writing.
 - You were asked to write 10 questions about another culture or country.
 - Work with a partner and correct the questions but don't change the meaning.
1. Am I going to change or I will keep culture?
 2. Will be the same life as here?
 3. Where I can go to consult if I have problems that I need help?
 4. Is there dangerous?
 5. Is it difficult to get a job to foreigners?
 6. Can I get used with the food there?
 7. Does it have a lot of rain or fine?
 8. When is usual hours for going to bad there?
 9. What kind of topics not allow to talk with people?
 10. I want to know in which lifestyle I can fit in life expense?
 11. What kind of topics not allow to talk with people?
 12. How old do you have to be to go voting?

D What do I need to do to start?

Preparation & Logistics

- Start early! If your learners enjoy it, you can add more topics over time!
- The first topics can be ways to introduce themselves to you.

How to explain GFW to your learners

(a few ideas to inspire you)

- Every week (or your own timing), I will give you a new topic.
- Most of the topics are about you and your opinion, so you are the expert!
- The focus is on FLUENCY and MEANING, so think about the topics and write what you want. This means you should not worry about grammar and spelling.
- You might need to use your dictionary. That is great for your progress!
- After you hand in the fluency writing journal, I will read all your pages. I will keep your information **confidential**.
- I will write comments and maybe ask you questions.
- Because this is a “fun” writing for you, I will not correct your errors.
- This is your book. You can add drawings, stickers, and pictures, etc.
- If you have problem about what to do, be sure to let me know!

What else should I consider?

- These topics can also be used only for speaking.
- For some prompts, they could discuss their ideas during class and write later.
- I find English learners appreciate having a hard copy of their work, so I usually provide standard notebooks -Stapled is best - *Hilroy*, 32 pages. 8.5x11
- You can also give the prompts online.
- Decide if you want to give one topic at a time or give several copies (a set) with a due date. (The set helps them with time management).
- If you have a large class or multiple classes, you could rotate the due dates. (For example, collect 4 or 5 notebooks each day of the week).

E How can I design Fluency Writing prompts?

How

- These are the some of the factors I considered while writing the prompts (see other doc in this category : www.AACE-English.com → Fluency Writing →1 Guided FW -prompts - 16
- You can create your own prompts based on the topics you cover.

Provide an Audience

If possible, include the audience in the prompt such as writing to a landlord, another parent, former teacher, etc. This gives them a context/purpose.

Themes/ topics that work well

| | |
|------------------------------------|-----------------------------------|
| Personal (opinions, giving advice) | Their learning journey |
| Culture | Class activities / experiences |
| Current events | Themselves (they are the experts) |

Provide various formats

| | | |
|--------------------|--------------------------------|------------|
| Lists | Collages with words | Letters |
| Charts | Writing questions | Timelines |
| Sentences | Writing imperatives (commands) | Stories |
| Respond to a quote | Poems | Paragraphs |

I don't have time! I'm a volunteer!

How do I provide feedback?

- This truly will be “easy reading” for you, but you need to indicate you have read their work.
- I promise that you will learn a lot and truly enjoy reading their entries.
- Just a sentence or rhetorical question can be appropriate.
- If they ask you a question, just briefly answer.
- Even simple notes like the following will be appreciated:

| | |
|--|----------------------------------|
| Great! | Very thoughtful |
| Really? | That's creative. |
| I agree with you 200% 😊! | I don't understand this point. |
| Wow! | Oh my! |
| I like this idea. | I would have been surprised too. |
| That's a hard question. Let's talk about it, okay? | |

F Here are a few examples

- These show the how the other pages tie together
- The other file has 16 prompts that have a similar format
www.AACE-English.com → Fluency Writing → 1 Guided FW -prompts - 16

| Title | Theme | Format |
|---------------------|----------------|-----------------------------------|
| All About me: | Self | Words/ phrases + images |
| Big Beautiful World | Beliefs/Values | Images + words/ phrases |
| World is a Book | Travel | Respond to a quote |
| Home Rules | Family | List (hidden grammar practice 😊) |

Title: All About Me

Think First: What makes you unique? How are you different from others in the class and in your family? What makes you special?

Then Write: On two pages, write 20 things that describe you. You can write words or short phrases, but do not use sentences. You can add pictures or sketches, etc.

Title: Big Beautiful World

Think First: Nature can be described as “beautiful. What else do you think is beautiful in this world? Is nature the only way to think of beauty in the world?

Then Write: Make a collage of pictures of what you think is beautiful in the world. Write 2 or 3 words to explain each image.

Title: The World is a Book

Think First: When we travel, we learn many things. Which countries have you been to? What have you learned about the world?

Then Write: Agree or disagree with this statement. Give reasons and examples to support your view.

“The world is a book, and those who do not travel read only 1 page.”

- St. Augustine, 1st Century Bishop

Title: Home Rules

Think First: When you were young and lived with your family, were there rules you had to follow?

For example: *“Go to bed at 8:30.” “Clean up your room!”*

Did you think the rules were fair? Do you follow the same rules now?

Notice the rules above have a pattern: Verb + other info (the imperative)

Then Write: Write 10 rules that you had a child.

Also, write 10 rules you have in your family now. (use the grammar above)