

Composition I: The Writer's Craft Teacher Manual



Oak Meadow

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Table of Contents

Introduction	v
Lesson 1 Letter to Self	1
Lesson 2 Essay #1	5
Lesson 3 Revision and Photo Essay	11
Lesson 4 Essay #2	15
Lesson 5 Revision and Book of Self	19
Lesson 6 Essay #3	23
Lesson 7 Revision and Book of Self	25
Lesson 8 Essay #4	29
Lesson 9 Revision and Book of Self	31
Lesson 10 Essay #5	33
Lesson 11 Revision and Book of Self	37
Lesson 12 Learning Profile	41
Lesson 13 Revision and Book of Self	45
Lesson 14 Final Essay: Topic and Outline	47
Lesson 15 Final Essay: Rough Draft	51
Lesson 16 Final Essay: Revision	53

Lesson 17 Writing Portfolio 57

Lesson 18 Learning Reflection 59



Introduction

This teacher manual is designed to help you guide students through Oak Meadow’s high school English course, *Composition I: The Writer’s Craft*. This manual provides information on what to look for in evaluating student work as well as tips on how to assess student responses to creative assignments. For lessons that include projects, you will also find suggestions on helping students develop organizational skills in project management and time management.

In this teacher manual, you will find the full text for all assignments. Teacher manual answers are seen in **orange**. For the full content of the course, please refer to the student coursebook.

For obvious reasons, it is best not to share this teacher manual with your student. Each student is expected to produce original work, and any incidence of plagiarism should be taken very seriously. If you notice a student’s answers matching those of the teacher manual word for word, a discussion about plagiarism and the importance of doing original work is necessary. While students in high school are expected to be well aware of academic honesty, any discussion about it should be approached as a learning opportunity. Make sure your student is familiar with when and how to properly attribute sources.

We encourage you to join your student in discussing (and, if possible, reading) the literature in this course. Taking a special interest in your student’s work can result in greater engagement and effort. We hope this course helps your student gain insight into themselves and their writing preferences and abilities.

A Note About the Workload

Students vary greatly in terms of reading speed, reading comprehension, and writing ability. Some may find the reading in this course takes longer than expected; others may find the writing assignments take a great deal of time. In general, students can expect to spend about five hours on each lesson. Students who need more time to complete the work might modify some lessons to focus on fewer assignments or opt to complete some of the written assignments orally. Modifications like these can allow students to produce work that is of a higher quality than if they were rushing to get everything done. Each lesson in this course can be customized to suit your student’s needs.

Keep an eye on the workload as your student progresses through the course, and make adjustments so they have time for meaningful learning experiences.

Lesson

1

Letter to Self

Learning Objectives

In this lesson, you will:

- Identify specific words that express your sense of self.
- Explain your word choices.
- Write a self-reflective essay.

At the heart of writing is the need to communicate and, specifically, to express yourself. Consider what this means, to express your “self.” In order to authentically express your self, you need to understand who you are. This, then, is your starting point and guiding question for this course: “Who am I?” By examining your response to this question, you can begin to place yourself into the context of the world you inhabit and identify what you want to share with others in order to influence the world in some way. Searching for your own identity can help you better relate to the challenges, uncertainties, purposes, quests for knowledge, and ideas shared by other human beings.

The lesson introductions may include information you can use to guide your student and assess their work; sometimes ideas presented in the lesson introduction can be used as discussion prompts.

Self-expression is an on-going theme of this course. By learning to eloquently express their sense of self, experiences, or view of the world, students will gain confidence in effectively communicating their ideas in writing.

Reading

1. In *In Short: A Collection of Brief Creative Nonfiction*, read the following essay:
 - “In Praise of the Humble Comma” by Pico Iyer

ASSIGNMENT SUMMARY

- Read “In Praise of the Humble Comma” by Pico Iyer.
- Read a section of *Write It Right*.
- Choose three words to express who you are.
- Write a letter to yourself exploring the question, “Who am I?”

Notice how the author uses subtle humor, historical references, and analogy to impart valid writing instruction.

The literature included in *In Short: A Collection of Brief Creative Nonfiction* will help students examine the writer's craft and experiment with different writing techniques.

“In Praise of the Humble Comma” by Pico Iyer is a funny essay about the usefulness of proper punctuation.

2. Read the following section of Part II: Expository Writing in *Write It Right*.

- General Formatting

Reading selections in *Write It Right* present information that can be used to assess student work. For instance, formatting conventions include standard fonts, black type, consistent margins, headers or footers with page numbers and title/author information, and single line spacing. Essays can be formatted with the first line of each paragraph indented (and no spaces between paragraphs) or block style, using a space between paragraphs but no indentations.

Students are expected to incorporate information from *Write It Right* into their work.

Writing

1. Writing is an expression of self, so your first assignment is to spend some time thinking about who you are. You might find a quiet place to sit, outside or in your favorite spot. You might take a walk, just pondering the question of your identity and how you came to be the person you are. You might try walking into your bedroom as though you are seeing it for the first time. What does this space say about the person who lives in it? Look at your favorite possessions, the activities you like to do, the ways you like to spend your time alone. Use this information to help crystalize your sense of self. Choose three words to express who you are.

The first assignment asks students to express themselves in three words. Choosing only three words can be challenging; if students use a few more words, that's okay. The goal is for them to think carefully about both word choice and their own sense of self.

2. After spending some time thinking, write a one- or two-page letter to yourself, reflecting on the essential question, “Who am I?” Feel free to write your letter by hand, if that feels more natural to you or helps you get your ideas on paper more clearly. (If you are writing by hand, doodles are encouraged!) Use your three words in your letter and explain why you chose them.

You might want to jump right into your letter, or you might want to gather your thoughts first with a prewriting exercise. (See the section, “Prewriting Exercises,” in *Write It Right* if you aren't sure where or how to start.) Here are some additional questions that might help you explore this topic:

- What am I really good at?

- What do I need to work on about myself?
- What do I really know well?
- What do I want to learn or do?
- What do I worry about?
- What makes me feel happy or content?

Since you are writing to yourself, you can write either in journal form (“I like how I always notice . . .”) or in letter form (“Dear Me, I like how you always notice . . .”). When your letter is complete, proofread it to correct any errors in punctuation, spelling, or grammar.

As the first writing assignment, this essay can be used as a baseline of the student’s writing skills. Take note of the student’s writing strengths and challenges, and use this information in guiding your student forward.

Lesson

2

Essay #1

Learning Objectives

In this lesson, you will:

- Analyze two pieces of writing.
- Support your statements with textual evidence.
- Reflect on yourself as a reader.

Words, sentences, paragraphs—these are the writer’s basic tools. Most people take these tools for granted, and don’t give them much thought. But writers need to pay careful attention to every detail of a piece of writing to make sure the ideas expressed serve the intended purpose: to delight, intrigue, inform, persuade, entertain, provoke thought, or simply draw attention to the common bonds of humanity.

In this course, you will become a better writer. Part of that process is carefully examining what you like and don’t like about other writers’ styles. Everything you read can help you learn how to express yourself in your own personally meaningful way.

This week, you will read two essays that describe emotional experiences. In “Suspended” by Joy Harjo, the third sentence tells the reader what the essay is about, so the message or purpose is clear. How, then, does the author convey this “revelatory,” life-changing moment? Notice the use of sensory details to ground the reader in the experience of this “rite of passage into the world of humanity.” It is not the child’s first time hearing the music, but it is her first time *really* hearing it. Similarly, “Museum Piece” by David Huddle describes seeing something familiar in a new light.

In each of the essays you’ll read in this course, notice what makes the writer’s voice unique. What makes their writing powerful? What writing techniques do they use to express themselves so powerfully? Analyzing what works well can help you become a stronger writer.

ASSIGNMENT SUMMARY

- Read sections of *Write It Right*.
- Read “Suspended” by Joy Harjo and “Museum Piece” by David Huddle.
- Write an analytical essay in response to the reading (Essay #1).
- Reflect on and describe your reading process.

Reading

1. Read the following sections of Part I: Writing Basics in *Write It Right*. Keep this information in mind while reading the essays in the next assignment and writing your own essay this week.
 - Elements of Good Writing
 - Writing Style
 - Sentences and Paragraphs
 - Varied Sentences
 - Dependent and Independent Clauses
 - Run-On Sentences
 - Concise Writing
 - Dangling and Misplaced Modifiers
 - Strong Paragraphs

In each piece of student writing, look for evidence of the writing mechanics described in these sections. For instance, every piece of writing should show evidence that the writer had in mind a clear subject, audience, and purpose. Sentences should be varied and grammatically correct. Paragraphs should be well organized, focused on a specific topic, and include relevant details that support or illustrate the key ideas.

2. In *In Short: A Collection of Brief Creative Nonfiction*, read the following essays:
 - “Suspended” by Joy Harjo
 - “Museum Piece” by David Huddle

Take active notes as you read. Use your notes to help you understand what you read. Write down any ideas the reading sparks in your mind. Underline, ponder, disagree. Look up words you don't know and write down the definitions in your own words. Taking notes about a text is your chance to interrogate it as much as enjoy and learn from it. Active note-taking helps you translate for yourself what the text means to you.

In “Suspended,” the author writes about a moment when she suddenly experiences a sense of music as a bridge uniting humanity.

“Museum Piece” describes how a Vermeer painting speaks to the viewer.

Writing

1. Using your notes about the two essays you read, write a one- or two-page response (this will be called Essay #1). What did you like or dislike about the essays? What were the authors trying to

convey? Did the essays share a common thread? Which writing techniques did the authors use? Were they effective?

Here is a list of some of the features that define a writing style:

- Are there a lot of adjectives? Are the verbs strong?
- Are the sentences long or short? Does their structure vary? What structure does each author prefer?
- Are the paragraphs long or short? Does their structure vary?
- What sort of rhythm is achieved within the sentences and paragraphs?
- What is the tone of the writing? Is it intellectual, poetic, authoritative, or humorous?
- What kind of language do the authors use? Formal? Informal? Do they employ dialect or slang?
- Are the descriptions elaborate or subdued?
- Is the emphasis on plot? Character? Setting?
- Do the authors use metaphor or simile?
- What narrative point of view is used? Is it effective?

In your writing, reference at least one specific line, phrase, or word choice from each essay you read; make sure to cite the author's name and the title of the essay and enclose any direct quotes in quotation marks. When you have completed your essay, proofread your work. Share your essay with at least one other person (this can be a teacher, another adult, or a peer) and ask for feedback.

Students will write a series of essays in this course. For this essay, students will be analyzing and comparing the two essays assigned in the reading section. Students should address at least some of the questions in the checklist above. They will also include at least one text reference (with an in-text citation). Both reading selections (“Suspended” and “Museum Piece”) describe the experience of seeing something in a new way. “Suspended” uses vivid, sensory details and is written in the first person; “Museum Piece” uses specific, minute details and is written in the second person. Students will highlight various other elements as they analyze the two essays.

Students are expected to share their essay with you or another person for feedback; they will revise the essay (based on the feedback) in the next lesson. This pattern—write a rough draft, share with others for feedback, and revise—will be followed for each essay the student writes.

Throughout this composition course, students will be developing writing skills in different areas, such as writing mechanics, supporting evidence, and expressiveness. The following

checklist can be used to assess student work, monitor progress, and identify areas needing additional support.

Not every piece of writing will need to display every skill listed. It is usually best to focus on a few specific skills at a time rather than overwhelm the student by trying to “fix” everything at once. You might like to divide the list into skills you’d like the student to address early in the course and skills to focus on later; or you might like to prioritize the list based on your student’s current skill level and strengths, first calling the student’s attention to skills that are present but need fine-tuning before introducing more advanced skills later in the course.

Use the writing rubric below in whatever way you feel will best support your student.

WRITING MECHANICS

✓	SKILL
	Uses complete sentences
	Uses a variety of sentence lengths and types
	Demonstrates correct use of punctuation
	Shows awareness of grammar rules
	Shows awareness of spelling conventions
	Focuses paragraphs on a main topic
	Presents ideas in an organized manner
	Uses transitions to introduce new ideas and connect them to previous ideas
	Uses introductory paragraphs to introduce the topic and scope of an essay
	Uses concluding paragraphs to highlight key elements or connections between elements

SUPPORTING EVIDENCE

✓	SKILL
	Cites specific examples or quotations to support ideas
	Includes relevant quotations
	Includes relevant images or graphics
	Articulates relationships between ideas, themes, or concepts
	Demonstrates proper use of in-text citations
	Creates a works cited page
	Uses correct format for citations

EXPRESSIVENESS

✓	SKILL
	Writes with originality
	Uses precise language
	Shows intentional, careful word choice
	Uses language appropriate to the audience and writing purpose
	Uses two or more artistic mediums (such as text, images, graphics, audio, video, art, etc.) to represent or elaborate on an idea or theme
	Explains ideas and concepts in their own words
	Expresses ideas with clarity
	Develops ideas and concepts from broad to detailed (or vice versa) or from simple to complex
	Shows ability to write with focus on a particular topic
	Addresses all elements of assignment prompts with purposeful intent
	Demonstrates relevant use of figurative language (such as similes, metaphors, and analogies)
	Uses descriptive language to connect the reader to a scene, event, or setting

2. Think about your experience reading the essays assigned in this lesson. Reflect on your individual reading process: your strengths, challenges, and approaches to reading. Do you read things once and only once? Do you go back and reread lines and passages that you like or that confuse you? Do you take notes as you read? If so, how and why? What do you do when you come upon a word that is unfamiliar to you? What do you do when you come upon a passage that delights you or resonates with you? What happens when you read an idea you object to or that baffles you? Reflect on how you read in general, how you read the two essays assigned in this lesson, and how your reading process differs depending on what you are reading. What are your reading strategies? What is your approach to reading?

Here are some of the things you may notice and focus on in your essay:

- your note-taking style
- your stylistic preferences for writing and reading different kinds of essays
- the kinds of writing you find confusing, frustrating, or annoying
- the kinds of writing you find appealing, exciting, or intriguing
- how you connect what you are reading to your own life

Write one or two paragraphs about yourself as a reader. Alternately, you might choose to complete this assignment as a discussion, as an audio or video log, or in a creative, visual, or artistic form.

Students can approach this as a writing assignment or in another format (audio, video, creative, visual, or artistic). The goal of this assignment is for students to reflect on their own reading process. There is no single right way for a reader to approach a piece of writing, and by understanding their own feelings about reading or their responses to different types of writing, students can become more active, analytical readers.

Further Study

All Further Study activities are optional. They provide additional ways for students to explore the lesson topics. Students may be given extra credit for these activities, or, with teacher permission, may use them as a substitution for another assignment. These activities can often be used as discussion points or for group collaboration.

Note: All Further Study readings are optional.

Social relationships have an ebb and flow. Even with casual relationships, the push-pull of emotions can sometimes be inexplicable, or at least hard to fathom. For one take on the impact of social relationships, read “On the Street” by Vivian Gornick (*In Short: A Collection of Brief Creative Nonfiction*). Try to figure out how the author expresses her conflicting emotions.

Lesson

3

Revision and Photo Essay

Learning Objectives

In this lesson, you will:

- Pair images and words in a photo essay.
- Incorporate feedback into a revision.

An essential part of writing is revising. The first step—the rough draft—is used to get all the ideas down on paper in a basic order. The revision stage of the writing process is when we get a chance to work with the words, and play with the words, until they are shaped into something more meaningful and expressive. Like a jeweler cutting facets into a gemstone to bring out its hidden depths of light, writers use revision to make their writing shine.

In this lesson, you will continue your exploration of self with a photo essay, and revise the essay you wrote in the previous lesson.

Reading

1. To prepare for your first revision of the course, read the following section of Part I: Writing Basics in *Write It Right*.
 - The Writing Process
 - Prewriting Exercises
 - Writing a Rough Draft
 - Revising
 - Editing
 - Proofreading

ASSIGNMENT SUMMARY

- Read sections of *Write It Right*.
- Read “Joe Turner’s Come and Gone: The Play” by August Wilson.
- Create a photo essay using objects that are meaningful to you.
- Revise Essay #1 based on feedback.
- Assess yourself as a writer.

Read the following section of Part II: Expository Writing in *Write It Right*.

- Citing Your Source

Read the following section of Part IV: Writing Rules and Conventions in *Write It Right*.

- Multimedia Presentations

As always, the reading sections above can be consulted for more detailed information about writing conventions and mechanics.

2. In *In Short: A Collection of Brief Creative Nonfiction*, read the following piece:

- “Joe Turner’s Come and Gone: The Play” by August Wilson

This was written to set the scene for a play. Notice the careful word choices the author uses to create an atmosphere with phrases such as, “sun falls out of heaven like a stone,” “fires of the steel mills rage,” and the barges “trudge up the river.”

This essay is the beginning of a play. It describes a scene in 1911 in which African Americans, whose parents had once been enslaved, arrive in Pittsburgh for the first time.

Writing

1. Select at least five objects or belongings that are meaningful to you and represent who you feel yourself to be as a person. You might choose a book, painting, piece of jewelry, special rock or crystal, musical instrument, sports equipment, or any other object that is relevant to your life. Take photographs of each of the five objects, and then write a few sentences about the meaning of each object. Why did you choose this object? How does it represent you? How, if at all, do these objects connect to one another? Use precise language and sensory details to convey a vivid description. Create a photo essay by pairing each photograph and text in a cohesive visual manner—it could be a paper collage, a handmade book, a slide presentation, or any format you choose.

This creative project asks students to pair images and text in a cohesive way. For instance, a musical instrument might represent a feeling of freedom or creative release, or it might represent a family connection or cultural tradition. Each object chosen will be personally meaningful to the student. If the connection between the object and the text is unclear, ask the student to explain their choices. By discussing ideas, students often become more aware of ways in which their writing could be more expressive or concise.

2. Revise your Essay #1, using the feedback from your teacher or someone else you have shared it with. **Save your first version before revising.** Copy it into a new document before you begin your revisions. (You may need both versions for your final portfolio.) First, reread your entire essay. Notice if the information and ideas flow smoothly from one to the next. Make sure key points are highlighted, and paragraphs are organized around these key points. Find ways to use expressive and detailed language instead of bland generalizations, and use a variety of sentence types and

lengths to shape the content in a way that is engaging for your reader. Aim for writing that is succinct.

When you have made your revisions, let the piece rest overnight. This allows you to come back to it with a fresh mind and eyes. The next day, read your new draft aloud, looking for places that sound awkward or have errors in grammar, spelling, or punctuation. Make any necessary corrections, and then proofread your work one final time to fix any lingering errors. Your final version should feel like your best work.

Compare the rough draft of the student's essay (from the last lesson) with the final version. Look for evidence that feedback has been incorporated, and the student has revised, edited, and proofread their work. In *Write It Right*, students are given the following checklist to consider when revising a rough draft:

- Does my writing express my ideas clearly?
- Have I stayed focused on the topic?
- Is the information well organized? Do the ideas flow in a logical sequence?
- Are there relevant transitions connecting paragraphs or key ideas?
- Does each paragraph focus on a main idea?
- Have I made sure there is a beginning, middle, and an end to each paragraph and to the piece as a whole?
- Are my sentences phrased carefully? Do I vary the sentence structure?
- Do I include details and elaboration when necessary?
- Is my writing descriptive and interesting? Does it engage the reader?

Here is the editing checklist students are given:

- Do all sentences and proper nouns begin with a capital letter?
- Have I used a variety of sentence lengths and types?
- Are section headers and graphics labeled and relevant?
- Have I accidentally left out words or written something in a way that is confusing?
- Do I use paragraph indentations or space between paragraphs consistently?
- Is my name on my work and, if appropriate, a title?

Point out elements that are missing and, if necessary, add them to the writing rubric in lesson 2 so you can check on skill progression in later lessons.

3. In the previous lesson, you reflected on yourself as a reader. Now you'll reflect on yourself as a writer. Answer the following questions using a five-point scale:

5 = Strongly Agree

4 = Somewhat Agree

3 = Neutral

2 = Somewhat Disagree

1 = Strongly Disagree

Carefully consider each question before answering. Write down your answers.

- a. Through writing, I can express myself clearly and eloquently.
- b. I like the creative process of brainstorming ideas before beginning a writing project.
- c. I enjoy doing research and writing about what I've learned.
- d. I regularly use the writing process of revising, editing, and proofreading to make my writing stronger.
- e. I'm good at finding and correcting mistakes during the editing and proofreading stages.

Be honest in your answers—you won't be graded on this assignment; it is just an exercise to help you recognize your strengths and challenges as a writer.

Self-reflection is an essential part of growth. You can use the student's response to this assignment to support their growth as a writer by encouraging further development in areas of strength and providing instruction or scaffolding for skills that need more attention.

Further Study

For another example of building atmosphere through careful detail, read Maxine Kumin's essay, "Enough Jam for a Lifetime" (*In Short: A Collection of Brief Creative Nonfiction*). Notice how the author conveys a clear sense of her mother through the details she chooses to share. (All Further Study readings are optional.)

Lesson

7

Revision and Book of Self

Learning Objectives

In this lesson, you will:

- Demonstrate succinct writing and careful word choice.
- Incorporate feedback into a revised piece of writing.
- Creatively combine images and text in a meaningful way.

Have you ever met someone who had a certain characteristic or mannerism that, for you, illustrated their character? In order to describe an individual's personality, writers often draw upon telling details that reveal the person's inner life. This week, you'll read one essay and excerpts of three others (found in The Writer's Craft section) that demonstrate how to create a strong portrait in words.

Reading

1. Read the following section of Part II: Expository Writing in *Write It Right*.
 - The 100-Word Essay
2. Read "Last Shot" by Tobias Wolff (*In Short: A Collection of Brief Creative Nonfiction*). This essay presents a strong portrait of a man, illuminating who he was and what his presence (and absence) meant to the author. Notice how readers get a sense of Hugh. What does the author choose to relate about Hugh? Why does the author wait two paragraphs to introduce him? How do these opening paragraphs influence the reader's experience and understanding of Hugh and his role in the author's life?

ASSIGNMENT SUMMARY

- Read a section of *Write It Right*.
- Read "Last Shot" by Tobias Wolff.
- Write a 15-word essay about yourself.
- Revise Essay #3 based on feedback.
- Begin constructing your Book of Self.

“Last Shot” describes feelings about a friend who was killed in the Vietnam War. The author gives a vivid sense of how the friend embraced life; this is eloquently captured in a memory of skydiving together.

Writing

1. Write a 15-word “essay” about yourself. Begin by brainstorming words that resonate with you. Write them down, and then play with adding, changing, and replacing words. Rearrange them. It might help to write each word on a piece of paper and then move the pieces (words) around to see how they might fit together. Just because you only have a few words to work with doesn't mean this is easy! You can think of this as a short poem, something with few words but an abundance of meaning. You don't have to stick to exactly 15 words (you might have a few more or a few less) but the idea is to make very careful word choices to come up with a snapshot of yourself. Follow the writing process—write, revise, edit, and proofread—to help you create something that authentically expresses your thoughts.

Being asked to write a very short piece encourages students to carefully and intentionally choose each word. The exact word count is not as important as the ability to express themselves with precision. Draw attention to words that are redundant or vague; likewise, point out words that are particularly powerful, expressive, and effective.

2. Revise your Essay #3, using the feedback you've received. (Remember to **save your first version before revising**.) Use all your revision skills to improve the clarity and flow of your work. Consider the following elements:
 - **Authenticity:** Are you presenting your own ideas or what you think your teacher wants to read? Does your writing reflect your own truth?
 - **Clarity:** Are you using the English language with intention and precision to help your reader better understand your ideas?
 - **Economy:** Does each sentence add something new rather than restating or repeating what's already been written? Can you find ways to eliminate superfluous phrases so your writing is streamlined and purposeful?
 - **Voice:** Does your unique voice come through in your writing? Do your word choices and phrasing sound natural to you when you read them aloud?

Let your work rest after your first round of revision, and then go back to it to edit your essay to correct technical errors. After all the changes have been made, proofread your work.

In addition to the questions in the list above, you can use the writing rubric in lesson 2 and the revision and editing lists in lesson 3 to assess the student's work. Look for improvement in areas that the student has received instruction or feedback about.

3. Collect your supplies and begin constructing your Book of Self. Notice what types of images and words you are drawn to. You don't have to analyze each one with reason and logic; your emotional response is equally valid in terms of creating this project of self-expression. (You may want to consider including your 15-word essay.)

Students are expected to begin work on their Book of Self. It might be useful to check in with your student about what they have done so far and to encourage them to discuss their project or creative process.