

A violin and its bow are positioned on the left side of the image, resting on a sheet of musical notation. The violin's body is partially visible at the bottom left, and the bow is held vertically. The sheet of music is open, showing several staves with notes and rests. The background is dark, and a wooden object, possibly a book cover or a piece of furniture, is visible in the upper right corner. The overall scene is lit with a warm, golden light, creating a sense of depth and texture.

*E*trudes

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20 Days of Writing Exercises

The purpose of these writing exercises is to help you learn to get words on the page... without hesitation. But there is more. Much more. I want you to understand what makes for good writing - by exposing you to the very best writers. Writers such as Voltaire, Johnson, Shakespeare, and more, have a keen understanding of humanity...and the craft of writing. Through distributed practice (consistent practice of the same thing over time), you should grow in your understanding of the craft of writing.

Goals

1. With practice, you should be able to write without pausing for a certain length of time in response to a writing prompt (word production).
2. With practice, you should be able to discern the meaning of quotes from famous people (word dissection).
3. With practice, you should be able to write extended passages in response to writing prompts (targeted word production).
4. With practice, you should be able to make judgments about writing.
5. With practice, you should be able consider important ideas and how writing can impact our ability to express these ideas.

What are the core components of this section of the course?

Part I: Word Production

Part I of each day's work is an exercise in word production. How many words can you get on the page - without stopping? Your task is to take the word that is given to you and run with it...wherever your imagination takes you. Don't think...write. Don't fight the words...write the words. These exercises should help you if you have trouble getting words on the page. They will also help to build good writing habits.

On the course page, you will find links to several different random word generators. Choose one, and let the program choose a word for you. And then write for however long the directions dictate. Start off with one minute, and then gradually increase the amount of time (again, look at the directions).

I like to approach being a writer like being a musician. A musician picks up his or her instrument every single day and practices. A writer should pick up his or her pen every day and put it to paper. This section of the course provides new and experienced writers with writing prompts (single word prompts) to help you practice getting words on the page. The purpose of these writing exercises is to help you learn to get words on the page...without hesitation. Think of it as an exercise in word improvisation - just as a jazz musician improvises with notes.

Understand: Writing is Easy

Writing is easy. Very easy. You should be able to crank out 1,000 words or more in less than an hour. Every day. If you are struggling with your writing, you need to change how you are doing it. Maybe you should be using pen and paper instead of computer. Maybe you should be lying on bed instead of sitting at a desk. You need to figure out how best to get words from your brain to onto paper or computer. Remove all impediments. Next, you need to understand that 1,000 words per day doesn't mean that these will be worthwhile, usable words. I routinely discard 1,000's of words when I rewrite and revise my writing. This is part of the creative process. Think of the thousands of words that you have written as a large block of marble. You must start chiseling away at the block until you have a statue – hopefully something that others will want to look at, not just your own fanciful creation.

Part II: Word Dissection: Understanding Words on the Page

In this section of the course, you will find a series of quotations from famous people. These are exercises in word dissection. Consider each quote. Your task is to paraphrase the quote (i.e., put it in your own words). Use a dictionary and/or thesaurus, as necessary.

The immediate aim is to have you dissect, and hopefully appreciate, some famous quotations. A secondary, and perhaps more important aim, is to expose you to history and culture. A good writer should have a broad understanding of both.

These exercises are intended for both beginning and more experienced writers. For beginning writers, these exercises will help you to see how the very best writers used language to express their thoughts. For more experienced writers, I give you these quotations so that you can savor their richness.

This is also a precursor to being able to properly evaluate the worth of your own writing (editing and revising). You have to know what someone is trying to say in order to judge how well he or she said it.

Part III: Word Production: Getting Words on the Page Part II

The purpose of these writing exercises is to help you practice the skills you learned in Word Production, Part I. I want you to be able to write – without hesitation and without thinking – in response to more specific writing prompts. Your task is to read a quote and a scene from a story, and then use these to write what happens next in the story.

Part IV: Word Worth: Judging Words on the Page

Part IV of each day's work is an exercise in making judgments about writing. Your task

is to read several quotes and decide which is the best, and then explain your reasoning. Do you know good writing when you read it? Are you able to discern excellence? How refined is your literary palate? The purpose of these exercises is to have you make judgments about famous quotations.

And expose you to more language, history, and culture in the form of these quotations. Who cares about history and culture?

"A lawyer without history or literature is a mechanic, a mere working mason; if he possesses some knowledge of these, he may venture to call himself an architect."

Sir Walter Scott

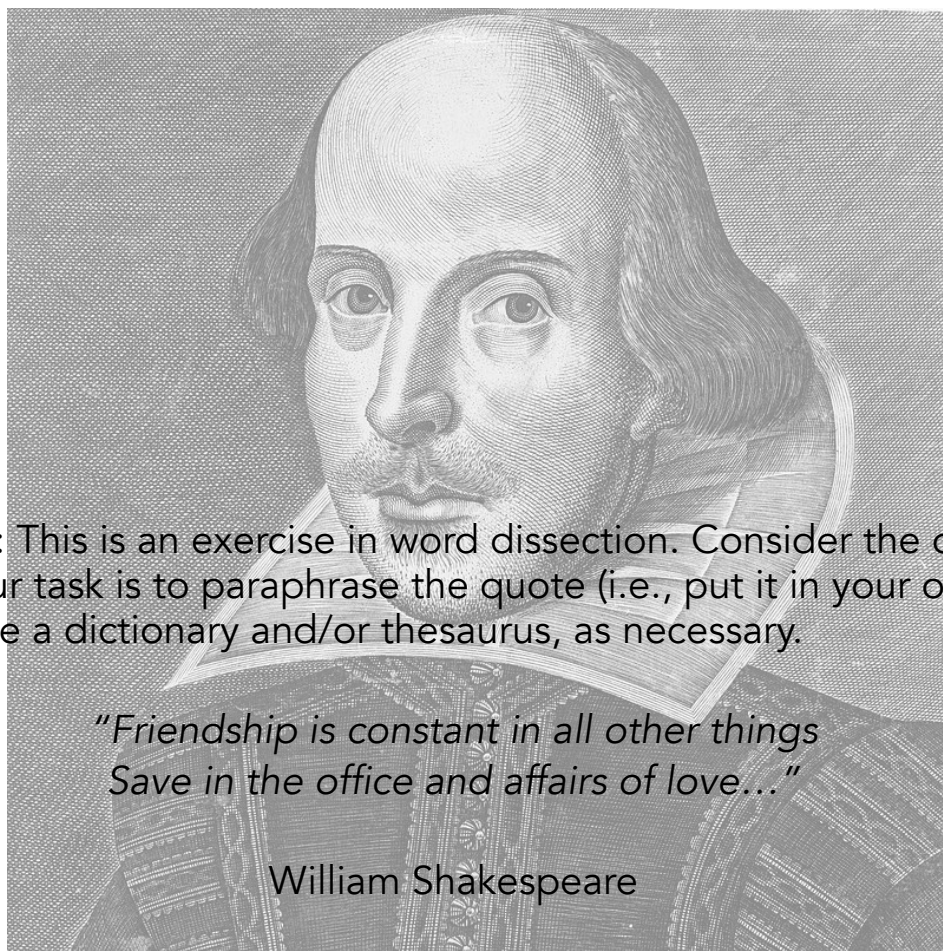
The same could be said of writers.

You will be given some quotes to read, usually two or three, and you must decide who said it better. For these exercises, you don't have to write out your answers, but you should be able to articulate some sort of rationale for your choices. Then, after you have decided who has best expressed a particular sentiment, compare your answers to mine. You may or may not agree, but it is a useful exercise in reading, discerning, appreciating, and comparing.

These exercises are another useful way to prepare you for the editing and revising of your own writing.

Note: You can do one or all of these exercises on a daily basis. Just as a musician does warm-up exercises before digging into musical practice, these exercises could be considered warm-up exercises for your writing practice. Use them as you see fit.

Note: You can do these exercises in a writing journal, or you can print the pages and write on the printed copies. Since this document is in PDF format, it is easy to print however many pages you need for each day's practice.



Part II:

Directions: This is an exercise in word dissection. Consider the quote below. Your task is to paraphrase the quote (i.e., put it in your own words). Use a dictionary and/or thesaurus, as necessary.

*"Friendship is constant in all other things
Save in the office and affairs of love..."*

William Shakespeare

Here's how I paraphrased and/or dissected the above quote:

First, I broke up the sentence into its various component parts, and then I tackled each part individually.

"Friendship is constant" means that friendship is unwavering, you can count on your friends

"in all other things" means "for just about anything"

"save" means "except"

"in the office and affairs of love" refers to "matters of the heart"

Lastly, I put all of the pieces back together and voilà, the final product looks like this:

You can count on your friends for just about anything, except when it comes to matters of the heart.

Who Said it Better? Day 1

Directions: This is an exercise in making judgments about writing. Consider the quotes below. All three quotes deal with the idea of love. Your task is to read each quote and decide which is the best. Explain your reasoning. In order to make your decision, make sure that you understand what each writer is trying to convey.

*"The wounds invisible,
That love's keen arrows make."*
William Shakespeare, *As You Like It*

"Who can give law to lovers? Love is a greater law to itself."
Boethius, *Philosophiae*

"To be loved, be lovable."
Ovid, *Ars Amatoria*

Who said it better – Shakespeare, Boethius, or Ovid?

Here is the winning quote:

*"The wounds invisible,
That love's keen arrows make."*

Shakespeare is triumphant.

I chose this quote because the Bard referenced Cupid from ancient Greek and Roman mythology. That is smart. You have to understand both the mythology of Cupid shooting people with arrows, and that sometimes love hurts. It's smart because it shows the reality - sometimes painful - of love. And his words show humanity. There is depth to this quote, and that's why I chose it as the winner.

Lesson Learned: Show me the reality/humanity of this world and I will appreciate and enjoy your writing.

Question: Why did I start off with quotes about love? Remember that there are no accidents in teaching, writing, or crime. I chose love because love is what makes the world go 'round. And if love makes the world go 'round, then don't you think that your writing should include elements of love?