



Organizing is what you do before you do something, so that when you do it, it is not all mixed up. — A. A. Millne

Many of us have a love-hate relationship with photo albums. This summer eight of us took a 16 day tour of Scotland. Upon returning home, we all shared photos, making the number of pictures overwhelming. How to organize all these memories? Should I sort them by date, location, or activity? Answers had to be formed before I could even begin to create the album! This mass of memories needed some organization to help it make sense.

Our students face the same dilemma when asked to find information in text. When asked to research and write about a topic, students can easily become overwhelmed with the sheer amount of information available on a topic. Before young researchers and writers can begin to gather information, they require an organizational structure. It is our responsibilities as instructors to provide that structure.

Primary Students

“Read about caterpillars and write down important information.” Prompts such as this are similar to stacks of unsorted vacation photos laying on the table. In order to help our young learners, prompts must provide specific organization structures. Compare this prompt - “We are going to read an article about caterpillars. As we read, we are going to look for information on caterpillars’ appearances, what they eat, and how they spin their cocoons.” Students now have a specific focus for their reading and know exactly what information they are to find.

Give each student a copy of the prompt. Inform students we are going on an information safari. What are we searching for first? Look back at the prompt— we need to look for information on *caterpillars’ appearance*. Underline the word *appearance* with your red colored pencil. Read the text together. Every time we find information about the appearance of a caterpillar, we will underline those words in red. For example, we read the sentence: *Some caterpillars have stripes and some have spots.* We will underline the words *stripes* and *spots*. Continue reading the passage, underlining all information about the appearance of a caterpillar in red. Return to the prompt and underline the words *what they eat* in green. Reread the passage, underlining all the information concerning caterpillars’ eating habits in green. Repeat the process again for how caterpillars spin cocoons.

You may choose to further model organizing this information into a writing plan. Provide students ample practice finding requirements within a prompt and locating the information in text.

Intermediate Students

When asked to research a topic, students often become overwhelmed with information and copy down everything they read. It is difficult for them to narrow a search and distinguish between information which is important and information which is interesting. It is essential we provide students with a structure for their information search through the prompts we provide. Learning to read a prompt and discover the information asked for is a skill that must be taught and practiced. Provide students with scaffolded prompts, requiring students to underline the topic, format and specific big ideas needed to complete the task. This activity can be practiced without having students complete the entire writing process. Students are practicing the writing process without creating a product. The following prompts are samples—feel free to use your own curricular topics.

Basic Prompt:

Write an opinion essay about your favorite winter activity. Include three reasons why you enjoy this activity.

Level Two:

Read the two passages. Compare and contrast the sports of skiing and snowboarding. Include information about both the equipment and skills required.

Level Three:

Read the two passages explaining why snowboarders are being banned from certain ski areas. Write an essay detailing the two points of view concerning the presence of snow boarders at ski resorts.

http://snowboarding.about.com/od/snowboardresorts/i/snowboardingban_2.htm

Be sure to visit our new, updated website. Let us know what you think!

www.writenow-rightnow.com

Additional ideas and activities can be found in the *Write Now Right Now Writing Program*.

Visit: www.writenow-rightnow.com for more information and lesson samples.