

# DRAWING WRITING and the new literacy where verbal meets visual



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Sample exercise: "Preliminary Drawing and Writing," pages 115 to 125  
Internet sample version

*For more information on this revolutionary new educational program,  
see the Drawing/Writing website, at <http://users.rcn.com/ssheridan>*

# Preliminary Drawing and Writing

## OBJECTIVES:

\*Commitment\*

\*Benchmarks\*

Materials: pencils, markers, objects, legal paper and legal-size file folders.

## **BACKGROUND:**

“Preliminary Drawing and Writing” is the name for a sample of drawing and writing taken before the five-step program begins, providing benchmarks for skills at the beginning of the Drawing/Writing process. After completing a session of Drawing/Writing, students choose a new object to draw and write about in a sample called “Closing Drawing and Writing” which provides benchmarks for skills after the five-step process. Using a tool called Rescore, students evaluate changes over time based on these two samples or sets of benchmarks. A benchmark is a surveyor’s mark made on something permanent, like a rock with a known position and altitude. The marks provide reference points for determining position. In Drawing/Writing, the benchmarks are visual and verbal skills and the understanding is that they are not made on a rock but with the brain which has no known position or altitude but changes over time. By comparing sets of benchmarks, students determine their current visual and verbal position.

No training precedes the Preliminary Drawing and Writing. This initial sample simply records a student’s skills at a certain moment; the skill level does not define a student’s mental capabilities. Students who understand pre- and post-tests as temporary markers in a lifetime of learning will regard tests as measuring devices--nothing more and nothing less. As the brain is variable and modifiable, so tests measuring brain function should be expected to show variation and modification.

Both the preliminary and the closing Drawing/Writing samples are timed in the same way: about 10 minutes is allowed for each drawing and each piece of writing, or 20 minutes per sample.

## PROCEDURE:

**SET UP:** Lay out folders, paper, magic markers and pencils. Ask students to take a folder, five or so sheets of paper, and a pencil or a marker, and return to their desks or tables. You, too, choose an object and a pencil or a marker, and gather the same materials.

Take the Drawing/Writing objects out of the box and lay them on a large table or the floor. Let the students look at the objects and handle them before making a choice. Ask students to devise how they line up to choose the objects.

**HOMEWORK:** Homework is a repeat of the day’s exercises. To explain this:



*Drawing/Writing Objects*

SAY: “Homework will be a repeat of each day’s Drawing/Writing exercises. To do this work, choose a new object at home. You will leave your classroom object here. Draw your at-home object for ten minutes and then write about it for ten minutes, just as you did in the classroom. Take a second folder right now and put some paper in it. Write your name on this second folder along with a label like ‘Homework Drawing/Writing.’ You will need to get your own markers and pencils for working at home.

“You will work with the same two objects--in class and at home--for the full two-week Drawing/Writing session.”

**TIP:** Make this clear before students make a choice, make it clear that the chosen object remains constant for the session. Resist saying any more lest you interrupt their decision-making. The skill of making decisions is learned over time and is based on experience. A student may choose to draw a small glass bottle because he thinks it will be simple. After a session with Drawing/Writing, he knows this object poses subtle and difficult drawing problems. A large, apparently more complex object like a pair of rose shears may be far simpler.

**TIPS:**

**Pencils:** Most students choose pencils for the Preliminary Drawing and Writing because pencils let them erase. The Drawing/Writing process strives to achieve two attitudinal changes. First, that students become less fearful about mistakes. Second, that they learn that mistakes are part of the learning process and that mistakes are just inaccuracies which can be rectified. In fact, they learn that mistakes are opportunities.

**Scribbling:** Encourage scribbling. If we expect children to learn to write and read, we must encourage their mark-making. Scribbling is proto-drawing and/or proto-writing in a motoric, warm-up mode. Some scribbling produces rounded, bounded shapes, including mandala-like figures. Some scribbling looks like wavy lines or a series of dots and dashes. Whatever form scribbling takes, it is legitimate mark-making indicating the human predisposition to make marks of significance, and stands as early self-training in literacy.

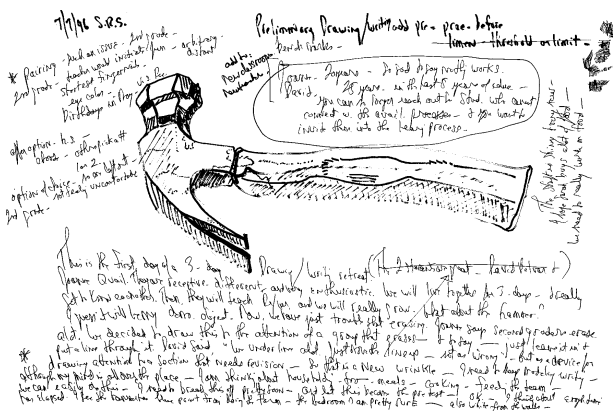
**Doodling:** Doodling is the valiant attempt of the mind to stay alert.

**DISCUSSION with a Specific Goal:** This line of questioning has specific answers: For instance, you might ask, “Is there anything useful about sticking with one object for two weeks? What can we learn from choosing an object and sticking with it? What words could you use to describe this activity?” You are looking for the word “commitment,” but you will accept a wide range of responses in the meantime, duly recording them on the board.

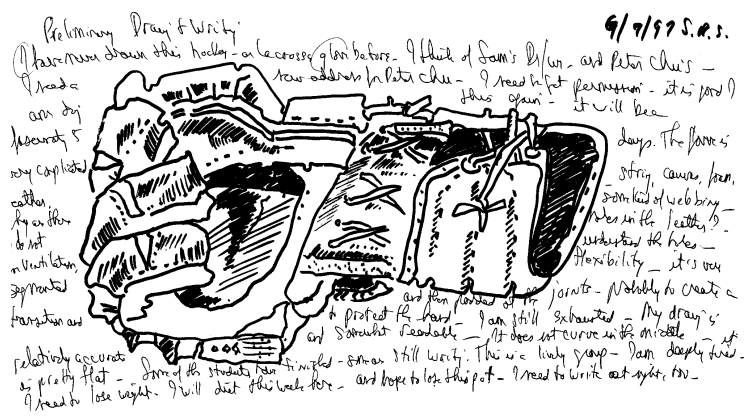
**DISCUSSION, open ended:** Once you get the words “choice” and “commitment,” or after you have taught the words “choice” and “commitment,” ask, “Why is choice useful or important? Why is commitment useful or necessary?” Ask students where choice and commitment come into their lives, and where they anticipate choice and commitment coming into their lives in the future.

Some useful questions include, “Is it important to choose? Why is it important to choose? What can be learned from committed choice? Are there problems with choice and commitment?”

**SAY:** “Put your names on your folders. We are going to do an exercise called ‘Preliminary Drawing and Writing.’ Put your object where you can see it easily. We are going to draw the object for about ten minutes and then write about it for ten minutes. Put the drawing and writing on the same side of the page. You will be showing all of your drawings and reading all of your writings aloud to a peer. You will pair up later. So, just remember that all your Drawing/Writing work will be shared.”



Preliminary Drawing and Writing, Hammer, SRS



Preliminary Drawing and Writing, Lacrosse Glove, SRS

**TIP:** Some students will ask you how to do Preliminary Drawing/Writing. Make clear that the students are to draw and write any way they choose to. Some students will be very uncomfortable, initially, with the prospect of such freedom. They will get used to it. Don't give this exercise too much weight; avoid using the terms "pre-test" and "post-test." If students ask you why they are doing this, tell them this preliminary drawing and writing provides "benchmarks" for their "visual and verbal skills." Although this answer may sound like gobbledygook to students at this point, you may have allayed any test anxiety, insuring more or less authentic samples of work.

By making sure drawing and writing occur on the same side of the page, you also reinforce the idea that drawing and writing belong together.

**SAY:** "Draw in any way you choose to. Write in any way you choose to."

**DEMONSTRATE:** Pick up your object, and write on the top of the board: "Preliminary Drawing and Writing." Add the date and your initials.

**SAY:** "Put these words at the top of a sheet of paper: 'Preliminary Drawing and Writing.' Add the date and your initials. Say, 'These are my initials.' If you do not say this, students may copy down your initials. (Many students have learned to copy mindlessly.)

**SAY:** "You may write in English or in whatever other language is easiest for you."

**TIP:** In a multicultural classroom, there will be several native languages, or mother tongues. To put all students at ease, ask them to write in any language that is comfortable for them, and translate that piece of preliminary writing into English. By the same token, ask the students who wrote in English to translate their writing into another language. If they do not know another language, give them some first year grammar books and foreign language dictionaries and let them struggle with a translation so that they will understand the plight of the student whose English skills are tenuous. In this way, every student in the classroom experiences comfort and discomfort with language and the group becomes a community in which language-learning is a shared enterprise. Because I am an English teacher, my goal is written English. If you teach French, your goal is written French.

**DEMONSTRATE/DO:** Loosely timing both activities, ask your students to draw their object for about ten minutes, and then write about the object for ten minutes. Ask them to write on the same side of the paper. Drawing/Writing includes display of work; it is hard impossible to look at two sides of a piece of paper at once.

**SAY:** "When I say, 'Write any way you choose to,' I am suggesting that you are the boss. It is your decision how you write."

**SAY:** "Let's start drawing." Remember, you will draw and write with students. After ten minutes, say, "We have to stop drawing now. The way you started to draw is the way you would have ended your drawing. I know it is hard to stop drawing. Now, let's start writing. Write in any way you choose to write." Be firm in using this non-directive approach. If students focus on this writing sample as a test, they may produce a writing sample that is larger or smaller than they would normally produce. After the Drawing/Writing program, you will ask for another sample of drawing and writing. The two sets of samples document changes in visual and verbal skills and are used for self-evaluation.

At the end of ten minutes, say, "Finish whatever you were writing." Let students finish the sentence they were writing. Stay quiet until this is done. In this way, you show respect for students and for the act of writing.

**TIP:** Some students will finish drawing and writing before ten minutes are up. Some will still be drawing and writing at the end of ten minutes. Both situations should be expected. If the whole class is done before ten minutes is up, stop the session. You do not want to make students uncomfortable. For students who are busily drawing and writing at the end of ten minutes, reassure them that they will have time to do more drawing and writing, and apologize for cutting them off in the midst of their work.

**SAY:** “We have to stop writing now. We will have time to do much more. This sample of drawing and writing gives us benchmarks, or measures, for your current skills are now.

**DO:** At this point, you will need to organize the room in pairs. You might simply count off the room by twos using the existing seating arrangement. Ask students for their ideas. Pairing can be thorny so it is best to use students’ own solutions, practicing constructivism on this level, as on other levels in this program.

**SAY:** “Now, show your drawing to your peer and read your writing aloud to your peer.”

**PEER SHARE:** This will take about ten minutes. While students peer share, walk around the room, listening. Bring the class’s attention to a particular pair. The reason for choosing one pair is teaching peer-mentoring behavior. How you choose this pair is up to you. You may overhear a particularly interesting exchange. Or, you may want to bolster the confidence of a certain pair. Or you may want to single out a pair who is having trouble engaging in the task. Rather than chide them, attend to their quandary by asking them to provide a model for class behavior.

**SAY:** (addressing one of the students in the pair directly) “Please read your writing aloud for us. How can we describe this writing?” (Address the other student and the rest of the class, too.) “Yes, that is descriptive writing. Yes, that other section of the writing tells a story.”

**TIP:** Take whatever terms students provide and support them. Or, provide formal terms like “narrative,” if necessary. At first, you will need to teach many new terms. Like other skills, language snowballs. Students’ brains have been designed to absorb new words like thirsty sponges.

**TIP:** By starting at one side of the room with one peer pair and working your way around the room through every peer pair, you will do three things:

- 1) You will include every student immediately in the Drawing/Writing process.
- 2) Students will hear a broad range of student-produced writing and appreciate and start to learn the names for a broad range of genres, or kinds of writing.
- 3) By listening and asking questions about the writing where it is unclear, you will model the probing questions you want students to learn to ask each other. Make sure students understand that these questions are asked to teach students to use language more precisely, not to put them on the defensive.

**DO:** Make a chart of probing question, displaying it where it is easy for students to refer to. After going through several pairs, encourage the next peer to ask the questions.

**SAY:** As the partner responds with a better word, show your approval. “Yes, that word is much clearer, isn’t it?” Some useful questions:

- What exactly do you mean by that?
- What does that mean?
- That’s too general for me. Could you be more specific?
- Why did you use that particular word?
- Can you be more precise?

Could you give me a simple example of that?

Could you give me a picture of that?

Could you give me an easy definition of that? Could we use a simile or a metaphor?

Could you make that clearer for me?

Is that the word you want to use? Is there a more accurate word?

I do not understand what you are saying. Can you help me?

What is your point, exactly? I am getting the idea, but I am not sure what you really mean.

Do you mean that “x” is like “y”? Would you say that “y” is a good example of what you are talking about?

If what you are saying is true, what does that mean? The logic of what you are saying suggests to me that.... Is this what you really mean to say?

**SAY:** “Remember, these questions are designed to help your peer speak, write, draw and think more clearly. You are not attacking your peer. But you are definitely pushing your peer to be more precise, especially in the use of language. Until you understand what is being said, keep asking questions. Do not be rough. Be kind. But be persistent. Keep pushing.”

**TIP:** Show the class that there are a variety of ways to write. As suggested above, writing can tell a story and be called “narrative;” it can be loaded with adjectives and called “descriptive;” it can be characterized by simile or metaphor and called “poetic.” This is a good time to introduce simile and metaphor. You will work with these constructions repeatedly.

**SAY:** Focus on a student and ask him to describe what kind of writing his peer did. If he cannot answer, ask the other student to read her work aloud again. Open a general discussion. “I hear many adjectives; what kind of writing uses many adjectives? I hear a story. What is this kind of writing called? I hear a simile. Do you know what a simile is? I hear a metaphor. Do you know what a metaphor is? A simile uses the words ‘like’ or ‘as’ to make a comparison. For instance, ‘My Labrador dog is like a seal when she gets out of the water. Her coat is sleek and shiny.’ A metaphor is a direct comparison; for instance, ‘My dog is a seal.’”

Start with what students know. Rather than imposing terms, provide them in response to students’ comments. For instance, say, “Another word for the writing we call ‘story telling’ is ‘narrative.’” Teach these terms. If you take the time to teach these terms incrementally, by the time students reach the third or fourth grade they will be able to recognize and name a variety of genres of writing.

**RECORD:** Write the terms on the board that describe students’ writing including:

Descriptive  
Nostalgic  
Emotional  
Symbolic  
Reflective  
Evocative  
Provocative  
Spiritual  
Sensual  
Poetic  
Metaphorical  
Inferential  
Representative  
Analytical  
Narrative  
Expository



*Preliminary Drawing and Writing,  
Jennifer Lenfest, 1997*

I have a possibly unfounded prejudice against using the word “expository.” In Part 4, the sample English curriculum provides suggestions for introducing the expository essay to students in the context of previously generated writing without using this term, at first.

**TIP:** Begin vocabulary-building. This process becomes routine. Ask each student to write down in his Drawing/Writing journal all words used by his peer that he does not know. Then, addressing each pair, ask students to provide two new or interesting words used by the peer. Ask the peer to define each of the words. Ask other students for their definitions. Write down all of these words with their definitions, helping students appreciate the degree to which the meanings of words are personal and layered. In this way, individual vocabularies and a shared class vocabulary are built from student writing. I add more of my own words as we work. In this way, student vocabulary is enlarged by your vocabulary, too. Because you will use a dictionary to make sure you and students are using words precisely, more words are added to the mix from the dictionary.

**RECORD:** Write all of these words on the board. Make sure that students write down all words. This list becomes the shared class vocabulary.

**SAY:** “As you listen to your peer read, think about the new words or the interesting words or phrases being used. Write down in your Drawing/Writing notebook all of the words you do not know and some of the words or phrases you would like to use that you already know but forget to use.

“Now, I am going to go around the room and ask each student to call out two words used by her peer that she thinks the class would like to add to its vocabulary.”

**GROUP CRITIQUE:** There is no group critique with Preliminary Drawing and Writing. The round-the-room sharing of work provides a general review of the work. Hereafter, a group critique follows each exercise. Remain sensitive to weak or shy students for whom group critiques will be, at first, painful. Still, these students, too, must learn to self-advocate and communicate in the world. Group critiques provide training in public speaking and in putting opinions “out there” and “on the line.” The ability to speak up and speak out is necessary and requires training.

After the first formal Drawing/Writing exercise, the group critique becomes routine. Even at this early date, drawing and writing skills reflect an increased level of engagement, and students can better tolerate a public display of their drawing and writing. Differences in skill levels will be obvious, but growth in skills becomes clear, too. It has been my experience that the most exciting outcome for the group is the dramatic growth of the weakest student revealed in these critiques.

**SAY:** “Do the Preliminary Drawing and Writing exercise at home with an at-home object. Leave the class objects and folder here.” You will not need to repeat the second sentence again.

If you have a multicultural classroom, add these instructions: “Translate your writing into English as well as you can, on your own. For those students who wrote in English, you have a different task: translate your writing into some other language, as best you can on your own.”

**TIP:** Buy some second-hand, first-year language texts and dictionaries. It does not matter how outdated these are. They will contain the vocabulary students need for this translation exercise. Lend these to students.

**RECORD:** Write on the board: “Homework, repeat Preliminary Drawing and Writing at home with a new object. Draw for ten minutes and write for ten minutes.” You will not write this homework instruction down again. You will simply tell students to repeat the day’s work at home at the beginning of each of the following steps.

**SAY:** “Now, put your class object back in the box. Put your class folder away.”