

Session Title

Writing To Discover and the Essay Marathon

Target Audience

Middle, High School

Strand or Focus

Writing Strategies

Presentation Format

Lecture, Interactive Workshop

Session Description

After writing an essay everyday for two years, I discovered writing is a muscle that stays strong when exercised. A coach would never take his basketball team to game day without the everyday practice needed to do well; yet as writing coaches, that's exactly what we do. We assign a three page essay without the preceding practice needed to write well, and consequently our students loathe "game day." Through strategies, techniques and the essay marathon, teachers will learn how to develop writing muscle in their classrooms.

Session Outline

1. Introduction: Explain my own history of discovering the power of writing consistent essays:
 - CUWP writing camp
 - I didn't want to lose what I'd gained.
 - I began to think of writing in comparison to exercising—when we stop, we lose muscle. Consistent exercise maintains strong muscles – writing muscles.
2. Summary of what we do as teachers to help students loathe writing
 - Daily, five-minute, journal prompts are not enough.
 - Writing assignments are given with a product in mind, not the necessary practice or skills to create a product.
 - Students sometimes write for a grade only, not to foster the enjoyment and exploration of writing.
3. Writing as discovery—or WRITE TO DISCOVER
 - The Montaigne essay originates from the French word *essayer*, which means to try, and hence a chance to discover from writing.
 - We must write to discover. When we do, the process becomes a delightful journey full of surprises.
 - Ask teachers to recall surprises in their lives and the joy it brought.
 - Share my students' reactions to life's surprises.
 - Show two essays where I was surprised by my writing discoveries.
 - Share the story of how my writing discovery inspired a student to make a change in her life.
4. The opportunity to write and discover: The Essay Marathon
 - Introduce and demonstrate territories: the gateway to a hundred personal narrative topics.
 - Invite teachers to create territories.
 - Invite teachers to multiply their age by 365 (days in a year) as evidence that they have plenty to write about. Example: If a teacher is 40 years old, she will have lived 14,600 days—helps to convince students they have plenty to write about. The 17 year old student has lived 6,205 days!
 - Teach funneling of territories. Give examples of great essay topics that came from simple student territories: Cheetos and oatmeal, AP Chemistry, Paris, friends.
 - Invite three teachers to put territory topics on the board and demonstrate how to funnel.
5. Share the results from Essay Marathon
 - Student questions (Erik's)
 - Student concerns (Carl's)

- Student experiences (Krista's, Katie's)
- My own surprise when the bell rang for the student break and they kept writing. Show photos.

6. Writing to Discover Beyond the Personal Narrative

- Note taking has new meaning
- Demonstration of student writing from Plato's Cave Allegory and William Golding's Thinking as a Hobby.
- Journal prompts to essays
- Chemistry (and all disciplines) notes to essays

7. Culmination

- Essay Café, writing contests
- Accountability