

## Motivating a Reluctant Writer

**Give clear instructions.** Students who don't know exactly what is expected will be hesitant to begin. The assignment should be carefully stated and the grading system clearly outlined.



**Break it down.** Writing can be a daunting task for many writers, especially inexperienced ones. Breaking the writing process down into smaller steps can prevent the writer from feeling overwhelmed. When we feel overwhelmed we often don't know where to begin, so we don't. Numbering the steps provides the writer with a clear path to complete the paper.

**Choose engaging topics.** A student who loves to dissect electronics may not be eager to write a paper about Mozart. However, a paper on how the electronic components of a digital piano allow pianists to play Mozart in many "voices" may inspire a paper worth reading! One student struggled to write a report on population growth in China, but the words flowed easily when the topic was changed to discuss the plight of Chinese orphans. Students have plenty to say when the topic engages their passion.

**Meet the challenge.** Students would rather rise to the occasion than feel the assignment is boring or below them. Finding the balance between a challenging assignment and one that is out-of-reach is sometimes difficult. It may require a bit of trial and error as you gauge the writer's response. Still, engaging a writer with the right amount of challenge is worth the effort.

**Make it meaningful.** Without meaning, the other four elements will only have marginal success. There is nothing worse than the feeling that you are wasting time on a purposeless activity. "Because the book/teacher said so" is not a winning argument. Explaining that the student is developing skills for the future may also have little impact (the future is an abstract concept). Defining a meaningful outcome goes a long toward motivating any writer.

Here are some ideas for making it meaningful:

- Incorporate topics the student feels strongly about and enjoys studying.
- Observe current events that can be discussed in a practical venue. For example, write an article that can be submitted to the local newspaper or a letter to a prominent person or company. Then follow through and send it!
- Choose real life issues that require research to support an informed opinion.
- Play the "Devil's advocate" by having the student learn more about an opposing viewpoint with the purpose of strengthening their own. Then, stage a debate with friends and family!
- Develop a sense of purpose. How can the writing assignment impact the student, the community, and/or the world? Does it raise awareness for a cause? Or provide feedback or clarity on an important issue? Does it present concerns, original ideas, or answers to common questions? Writing is meant to make a difference; students want to know how their writing makes a difference to the reader.

