

Taboo (Writing Narratives)

Purpose

Students often express ideas in writing without providing sufficient supporting details or examples. This routine is inspired by the word game *Taboo* and will help students to write narratives with a focus on details and descriptions.

Time

This routine takes 15 - 20 minutes.

Supported standards

CCR Writing Anchor 3: Write narratives to develop real or imagined experiences or events using effective technique, well-chosen details, and well-structured event sequences.

ELPS 3: Speak and write about level-appropriate complex literary and informational texts and topics

Materials

- Pencil and paper
- At least two students (with modifications, this routine could be done with one student)

Procedure

This routine is best used when there are at least two students. Modifications for one student are below.

1. The instructor chooses a topic or area of focus that the students are comfortable with and gives each student a **different** secret prompt. For example: *Write a paragraph about a person waiting outside an office for a job interview.* Or, *Write a paragraph about a morning when a student is late for school.*
 - a) Below the prompt, the instructor writes several taboo words that will get erased from the story. (e.g. interview, resume, nervous, suit)
 - b) The instructor explains that the students should include these words in their writing, but after they write the story, they will need to hide the words. The goal is **not** to avoid the words, but to add additional details that will provide context. (e.g. *He is very [redacted].* Vs. *He is so [redacted] that he is sweating.*)

- c) The instructor explains that after students finish writing, they will read their paragraph out loud to the other student(s).
2. Students take time to write their paragraphs. The instructor should encourage them to use a dictionary to find words and add descriptions that will help add details to their writing.
3. When the students finish, each one reads their paragraph, giving a long pause (or making a specific sound) when they come to a taboo word. The other students listen and guess what the paragraph is about.
 - a) Challenge: students may also try to guess the taboo words that are erased from the paragraph.

If there is only one student, the instructor can modify this routine by providing a prompt and including a longer list of taboo words the student must use. The instructor can listen to the story and guess the erased words.

Example

Prompt: *Write a paragraph about a person waiting outside an office for a job interview. Include these taboo words in your paragraph: **interview, resume, nervous, suit**. When you finish writing, you will read the paragraph out loud. Do **not** read the taboo words out loud.*

It is 10:00 a.m., and Mrs. Jones is waiting at the office for her job [REDACTED]. She has applied for a job as an instructor's assistant because she loves working with children. Mrs. Jones wants to look professional for her [REDACTED], so she is dressed in a black [REDACTED] and has a matching black purse and black shoes. She is [REDACTED] because she is afraid she will not understand some of the questions in the [REDACTED]. On her [REDACTED], she wrote that she speaks English and Spanish. She knows two languages, but she feels more confident speaking Spanish!

Possible guesses for the situation and the missing words:

- I think she has a meeting with her boss.
- I think she has a job interview.
- I think she feels nervous because she doesn't feel confident speaking English.
- I think she is wearing a black dress.
- I think she is wearing a suit.