

Writing with Power / Power Writing / Rock Star Writing

This is an easy system to quickly help students understand how to write five-sentence paragraphs and five-paragraph essays, which are repeatedly called for in the Common Core ELA standards.

There are three kinds of sentences:

- 1 - topic sentence / main idea / thesis statement (e.g., the rock star)
- 2 - major detail (e.g., the backup singer)
- 3 - minor detail (e.g., the road crew)

In a rock concert, nobody can oversing or upstage the rock star! Everybody has to follow what the rock star is doing.

Once students understand what the numbers mean, you can have them work in many different configurations. Here's one that grades 1-5 can learn. An easy way to start is by asking for three facts about a topic. Here, let's try, as our topic, three things we love about Michigan

Outline

- 1 - 3 things I love about Michigan
 - 2 - Hartwick Pines
 - 2 - Mackinac Bridge
 - 2 - Vernor's Ginger Ale
- 1 - Those = 3 things I love abt Mich.

Quick, right? Now let's start to assemble them into a paragraph. As a default, we'll use "There are" to start our #1; as students get older, you can introduce more options or more sophistication.

(1) There are three things I love about Michigan. (2) One is Hartwick Pines. (2) I also love walking over the Mackinac Bridge on Labor Day. (2) We can always find Vernor's Ginger Ale at the grocery store! (1) Those are three reasons why I love being a Michigander.

OK, not bad, but a little bit wooden. Let's try adding some transition words -- I call them "glue words."

Glue Words

Sequencing words: first, second, next, last, finally, last but not least, etc.

Words that change the direction of what I'm saying: However, nonetheless, nevertheless, suprisingly, in any event, etc.

Let's add those glue words to our #2 sentences, like this:

(1) There are three things I love about Michigan. (2) The first is Hartwick Pines. (2) A second is the Mackinac Bridge, whic I love walking over on Labor Day. (2) A third is that we can always find Vernor's Ginger Ale at the grocery store! (1) Those are three reasons why I love being a Michigander.

OK, better, but not awesome, right? We're still pretty choppy (but not bad for a first grader!). We need more detail.

So once students master 1-2-2-2-1, try 1-2-3-2-3-2-3-1 next time. And you can add as many #3s as you want!

Outline

- 1 - 3 things I love about Michigan
- 2 - Hartwick Pines
 - 3 - state park with really old pine trees - smell great!
- 2 - Mackinac Bridge
 - 3 - connects two peninsulas
- 2 - Vernor's Ginger Ale
 - 3 - made in Detroit
 - 3 - bubbles bite on your tongue
- 1 - Those = 3 things I love abt Mich.

Which makes our paragraph:

There are three things I love about living in Michigan. The first is Hartwick Pines State Park. It is full of really old pine trees that smell great. The second is Mackinac Bridge, which my family walks on during Labor Day, when there are no cars! It connects the Lower and Upper Peninsulas of our state. The third is Vernor's Ginger Ale. It's made in Detroit, and it has amazing bubbles that bite at your tongue. Those are three reasons why I am grateful to live in Michigan.

Is this formulaic? You bet. But it really reduces student performance anxiety, and it nails the Common Core State Standards. (And if Pearson's auto-grading system gets implemented, you're in even better shape!)

As you get into later years, you can turn these paragraphs into beginner five-paragraph essays by following this format:

Paragraph 1	Paragraph 2	Paragraph 3	Paragraph 4	Paragraph 5
1 - thesis statement	2 -	2 -	2 -	1 -
	3 -	3 -	3 -	
	3 -	3 -	3 -	
	3 -	3 -	3 -	
	2 -	2 -	2 -	

In this case, you would use glue words with the #3s instead of the #2s (or in addition to it!). My fifth graders could master up to this level by the end of fifth grade.

And as students get even older, they expand their first and fifth paragraphs into full-blown opening and concluding paragraphs.