

March 2018

The Collins Writing Exchange

Ideas, Tips, and Resources on Writing from [Collins Education Associates](#)

Featured Writing Assignment

Narrative Writing: Telling a Story

Narrative writing is not just about entertainment and creativity. It can also be a powerful way to build a variety of writing and thinking skills that are used in informative and opinion writing. Select an assignment below and use it to engage your students in planning and telling a story. Each one is a fully planned unit complete with prewriting activities and clearly defined Focus Correction Areas (FCAs).

- [Retelling a Story](#) (Primary)
- [Continuing a Story](#) (Elementary)
- [Creating a Folktale](#) for Young Children (Middle School)
- [A Moment in Time](#) (High School)

Special Note:

To support your teachers' use of the program, consider having a Collins Associate demonstrate one of these narrative assignments or model other lessons in your classrooms. [Email](#) or call us at 800-932-4477.

Excerpts from Collins Online Conversations

Writing Prompts for the Arts



In a recent Collins Online Conversation, several art teachers asked for examples of easy-to-use Type One and Type Two writing prompts. See John Collins's specific [suggestions](#) for middle and high school art teachers. Use the links below for other Type One and Type Two prompts you can use in art, music, physical education, and other special subjects.

Writing prompts for art, music, physical education, and special subjects:

- **Elementary:** [Type One](#) [Type Two](#)
- **Secondary:** [Type One](#) [Type Two](#)

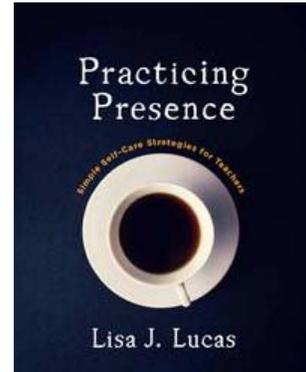
Special Note:

Looking for a way to support your teachers' use of Collins Writing but don't have an available in-service day? Schedule an online 1- to 2½-hour Collins Online Conversation focused on your staff's specific needs. See our [detailed menu of training topics](#) or call us at 800-932-4477 to design a session for your teachers.

Mindful Teaching

Self-Care Strategies for Stressed Teachers

Collins Associate Dr. Lisa Lucas understands well the demands that teachers face and the pressure they are under. Lisa has written a book aimed at helping teachers manage the frustration of being overwhelmed. In *Practicing Presence: Simple Self-Care Strategies for Teachers*, Lisa offers ideas, exercises, and dozens of practices that can help teachers who are "tired, wired, and running in circles." You can [preview](#) Lisa's book at the Stenhouse publisher website.



*Practicing Presence:
Simple Self-Care
Strategies for Teachers*

Our [blog](#) has a brief interview with Lisa about the genesis of the book. In it Lisa discusses some of the stresses related specifically to writing instruction and how teachers can deal with them.

Digital Video Assessment

Saving Time *and* Motivating Students with 1:1 DV

Writing teachers are always looking for ways to give their students better, more complete feedback on their compositions. But conferencing with all students on their work is formidable--often impossible.

High school English teacher David Narter has found a way to significantly increase the feedback he gives his students and make it more personable. He's using Digital Video Assessments to give verbal rather than written feedback to his students. It saves him time, and the students love it. See Narter's recent [article](#) in the *English Journal* to learn more.

Convention Wisdom

The Case of the Multimillion Dollar Comma

The battle over the "Oxford comma," also referred to as the "serial comma" or the "Harvard comma," wages on. The question is whether the last comma in a series--the comma just before the conjunction--is really needed. Most periodicals (like *The New Yorker*) use it; most newspapers (such as *The New York Times*) don't.

The Collins Writing Program's *Essential Conventions Check Mate* recommends using the Oxford comma. Why? Clarity. It is true that in many sentences, like the one below, the last comma is not essential for clarity.

- *At the ceremony she had an umbrella, sunglasses and camera in her hand.*
- *At the ceremony she had an umbrella, sunglasses, and camera in her hand.*

With or without the last comma, it is clear that she has three things in her hand. But, in the following sentence, the last comma clarifies how many people were in a picture.

- *She took a picture of her parents, the president and the vice president.*
- *She took a picture of her parents, the president, and the vice president.*

In the first sentence it could be interpreted that her parents are the president and vice president. The second sentence makes it clear that four people appear in the picture.

\$5,000,000 COMMA

One recent convert on this matter is the state of Maine whose decision not to use the Oxford comma in a state law resulted in the courts awarding over \$5 million of disputed overtime pay to truck drivers. See a summary of this story in a recent [Marshall Memo piece](#) (and don't miss Kim Marshall's humorous example supporting the use of the final comma).

Use the links below to *Check Mate* comma rules and make sure your students' writing is clear and precise.

- [Level P](#) (grades 2-3)
- [Level A](#) (grades 4-6)
- [Level B](#) (grades 6-9)
- [Level C](#) (grades 9-12)

Special Note:

Check Mate, the student guide for essential conventions, can help your students with comma rules and other convention rules. Or try the [Essential Conventions Teacher Resource Guide](#) (\$25 for the PDF; \$30 for the hard copy). You can also download [free samplers](#) of each Teacher Resource Guide to try with your students.

New Collins Workshop

Evidence-Based Reading and Writing: TDA, DBQ, and SAT

John Collins has developed a new workshop, Evidence-Based Reading and Writing: TDA, DBQ, and SAT. The workshop requires no previous background with the Collins Writing Program and is aimed at grades 3-12.

As with all of John's workshops, the session is hands-on and fast-paced with practical guidelines and exercises that teachers can use immediately. See Upcoming Events below for sessions already scheduled, or view the [workshop description](#).

Upcoming Events

Kristine Gibson in New Jersey and Pennsylvania; John Collins in Pennsylvania; and Bill Atwood in Massachusetts



<i>Date</i>	<i>Location</i>	<i>Session</i>	<i>Grades</i>	<i>Presenter</i>
3/22/18	Morris-Union Jointure Commission, New Providence, NJ	How to Painlessly Teach Essential Conventions and Sentence Building	1-5	Kristine Gibson
4/9/18	MA Reading Association 49th Conference , Quincy, MA	Five Fantastic Reading and Writing Strategies to Use in Math (See bottom of page 3 of program.)	K-8	Bill Atwood
4/24/18	ARIN IU #28, Indiana, PA	Evidence-Based Reading and Writing: TDA, DBO, and SAT	3-12	John Collins
4/26/18	Beaver Valley IU #27, Monaca, PA	Evidence-Based Reading and Writing: TDA, DBO, and SAT	3-12	John Collins
5/8/18	CIU #10, West Decatur, PA	Designing Curriculum-Based Writing Assignments, Unit Planning, and Grading Calibration in the Primary Grades (Day 3)	K-3	Kristine Gibson
5/16/18	Morris-Union Jointure Commission, New Providence, NJ	Using Student Portfolios to Increase Accountability, Assess Progress, and Improve Writing	K-5	Kristine Gibson
5/22/18	Morris-Union Jointure Commission, New Providence, NJ	Using Student Portfolios to Increase Accountability, Assess Progress, and Improve Writing	6-12	Kristine Gibson

We add new sessions to the list regularly, so if you don't see something in your area, [check back soon!](#)

Quicklinks

Standards-Based FCAs for Narrative Writing

We have perused state and national standards and identified essential Focus Correction Areas (FCAs) for narrative writing. Use the links below to see the key academic vocabulary terms for narrative writing as well as FCAs for each grade range. The FCAs are briefly explained and exemplified.

Narrative FCAs:

- [Grades K-2](#)
- [Grades 3-5](#)
- [Grades 6-8](#)
- [Grades 9-12](#)

Be sure to check out other teaching materials on our [Free Resources](#) web page.

Collins In-Service

Professional Development for Your Staff

Would you like to speak to a Collins Associate about offering a [professional development session](#) in your school or district? [Email](#) us or call us at 800-932-4477 to learn about options and pricing or to set up a FREE phone consultation. We offer highly competitive rates and will customize the training to suit your school's needs.



Collins Institutes

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About Our Newsletter

Helpful Resources for Busy Educators

Our goal is to make our newsletter rich with ideas, research, and resources related to writing and thinking skills instruction. We hope you share *The Collins Writing Exchange* with colleagues who might be interested.

For those of you who had this issue forwarded to you, [join our mailing list](#) to receive future issues directly.

Missed a previous issue? Read it now at [The Collins Writing Exchange Archive](#), or click on a recent edition:

[January 2018](#)

Click Picks of 2017, Getting to Type Five, Specialty Punctuation, and More

[December 2017](#)

Opinions Matter, Shortcuts for Grading Writing, Holiday Apostrophes, and

More

November 2017

LUCI, K-12 Academic Vocabulary Lists, S "T" A r t 10% Summary Organizer, Virtual Training Menu, and More

October 2017

The Book Commercial, College Essay Editing Checklist, the Power of Past Papers, and More

Collins Education Associates | 800-932-4477 | Fax 978-363-2212 |
info@collinsed.com | www.collinsed.com