

# Mimicry Writing

[Mimicry Writing is a writing philosophy and methodology that teaches basic & high-level sentence-writing skills to all students.]

Understanding the utility of this approach hinges on an ability to grasp this concept: *The Language of Writing*. Writing ostensibly has its own language, and this language evidently exists on two adjoining though distinct and separate planes. These planes are complementary, both being essential and integral components of this language. The *overt plane* of this language (which is the obvious one) is comprised of concrete grammar rules and tangible regulations that govern its mechanical uses. The *subliminal plane* (which is the unsuspected one) is comprised of subtle understandings, senses, and impressions of those same rules and uses. Because these understandings, senses, and impressions are primarily subliminal, they are indirectly and incidentally imparted as byproducts of constant, meaningful exposure to typical American writing.

Importantly, these understandings, senses, and impressions act as *primers* and *catalysts*, aiding and abetting the comprehension of the rules that govern the overt plane. Because some students have constantly been exposed to the application of the rules (though not necessarily the legalistic rules themselves), these students invariably develop a deeper understanding at an early age of the subliminal plane of this language. Thus, the apprehension of the concrete plane during formal schooling becomes infinitely easier for them.

There are routine phraseologies which tend to typify our methods of expression. The punctuation patterns necessary to convey these expressions also tend to become routine and typical as well. If one is not aware of these phraseologies and punctuation patterns, one would be hard pressed indeed to write with clarity and ease according to the normal standards which govern American writing.

This language of writing is first and best learned on an intuitive level as the verbal expression of this language is being mastered. Our mainstream children are exposed to it somewhat fortuitously during early childhood by way of bedtime stories; these are the children who tend to know it best. They have a *sense* for the language.

However, those children of ours who are not a part of the mainstream / middle class culture, those whose parents don't read Snow White and Cinderella to them are not adequately exposed to the phraseologies which typify and comprise this language of writing. These are the children who struggle most with their writing efforts.

Consider the following phrases: A long, long time ago...there lived a great and mighty king...once upon a time...in a distant and far away land. For the children who were taught the language of writing from their infancy, ordering these phrases would be a relatively easy task. After just a short time they'd figure out that they should be ordered thusly: Once upon a time, long, long ago, in a distant and far away land, there lived a great and mighty king. Though there are alternate arrangements which would be grammatically acceptable, there is only one that *sounds right*. For the children who were not repetitiously read to in their early childhood, who weren't impressed with the subliminal component of this language of writing, this arrangement doesn't sound any better or any more *right* than one of the alternate arrangements might.

When children are read to during their pre-literate childhood, they have conveyed to them on an intuitive and impressionable level this language of writing. These children aren't necessarily cognizant of this impartation as it happens. They are enraptured by the plot and fascinating characters in the stories. Nonetheless, through repetitious, constant exposure to the patterns inherent in most early childhood literature, the lessons are indelibly impressed (taught). These children will forever know what *sounds right* and what *makes sense*.

So, what of those children who were not so taught, not so impressed? Is it too late to teach them? The answer to the latter is no; it's never too late! Though most of them won't actually sit still for bedtime stories anymore, there is still a way to impress this language in their minds. The method is deceptively simple. It is the same approach used by the parents. Consider carefully what the parents did. They read the stories repetitiously, the way the stories were written, adding a bit of emotional flavor, periodically. This process imparted the understanding of the subliminal plane of this language to these children. This impartation can yet be accomplished now in older children through *mimicry writing*.

Mimicry writing is essentially what the name suggests. It is mimicking writing – writing that is designed to demonstrate itself, modeling the typical flow and patterns of expression, writing that illustrates the combining of related ideas and the concise expression of single thoughts.

Students have experienced excellent success in developing writing skills by mimicking the writing of others. The sentences in Appendix A can not only be used to illustrate the connotations of the target synonyms which are located there, but also can be used as sample sentences to mimic. Those sentences can and do function as *graphic paradigms* (patterned examples designed to be imitated). If students (1.) **listen** to the reading of these sentences; (2.) **reread** the sentences themselves; (3.) **copy** the sentences as they are; and (4.) are instructed to **write** shadow versions, substituting the target denotation for the italicized words, the same impressions that were made through the repetitious reading of the fairytales can be made through the repetitious writing of these (or similar) sentences. These exercises in tandem become multilayered reading, writing, and vocabulary exercises.

Traditional thinking touts the five-step writing sequence (prewriting through publication) as the primary means to teach writing. The problem with this traditional approach is that it assumes that the writers already know how to write. It assumes that they have a mainstream background. What if they don't? What if the students are emigrants from another place, another culture – a place where Little Red Riding Hood never ventured? What if they don't know what sounds right? What if they aren't even sure what a complete sentence is? What if double negatives sound perfectly normal to them? It seems an obvious conclusion that these would-be writers in order to develop facility as proficient writers must first be *impressed* with the knowledge of the language of writing as it exists on the subliminal plane. These impressions are nothing less than foundational to any hope of building writing facility in any student at any age.

The adage, *A picture is worth a thousand words*, is borne out rather starkly. The sole reason that this adage is revered as a truism is that the picture has been observed time and again by scrutinizing eyes taking the place of the thousand words. This fact has become axiomatic. Hence, the necessary lesson is conveyed through observation, not necessarily through overt traditional instruction. Thus, the picture becomes an illustrative

model or paradigm of what the student needs to know. The lesson, in effect, becomes *tacitly* and *intuitively* imparted through directed repetition.

The instructor should surely explain to the student what the process involves. This will not hinder it from working; it will actually facilitate and foster it. Just as the teacher would explain the theory of echo reading to the echo readers, this is simply a form of echo writing which should also be explained. Echo readers are told by their teachers, “I want you to read the way I do. Read after me.” Mimicry writers are told by their teachers, “I want you to write the way I write. Write after me.”

Allow the illustrative sentences in *Appendix A [Bridging the Chasm]* to serve as intuitive models and graphic paradigms for your struggling writers. You’ll be astounded at the understanding that will be imparted by these *word pictures*. These sentences will aid the underdeveloped literates in learning how to think in the language of writing. Once they start to think in that language and develop a sense for the language, writing in that language will be a matter of natural expression for them, just as it is for those who were earlier impressed.

Bridging the Chasm (Gosa, 2007)