

ENGLISH HOUND



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Since we started English Hound three years ago, we have had amazing success at teaching our students to improve their reading and writing skills. Our teachers develop a personal connection with our students and are deeply committed to helping them excel in schoolwork and extracurricular writing.

One teacher helped a 4th grade student publish a book about undergoing clinical trials for overcoming a fatal nut allergy. Another teacher helped a 9th grade student publish a work of creative fiction. One teacher worked with an 8th grade student on his writing submission for the Library of Congress, and he won the writing award. She also advised two students on their college admissions essays and they were admitted to their first college choices, Columbia University and University of Chicago.

We will never forget our conversation with one mom who told us with tears in her eyes that after working with our teacher for a year, her daughter improved her English grade from B+ to A; and that her teacher at Horace Mann, famous for being a tough grader, told her that her daughter was a beautiful writer and that she circulated her writing to the entire grade for everyone to see.

You can get a glimpse of how our teachers work with our students to help them improve their writing skills by reading on.

Sample Assignment From Teachers

Very nice class, Mickey! You read beautifully and asked very good questions throughout.

I enjoyed your writing very much also. You write so well, with solid sentence structure, detailed explanations, and very few errors. You are right - more description would help take your writing to the next level. Remember - rather than *telling* the readers what happened, **show** them so they can see it all happening in their own imaginations. **You want your readers to see what you see and feel what you feel!** Careful word choice is the key (remember JK Rowling).

As we discussed, there are two parts of your story where you can really focus on this: **one** is your arrival on this island, and the **other** is the dolphin adventure with your dad.

In the first, try to help the reader experience that **feeling of paradise** you told me about: if the wind *played* in your hair as you *bounced along the island* in your golf cart, that will make me feel the fun and magic of the place.

If I see you take a step through the salty water toward your dad, and reach out for his strong hand, and feel his *steady fingers wrap around yours*, I will begin to **feel the confidence** that makes you brave.

Here is a link to another story about a young girl and her father. Read the **first 3 pages** for some great examples of this kind of writing! I will be eager to hear your thoughts. [Link omitted.] See you next Monday!

Teacher Mary

Hi Max, At our next lesson on August 12th, we will review and edit your completed writing assignment, and discuss the end of the book. I will then assign you a writing assignment based on your understanding of the completed book. I look forward to discussing it with you at our next lesson. Thank you, Nancy

Tiger Boy Chapters 6-10

Personification is when human qualities are given to objects or animals. It is a literary tool that adds interests to a story. **Examples:**

"The angry storm pounded the tin shelter." (Anger is a human emotion)

"The sunflowers nodded in the wind." (Nodding is a human action)

1. Find one example of personification in chapters 6-10, and describe how it is used, and what it means.

Meaning:

2. Write a paragraph describing Baba's reaction to his conversation with the headmaster. Give examples from the book to support your statements.

3. Write a paragraph explaining the increase in the conflict between Neel and his father. Use a quote from the book that supports your explanation.

4. Write a paragraph describing your thoughts at the end of chapter ten. Include at least one reference to an event in the book. Include your reaction or response to the event.

5. Make a prediction about what will happen next. This only needs to be a few sentences.

Teacher Nancy

Hi Seoyoung,

Thanks for another productive class today. Here is what we discussed:

- 1) We looked at your Gioia essay. Overall, you demonstrated an understanding of how to pick apart evidence and analyze it to prove your thesis. Some things to work on are: choosing the *best* evidence to support your argument, keeping sentences clear and direct (think: clear subject, strong verbs, and avoiding a lot of little words), and adding in short sentences amidst longer ones.

- 2) We then went over your graffiti assignment. We decided that - because it was impossible, based on the evidence, to know for sure who the culprit was - your teacher really just wanted to see the strength of your reasoning and analysis. Your job was to pick the suspect whose evidence description had the most fodder for analysis. Your choice, Farley, ended up being hard. You had to rely too heavily on judgement and assumption, rather than analysis of the evidence.

- 3) We tried out analyzing Harriett instead, and found that the evidence in her backpack was a little simpler to analyze. We were able to say that the contents of her backpack suggested a strong connection to the act (i.e. having a book with an alliterative title that used the word 'bonehead'), whereas you were saying Farley's contents suggested something due to what they were *lacking* (i.e. no evidence of academics means he doesn't care about school, meaning he would be more likely to do it). A positive argument is almost always stronger than a negative one.

For our next class, I'd love to hear your ideas of what type of writing (or school-related assignments) you'd like to work on. If you're not sure then I'll plan the next class using my own ideas.

Until next week,
Teacher Stephanie

Writing Sample

6th Grade Writing Prompt: Describe an event that made you happy.

First Draft - completed as homework before lesson

Do you ever get the feeling that you're having the best time of your life? I do too. One summer week I was visiting my cousin Hunter for a few days. I was ecstatic about visiting him. My whole brain was buzzing with excitement. When I got there, we started a NERF war. After that, we decided to have some lunch. We played many different games. It went from teaming together to 1v1s playing Naruto (which I don't know a lot about). As usual, he went to his swimming practice the next day while I waited for him to finish. After we finished, we went to Target to get one NERF blaster each. Later on, we went to Smashburger to get a bacon hamburger each with fries. After lunch, we decided to go back and try out our new NERF blasters. I had such a great time there and hope to meet Hunter again soon.

Revised Draft After a Lesson with English Hound's Writing Teacher

The Best Visit Ever by Dylan C.

My whole brain was buzzing with excitement while I was getting ready to visit my cousin, Hunter. Spending time with him is always awesome because our NERF battles are very tight and energy-consuming. As soon as we arrived at my cousin's house we went straight upstairs. We transformed my aunt's house into a dangerous piece of land. There were darts flying everywhere and nowhere was safe. By the time we got too tired to play, the whole of the upstairs looked blue and orange from the darts.

We took a break and went to eat lunch at Smashburger. As soon as we finished eating, Target was our number one priority to get more weapons of mass destruction. Immediately after we returned home, it was back to NERF wars. Once we got bored of NERF, we decided to move on to an imaginary game of Narut, where we faced off and used different kinds of elemental jutsus. It was a great game, but Hunter being older and more experienced with Naruto, made it a bit one-sided. Since Hunter is a very competitive swimmer, he usually goes to swim practice every day. Early the next day, Hunter had to go to practice, while I was reading a book and playing on the iPad Mini. After he came back, we discussed some boy issues. I had to leave in order to be at my orchestra concert in time. It was a sad time for my cousin and me as we said our goodbyes. I was thinking about when I would next see Hunter, and how much fun I had with my favorite cousin.

5th Grade Writing Prompt: Write a Restaurant Review

First Draft for Homework

I will tell you a little later about the best Chinese fusion food I have ever had from Blue Bamboo in Jacksonville, Florida, but first I should tell you about the incredible service. When you walk into Blue Bamboo, the first thing that will happen is that a server will immediately greet you with smile. The ambiance there is very casual, you can walk in there with a t-shirt and shorts. When we got seated at our table, we

promptly got served our drinks. We didn't have to wait long before a waitress came and asked for our appetizers and orders. The service was quick and smooth.

Now about the food, I only had the opportunity to order two things from the menu. I had ordered the duck wonton crisps for appetizers, and for my entree, I ordered the short rib tacos. The duck wonton crisps were amazing. It is duck, carrots, cabbage, and a savory hoisin sauce which is layered between three crispy wontons. The short rib tacos are a specialty of Blue Bamboo's and I had high expectations for it. It had greatly exceeded my expectations. It is cabbage, carrots, and grilled short ribs with a spicy sauce on top of a corn tortilla. I would definitely order these again.

However, the downsides are the location of this restaurant. It is somewhat hidden behind bushes on a very busy street. The parking lot is very small, so we had to park at another store and had to walk over from there. But, otherwise I would definitely recommend coming back here again.

Revised Draft After a Lesson with an English Hound Teacher
Blue Bamboo: A Fusion of Flavors by Dylan O.

Chinese fusion sounds more like a surgery than a combination of delectable and luscious food. Blue Bamboo in Jacksonville, Florida has some of the best Chinese fusion cuisine in the world. That is just the opinion of this food critic.

This hidden gem is located on a busy street, and parking is a bit of a challenge, but that is all forgotten once you walk through the door and smell the heavenly aroma of mouthwatering food. Immediately upon entering the restaurant, we were greeted by a host of friendly servers. Once seated at our table, we were promptly served our drinks. The service was quick and smooth, and we didn't have to wait long for our appetizers to arrive at the table. We started with the duck wonton crisps, a rich combination of duck, carrots, and cabbage in a savory hoisin sauce layered between three crispy wontons. This is an amazing way to start the meal.

Because of the wide variety of appetizing options on the menu, it was a dilemma to figure out what to order. They all sounded tantalizing, but I selected the succulent short rib tacos. Since the short rib tacos are a specialty of Blue Bamboo's, I had high expectations for the dish, but it greatly exceeded those expectations. The mixture of cabbage, carrots, and grilled short ribs with a spicy sauce on top of a corn tortilla was divine. I would definitely order these again, and would recommend that you give them a try. One of the house specialties is the Dragon Whiskers, which are long straws of fried zucchini. We were excited to try them because we saw other diners devour them. We discovered that dragon whiskers are just as good as they look.

As we left the restaurant, happy and full, we understood the appeal of this new type of cuisine called Chinese fusion, or as I like to call it, Chusion.

MIDDLE SCHOOL: THE BEST TIME TO LEARN HOW TO WRITE

By Beverly Cole

As the mother of a student in middle or high school, you may begin to wonder how to help your child prepare for the future. Whether your child is a student trying to gain admission to an Ivy League school or a candidate applying for a job, learning how to write well at an early age is *critical* to his or her future success.

Prior to college, my award-winning public high school had prepared me well for my time as an undergraduate at the University of Pennsylvania. There was, however, one area in which I felt surprisingly unprepared: writing. Prior to Penn, writing had always been something I took for granted. Most papers I turned in would return to me with an “A” and a compliment. I assumed college would be the same. I was wrong. After I submitted a draft of a paper to my Linguistics teacher, she reviewed and returned the paper with a message on top that read something like, “Stilted use of language. Try again!” I felt like I had been slapped.

I ran to the library and started reading *THE ELEMENTS OF STYLE* by Strunk and White and *ON WRITING WELL* by William Zinsser with desperate intensity. It seemed that writing was no longer just about restating and citing facts you looked up in the library. At Penn, writing became a journey of creating compelling arguments after extensive research. With a new perspective on my own writing style, I tore apart and restructured my paper. When I received an A on the final copy of my Linguistics paper, I exhaled and smiled. Despite my momentary relief, I knew I couldn’t rely on my natural abilities as a writer. Writing, I realized, was a grueling process. Most of my college courses required some writing. In many exams, professors presented us with a question and a limited amount of time to collect our thoughts and answer in a precise yet expansive manner. For papers, I spent hours poring over citations. Annotated bibliographies were like writing projects unto themselves and took almost as long as the core assignment. With a great deal of effort, my writing improved during college and even helped me gain admission to Columbia University School of Law.

Writing, however, is not a skill essential only to pre-law students. Even engineering majors at most top-rated schools like Cornell (<https://www.engineering.cornell.edu>) and Yale (<http://catalog.yale.edu>) have writing requirements. In fact, Yale’s distribution requirements for a bachelor’s degree provide: “**Skills requirement in writing (two course credits)** The ability to write well is one of the hallmarks of a liberal education and is indispensable to advanced research in most disciplines. As students strengthen their writing skills, they develop intellectual practices that distinguish active from passive learners.... Over 130 courses, spanning approximately 40 different academic programs, give special attention to writing.”

Although I felt very much alone in my experience at the time, this may be a growing problem among top colleges and universities throughout the country. Not long ago, a Stanford professor surprised her class by publicly berating a student for poor writing skills. The professor later apologized, explaining that her outburst expressed a “frustration at what I perceive as a general decline in writing skills.” See <http://www.stanforddaily.com/2012/11/30/professor-reported-after-publicly-critiquing-students-paper-during-lecture/>. In addition, William Ellet, a former writing teacher at Harvard Business School, believes that the problem starts in middle school, citing to a Department of Education’s 2011 study finding that a paltry twenty-four percent of eighth and twelfth graders are proficient in writing. <http://www.cnbc.com/id/101176249>.

Because of my past challenges with writing I understand the true importance of learning how to be a strong writer at an early age. Writing should be an evolutionary process, not a crash course in survival. There are so many elements vital to the writing process: Brainstorming, Outlining, Drafting, Citation, Styling, Revision, and Proofreading. Each step requires deliberation, and without intensive, individualized interaction with a teacher, even the strongest of students can produce mediocre results. With training, however, young students can take the time to develop their craft so that when they reach college, they can write independently and with polished finesse.

There is a reason that Penn and Columbia and other top schools require writing as part of a student's curriculum. Writing is integral to life and a successful career. Superior writing skills are imperative to most occupations. Scientists submit grant applications and publish research findings, business people draft presentations and memos, and engineers write reports and proposals. Additionally, the written word continues to grow even more significant, as many of our communications that were once verbal are now written in a format like e-mail or text.

Like piano or golf or any other lifelong pursuit, writing is a *skill* that requires years of focus and practice. Learning how to develop and utilize this craft will have immediate as well as enduring benefits for your child.

Beverly Cole is the Communications Director of English Hound (www.EnglishHound.com), a NY based company specializing in online reading and writing tutoring.