

# Section One

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## Helping Your Student Balance Assignments

Dear Parent or Guardian,

Your student’s schoolwork will become more complex and challenging this year. Balancing difficult assignments in many classes requires strong organizational skills. When you add in extra-curricular activities, your student’s tasks can seem overwhelming. These strategies can help your student avoid last-minute, rushed work.

**KEEP A CENTRAL CALENDAR** Post a calendar like the one below in a central family location for your student to use. Important dates should include key deadlines, tests and quizzes, and other commitments. Long-term goals, such as research papers and assigned readings, should be broken into short-term goals. Also, use color-coding to match different classes with assignments. Crossing off completed tasks provides a visual reminder of items that still have to be tackled.

**SET PRIORITIES** At the beginning of each week, discuss upcoming assignments with your student. Help determine which activities and tasks are essential, and which might be able to wait until a later time. To discourage postponing difficult tasks, help your student recognize the importance of allowing enough time to always do a thorough, complete job.

Name of Month: _____						
Sunday	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday	Saturday
	<b>1</b> Choose topic for author report	<b>2</b> Begin reading first source for report	<b>3</b> Review biology chapter	<b>4</b> Biology quiz	<b>5</b>	<b>6</b>
<b>7</b> Review algebra chapter	<b>8</b> Algebra quiz	<b>9</b> Begin reading second source for report	<b>10</b>	<b>11</b> Review vocabulary	<b>12</b> Vocabulary quiz	<b>13</b>
<b>14</b>	<b>15</b>	<b>16</b> Finish reading report materials	<b>17</b> Review biology chapter	<b>18</b> Biology quiz	<b>19</b> Write first draft of author report	<b>20</b>
<b>21</b> Review algebra chapter	<b>22</b> Algebra quiz	<b>23</b> Revise author report	<b>24</b>	<b>25</b> Proofread report	<b>26</b> Author report due	<b>27</b>
<b>28</b>	<b>29</b>	<b>30</b>	<b>31</b> Review biology unit			

## Developing Fluency: Reading Aloud to Understand Characters

Dear Parent or Guardian,

California Reading Standard 3.4 emphasizes the importance of learning about a character’s traits by analyzing what a character says in narration and dialogue. The way a character “speaks” can reveal traits directly and indirectly. For example, a narrator might directly describe himself or herself for readers. But, on the other hand, a speaker’s choice of words and style can indirectly show that he or she is serious, youthful, or foolish.

You can help your student develop reading fluency and analyze characters by encouraging him or her to read carefully with an ear for characterization.

**COMPARE APPROACHES** Encourage your student to read a character’s dialogue aloud using different styles of speaking (for example, slow, dramatic, tense, or happy). Choose a significant speech or passage from a story, novel, or play. Next, select a specific style of speaking. Then, re-read the same selection, using a different style of speaking. Discuss which reading captured the character’s traits more successfully.

**USE PUNCTUATION CLUES** Remind your student to use punctuation clues to help with pacing. Periods, commas, colons, and semicolons indicate different kinds of pauses or stops. Readers can use these punctuation marks to decide when to take a breath.

Character	First Approach	Second Approach	What character traits did this reading emphasize? Which approach was more successful?

## Building Test-Taking Skills: Synonyms and Antonyms

Dear Parent or Guardian,

Standardized tests are important tools for evaluating your student’s progress. Many standardized tests examine vocabulary by asking students to identify synonyms (words with similar meanings) and antonyms (words with opposite meanings). The following home activities can help your student prepare for these kinds of questions.

**WORD CHART** Collect words from school vocabulary lists and reading materials such as books, magazines, and newspapers. Write a focus word in the chart below, and then have your student add synonyms and antonyms. Create new charts for additional words.

Synonyms and Antonyms			
Focus Word	<i>honest</i>		
Synonyms	<i>truthful</i>		
Antonyms	<i>dishonest</i>		

**WORD CHAINS** You and your student can create word chains of synonyms and antonyms. To create a synonym chain, begin with a word and ask your student to provide a synonym of it. Then, you provide another synonym. Continue, alternating roles.

To create an antonym chain, ask your student to provide an antonym for each word in the chain. You’ll find that antonym chains can take unusual directions because many words have more than one meaning.

Synonym Chains										
<i>happy</i>	–	<i>glad</i>	–	<i>overjoyed</i>	–	<i>joyful</i>	–	<i>thrilled</i>	–	<i>excited</i>
[ ]	–	[ ]	–	[ ]	–	[ ]	–	[ ]	–	[ ]
[ ]	–	[ ]	–	[ ]	–	[ ]	–	[ ]	–	[ ]

  

Antonym Chains										
<i>happy</i>	–	<i>sad</i>	–	<i>cheerful</i>	–	<i>gloomy</i>	–	<i>bright</i>	–	<i>dark</i>
[ ]	–	[ ]	–	[ ]	–	[ ]	–	[ ]	–	[ ]
[ ]	–	[ ]	–	[ ]	–	[ ]	–	[ ]	–	[ ]

## Evaluating Credibility

Dear Parent or Guardian,

Your student is developing reading skills to become an active and critical reader. No reader should believe that an argument is reliable before evaluating the facts and supporting details that an author has provided. The following activities can help your student evaluate the credibility, or trustworthiness, of an author’s arguments in a variety of situations.

**POLITICAL ANALYSIS** Read an article or listen to a speech about a current political topic. Talk about the author’s or speaker’s arguments with your student. Then, use the chart below to help your student evaluate how effectively the text supports its main idea. Consider whether the information presented appears complete and accurate.

**KEEPING TRACK** Help your student keep track of what he or she reads and how credible it is. The following chart is a good way to evaluate articles or news reports. Your student might want to keep a record only of trustworthy articles. Or, he or she might want to keep track of untrustworthy articles. For more practice, your student might also want to review other articles by an untrustworthy author to determine whether the majority of this writer’s work is untrustworthy.

<b>Credibility Review</b>			
	<b>Article #1</b>	<b>Article #2</b>	<b>Article #3</b>
Article or Speech Title			
Main Idea or Theme			
Supporting Evidence and Details			
Organization of Ideas			
Tone			
Credibility Rating (1 to 5: 1 is not very credible; 5 is highly credible.)			
Rating Explanation			

## Building Your Student's Vocabulary: Figurative Language

Dear Parent or Guardian,

Figurative language—language that is not meant to be understood literally—can expand and enrich your student's vocabulary. You can help your student review and practice the following types of figurative language.

- **Similes** and **metaphors** compare two things. Similes use the words *like* or *as*; metaphors do not.
- **Personification** gives human characteristics to animals or objects.
- **Hyperbole** is an extreme exaggeration.

**ENRICH A STATEMENT** Choose an ordinary sentence, and encourage your student to think of figurative language that will expand or enrich it. Record the most imaginative or effective sentences in the chart below.

**USE A WORD AS A SPRINGBOARD** Figurative language can help your student remember vocabulary terms. Begin with a vocabulary word or term from a school list or a reading source. Help your student use the word or term in sentences that use simile, metaphor, personification, and hyperbole. Write the best examples in the second chart.

Statement	Simile/Metaphor	Personification	Hyperbole
My math test was hard.	My math test was as hard as scaling Mount Everest barefoot.	I got beat up by my math test.	My math test was the hardest test in the world.
Word and Meaning	Simile/Metaphor	Personification	Hyperbole
<i>assiduous</i> (means "hardworking; diligent")	She was as assiduous as a worker bee.	The assiduous ant grimaced as it carried the giant bread crumb.	The author was so assiduous that he wouldn't stop writing if he were struck by lightning.

## Reinforcing Literary Concepts: Symbolism

Dear Parent or Guardian,

*Symbolism* is a literary device that your student needs to recognize and understand in order to master California Reading Standard 3.7. A symbol is a word, sign, or element that stands for something else. We use symbols all the time—for example, our flag stands for our country.

Some symbols have standard meanings. A rainbow often stands for hope; gold often represents wealth. But some symbols have several meanings: A star can be a symbol of religion, the future, or fame. Authors can also create unique symbols—symbols that assign new meanings to familiar objects. For example, a lost toy in a short story might symbolize a character’s forgotten past.

The following activities can help your student recognize symbols in daily life.

**EVALUATE FILMS AND TELEVISION** Discuss symbols after viewing a film or television program with your student. Talk about any key objects or elements you noticed, and decide whether they have symbolic meanings. Write down your conclusions in the chart below.

**CLASSIFY SYMBOLS** After identifying some symbols, discuss whether or not they are conventional symbols. Conventional symbols are always used in the same way. Keep a running list of conventional symbols and their meanings.

Symbols		
Symbol	How do you know it is a symbol?	What does this symbol represent?
<b>Conventional Symbols and Their Meanings</b>		
dove = peace		

## Building Test-Taking Skills: Analogies

Dear Parent or Guardian,

Analogies are a challenging part of many standardized tests. You can help your student prepare for them by reviewing the format of analogy questions.

Here is a sample analogy question:

SCALPEL : SURGEON :: \_\_\_\_\_

- A. medicine : patient
- B. hospital : doctor
- C. knife : blade
- D. precise : incision
- E. trowel : mason

Your student can follow these steps to answer an analogy question.

1. The first half of the analogy can be expressed as “SCALPEL is to SURGEON as. . .”
2. Consider the relationship between the first two words, and make up a sentence that states that relationship. “A SCALPEL is a tool used by a SURGEON.”
3. Look for an answer choice that shows the same relationship by substituting the word pairs into your sentence. Answer **A** does create a logical sentence: “A medicine is a tool used by a patient.” But answer **E** creates a correct sentence: “A trowel is a tool used by a mason.” **E** is the correct answer.

**CREATE ANALOGIES** Creating your own analogies is an excellent way to recognize relationships between words. This exercise asks you and your student to complete an analogy and then write three new analogies. First, complete the half-completed analogy by talking about the relationship between the words *fancy* and *simple*. Then, ask your student to create three new analogies by creating two sets of words that have the same relationship.

FANCY	:	SIMPLE	::		:	
(Relationship: Things that are FANCY are not SIMPLE.)						
	:		::		:	
	:		::		:	
	:		::		:	

## Reinforcing Reading Comprehension: Evaluating Structure

Dear Parent or Guardian,

In order to master the California Reading Standards, your student is reading increasingly challenging texts. Understanding the structure, or organization, of a written selection can help your student make sense of difficult material. For example, a newspaper editorial might begin with one or two examples of the potentially negative effects of a proposed law and then analyze the law itself in more detail. Recognizing this structure helps a reader understand the information presented and evaluate the author's effectiveness.

Use the following activities to help your student practice recognizing organizational patterns.

**ANALYZE NEWSPAPER ARTICLES** Have your student analyze the structure of a few newspaper or magazine articles. Use the flowcharts below to help summarize the overall content of each section.

**RESTRUCTURE AN ARTICLE** After your student evaluates an article, discuss ways the structure of the article supports the author's purpose. What other structures might the author have chosen? Discuss how a different organization would affect the overall effectiveness of the essay.

Article Title:	Article Title:
↓	↓
↓	↓
↓	↓
↓	↓
↓	↓

# Understanding Biographical Influences

Dear Parent or Guardian,

All authors are affected by the time in which they live and by their own personal life experiences. In fact, the events in a writer’s life often serve as inspirations for literary works. To master California Reading Standard 3.12, your student will analyze the way historical and personal experiences influence an author’s writing. You can use the following suggestions to help your student analyze an author’s biography.

**FIND OUT MORE ABOUT AN AUTHOR** Have your student choose a favorite author and then use library or Internet sources to research the writer’s life. Use the chart below to connect people, places, events, and ideas from the author’s life to characters, settings, plot incidents, and themes in his or her work.

**COMPARING FICTION WITH FACT** As you and your student learn more about an author, talk about how the writer transformed biographical details into fictional elements. Consider which details the author changed and which remained true to life. A good way to focus on the biographical influences on an author is to imagine how a different author might have approached the same subject or story. Discuss how that writer would have applied a different set of biographical influences.

Comparing an Author’s Life and Works		
	Biographical Details	Related Fictional Elements
People/ Characters		
Places/ Settings		
Events/Plot		
Ideas/Themes		

## Encouraging Independent Reading

Dear Parent or Guardian,

Independent reading can be an important part of mastering the reading skills outlined in the California Reading Standards. By choosing what to read, your student focuses on personal interests while developing reading strategies that will be useful later in life. Throughout the summer, encourage your student to read and discuss a wide variety of books.

**KEEP A READER’S JOURNAL** Suggest that your student keep a journal that records each book he or she reads, along with comments and criticisms. The form below can be photocopied, or the information can simply be written in a notebook. Also, since reading is the best way to learn new words, this form challenges your student to find at least ten unfamiliar and interesting words in each book.

**ENCOURAGE A CRITICAL RESPONSE** In order to encourage your student to evaluate every book, make reading a topic of family discussions. Help your student take time to reflect on each book. After your student finishes a book, talk about the themes or ideas of the book and the techniques the author used to make them clear and interesting.

<b>Reader’s Journal Entries</b>	
Title:	Title:
Genre:	Genre:
Capsule Review:	Capsule Review:
Vocabulary:	Vocabulary:
Title:	Title:
Genre:	Genre:
Capsule Review:	Capsule Review:
Vocabulary:	Vocabulary:
Title:	Title:
Genre:	Genre:
Capsule Review:	Capsule Review:
Vocabulary:	Vocabulary:

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# Section Two

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# Analyzing Problems and Solutions

Dear Parent or Guardian,

In the Writing Workshop in Chapter 3 of *Holt Literature and Language Arts*, students learn how to write a *problem-solution analysis* (California Writing Standard 2.4). This letter will require your teenager to identify a problem and then offer a thoughtful solution. It also suggests an activity to help your student choose a problem, think of a solution to that problem, and then think about how to convince an audience to accept his or her solution.

## Key Elements of a Problem-Solution Analysis

Much of the persuasive writing you and your teenager encounter every day offers solutions to problems, from ideas on increasing low school test scores to plans on reducing traffic jams. Usually, this kind of writing begins with a clear description of the problem and includes a detailed explanation of its causes and effects. Then the writer suggests a solution to the problem. He or she also explains why this solution is better than any others that people have suggested. To help your student prepare for writing a problem-solution essay, work together through the following activity, which asks you to select a problem and then suggest a solution.

## Activity: Exploring Problems and Solutions

1. Begin by asking your student to brainstorm a short list of problems that relate to school, your community, or the larger world. To spark some ideas, you might read a newspaper together or watch the evening news. You might also ask your student to think about topics that have recently been in the news or about topics that have a big effect on his or her life. After all, problems that your student deeply understands or cares about are the best possible subjects.
2. No matter what problem your student chooses to tackle, understanding that problem completely will lead to a better and more thoughtful solution. The *5W-How?* questions (*Who? What? When? Where? Why? and How?*) are often a good way to test an understanding of a problem. Look with your teenager at the way one student used these questions to define a problem: campus graffiti. Then, ask your student to make a similar chart to investigate a single problem from his or her list. Asking these questions might also help your student come up with a solution to the problem. (Some questions might require some research. For now though, it's enough to note the questions that your student wants to answer and, if possible, the answers he or she *predicts* will be found.)

<b>5W-How? Questions</b>	
<b>Sample Questions</b>	<b>Sample Answers</b>
<b>What</b> is the problem? <b>What</b> has already been done?	Graffiti covers the outside of several school buildings; the school repaints every several months
<b>Who</b> is affected by the problem?	Students, teachers, parents, and people who live around the school
<b>Where</b> is this a problem?	Mainly around the gym, but on other buildings, too. I know it happens at other schools, too, and on businesses and signs around town

**5W-How? Questions (continued)**

<b>Sample Questions</b>	<b>Sample Answers</b>
<b>When</b> did the problem begin?	Probably years ago, but it's gotten bad this spring
<b>Why</b> is this a problem? <b>Why</b> is it occurring?	It makes students feel bad about how the school looks; I think kids must feel bored or as if they have no outlet for expressing themselves
<b>How</b> can the problem be solved?	A security guard, I guess; could also dedicate one wall to a student-painted mural or put up a free-expression bulletin board

3. Understanding the problem is only the first half of the process. Your teenager also needs to convince readers why one solution is better than all the others. Help your student think hard about solutions by asking him or her to answer these questions.

What is the best solution to the problem?

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Why is this solution better than all the others?

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How will it work? What specific steps will it require?

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If your student prefers thinking through the answers to these questions aloud, you might consider a role-playing exercise. For example, you can assume the role of an unconvinced reader, asking specific questions and voicing objections. (Or, your teenager could pretend to be a reader who favors another specific solution. He or she could then orally respond to that reader's questions and concerns.)

Your student's responses could provide valuable points for a future paper. But in any case, these exercise will give your teenager an idea of what needs to be considered when writing a problem-solution essay.

# Writing a Persuasive Essay

Dear Parent or Guardian,

In the Writing Workshop in Chapter 4 of *Holt Literature and Language Arts*, students learn how to write a *persuasive essay* (California Writing Standard 2.4). This letter suggests some activities to help your student come up with a clear opinion, thoughtful reasons for that opinion, and the evidence that will convince even the most doubting readers.

## Activity: Planning a Persuasive Paper

1. The first step, of course, is choosing an issue to argue. Ask your teenager to brainstorm a list of at least three issues about which he or she feels strongly. To jog your teenager’s thinking, you might read or watch the news together or discuss what is happening in your community or at your teenager’s school. Then, help your student to develop an opinion about one issue. It may help to write an equation like the one below.

### EXAMPLE

**Issue:** The school board is considering a public-service requirement for all high school students.

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**My Opinion:** I think this would teach kids about helping others and provide a glimpse into different careers.

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**Opinion Statement:** The school board should institute a public-service requirement for all high school students.

Remind your student that an opinion statement—the statement that will become the thesis of your teenager’s essay—should be a clear and forceful stand on an issue about which people really do disagree. After all, there’s not much point in defending a point of view that everyone shares!

2. Once your teenager has an opinion to defend, it’s helpful to think about the potential audience, the readers your teenager will try to convince. Help bring that audience into sharper focus by working through the following questions.

Who is my audience?

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What do they already know or think about the issue?

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What objections, or counterclaims, are they likely to have to my point of view?

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3. Now, help your student build his or her case by jotting down at least three reasons that support the opinion statement. As your student is brainstorming, remind him or her that reasons can come in a variety of shapes and sizes: *logical* (appealing to the mind and reason), *emotional* (appealing to the heart), and *ethical* (appealing to the audience’s sense of fairness and what’s right). Logical appeals are most common, but emotional and ethical appeals can be very effective tools in making certain kinds of arguments.
4. Finally, ask your teenager to look over the types of evidence on the following list and then plan at least one piece of evidence to support each of his or her reasons. Some will need research, of course, but your teenager should be able to come up with some by brainstorming. (For those that need research, you might talk about what sources could supply the kind of information he or she is looking for.) All the examples below support the opinion statement about a public-service requirement in step 1.

Types of Evidence	Examples
<b>Analogies</b> are comparisons that show similarities between otherwise unrelated facts or ideas.	<i>Public service is as vital to those it helps as a lifeline is vital to a drowning person.</i>
<b>Anecdotes</b> are personal examples or stories that illustrate a point.	<i>I felt so valuable and confident after spending time with the first-graders at the community center.</i>
<b>Case studies</b> are examples from scientific research.	<i>State University’s study of public-service volunteers showed that they felt a greater sense of well-being than those who did no public service.</i>
<b>Commonly accepted beliefs</b> are ideas that most people share.	<i>Most people agree that society works best when people help each other.</i>
<b>Examples</b> are specific instances or illustrations of a general idea.	<i>Maria’s interest in nursing was sparked by volunteering at the hospital.</i>
<b>Expert opinions</b> are statements made by a recognized authority on the subject.	<i>Sarah Pike, director of the city’s Community Services Bureau, says that most of her adult volunteers began some form of volunteering when they were teenagers.</i>
<b>Facts</b> are statements that can be checked by testing, observation, or research; some facts are in the form of statistics, or numerical information.	<i>Only 15 percent of Springfield’s current graduating class did any kind of public service during high school.</i>

# Comparing Media News Coverage

Dear Parent or Guardian,

In the Writing Workshop in Chapter 5 of *Holt Literature and Language Arts*, students learn how to write an essay that compares and contrasts the way two different news media cover a single news event (California Listening and Speaking Standard 1.2). This letter provides a chart to help your student think about how different media cover the news—and about how that coverage often influences the news. The activities that follow the chart offer some ways to help your student look at news coverage with a more critical eye.

## Key Concepts for Analyzing Media News Coverage

Every word and image chosen by a reporter, editor, or producer is intended to take advantage of the strengths of the medium in which the story appears. Television, for example, can capture a raging wildfire or daring rescue more vividly and dramatically than, say, a newspaper account can. A newspaper, however, may be better suited to provide a diagram of the fire-damaged area or detailed list of the people evacuated from their homes. The choices made in presenting a story are also influenced by the need of every news outlet to attract a wide audience—and to keep it interested. With your student, take a look at the following chart, which lists questions in five areas commonly used in analyzing news coverage.

Analyzing News Coverage	
<b>Attention-getting techniques</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• How are images, words, and sounds arranged to get the audience’s attention?</li><li>• Does the story play up the controversial aspects of the event?</li></ul>
<b>Objectivity</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Is the main subject portrayed without bias, or is there a positive or negative bias?</li><li>• If two people or groups are involved, does the story give the impression that one side is more honorable or honest than the other?</li><li>• Does the story leave out any people directly involved in the story?</li></ul>
<b>Complexity</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• How much background information is given?</li><li>• How many points of view are represented?</li><li>• What types of sources are interviewed?</li><li>• Is the event put in a broad enough context to explain most of its causes and consequences?</li></ul>
<b>Sequence of Information</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• What image is shown, or point made, first?</li><li>• In what order are interviews, images, and ideas presented?</li><li>• Does the story close by focusing on a positive or negative point?</li></ul>
<b>Emotional Impact</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Does the story seem to be designed to prompt a certain feeling in or impression on its audience?</li><li>• What words and images are used to describe the event, and what connotations do they have?</li></ul>

## Activity One: Analyzing Media News Genres

The following activity will ask you and your student to compare how two different media cover the same news event.

1. The first step is finding an event that is covered in two different media (for example, Web sites, radio, television, newspapers, or magazines). Your teenager may immediately suggest a recent event that he or she is interested in. If not, scan newspapers, newsmagazines, and television or radio news for a story that is widely reported. (If possible, tape any television or radio coverage so that you can replay the story.)
2. Next, use the chart above to analyze the coverage. You might ask your student each question, or work through the questions together. Then, your student should make a judgment about which news medium did a better job of presenting the story. Have him or her answer the following questions.
  - Which story best provided the detailed information, fairness, and clarity that we expect from the news?

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- Why? (What comparisons led you to your decision?)

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These answers might serve as a thesis statement and evidence for your student's essay. But even if they don't, this exercise will cause your student to look at news stories in all media a little more closely.

## Activity Two: Planning a News Story in Different Media

To make your student more aware of the strengths and weaknesses of different media, ask him or her to put on a reporter's (or producer's) hat. First, invite your student to choose a recent news event—or to just imagine one. Then, ask how he or she would present that story in at least two different media. What images and information would he or she include? How would the presentation differ from medium to medium? Ask your student to jot down his or her plans and then scan the news for similar presentations.

## Writing a Description of a Person

Dear Parent or Guardian,

In the Writing Workshop in Chapter 7 of *Holt Literature and Language Arts*, students learn how to write a descriptive essay about a person (California Writing Standard 2.1). This letter suggests an activity to help your teenager gather the kinds of details that will produce an interesting and well-rounded description.

### Key Elements of a Descriptive Essay

Any description of a person, if it is successful, will try to show what is unique or distinctive about the person: the details on the gestures, phrases, background, and physical appearance of the person that all make readers feel as if they *know* the subject. Writing a description of a person takes careful observation and reflection. Specific elements in the description of a person include

- details that convey a rounded sense of the subject, not just what he or she looks like
- precise language and concrete examples, including actions, gestures, and dialogue
- the writer’s perspective—his or her unique thoughts and feelings about the subject

To help your student prepare to write an essay that describes someone clearly and vividly, work together on the following activity.

### Activity: Planning a Descriptive Essay

1. The first step is choosing a subject. Ask your student to list several people whom he or she knows well or could easily interview to learn more about. The list might include an elderly neighbor, a friend, an uncle, or the school librarian. Once your student has a list of at least four possibilities, ask him or her to think about which subject would be most interesting to an audience—or which could be presented in the most interesting way.

How much background the audience will need is another concern. If the details of the subject’s profession, for example, need a great deal of explanation, ask your student whether a complete description can be given in the space of this short paper.

2. Ask your student to brainstorm details about the person by filling in the following chart. If the person is someone your student does not know well, have your student fill in the chart as thoroughly as possible and then jot down a list of questions to ask the person in an interview.

### Gathering Details for a Description of a Person

Types of Details	Details
<p><b>Factual details</b>, including names, dates, ages, quotations</p>	
<p><b>Sensory details</b>—words and phrases that appeal to the five senses: sight, hearing, touch, smell, and taste</p>	
<p><b>Figurative details</b>—similes, metaphors, and personification that will sharpen the description for readers</p>	
<p><b>Thoughts and feelings</b> that reveal your perspective on your subject</p>	

3. Now, help your student find a way to tie the details together in a coherent way. What central idea does your student want to relate about the subject? To find out, ask your student to work through the following steps.

- After reading through the details you've noted in the chart, list at least four nouns and adjectives that apply to your subject. (One student, for example, might record the words *bold* and *nature loving* about her subject, a neighbor who wears wild, flower-patterned dresses while she works in her large rose garden.)

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- Circle the word or words that best sum up your overall thoughts or feelings, and then use them in a statement of your central idea. (The student above, for example, might write *Mrs. Parsons' character is as bold as the colorful garden she tends throughout the year.*)

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Afterward, you might ask your student to look back at the details he or she has written in the chart and cross out any that don't contribute to the central idea written above. He or she might also elaborate on the details that directly support the larger idea or feeling of the essay.

# Helping Your Student Plan a Research Paper

Dear Parent or Guardian,

In the Writing Workshop in Chapter 9 of *Holt Literature and Language Arts*, students are asked to write a research paper (California Writing Standard 2.3). Because your teenager will put a good deal of time and effort on this paper, it's important that the topic be manageable, researchable, and truly interesting to your student. This letter suggests some brainstorming steps to help your student find an ideal topic.

## Activity: Finding a Research Topic

1. Finding a topic for a research paper can seem a bit like entering a maze. There are so many possible paths, it's hard to know which one to follow. This year, your student's research assignment is somewhat limited: The topic of the paper should be a character found in literature or mythology that may be modeled on an actual person. Still, it may seem overwhelming to decide *which* character to investigate. Asking your student the following questions may help him or her draft a short list of possibilities.
  - Who are your favorite authors? Are their works based on historical events and actual people? Are you interested in learning more about these events and people?
  - What are your favorite stories, poems, novels, or plays? What interests you about the places or historical periods in which they are set?
  - What literary characters are your favorites? What are their lives like? Are they modeled on real people?
  - What mythological figures are you interested in learning more about? Do some of them seem as if they are modeled on real people?
  - What interesting historical events are treated in some of your favorite works of literature? How do the literary pieces compare to the real events?
2. Once your student has a list of some possibilities, ask him or her to take another look at the list. Sometimes topics are so huge (Shakespeare, for example, or Arthurian legend) that the paper would have to appear in twenty volumes; other times, topics are so specific (Why is Lancelot named Lancelot?) that they won't lead to fruitful research.
3. Now that your student has chosen a character as a topic for the paper, how difficult will it be to collect information on that character? In addition, how interesting or understandable will the research be to the paper's readers (most likely, your student's teacher and classmates)? Look at the questions in the following chart, and invite your student to jot down answers for his or her own topic.

## Evaluating a Topic

Questions	Answers
Can I find information about this topic in recent and reliable sources?	
Is there so much information that I'll never be able to read it all in the time I have available?	
What background information will my audience need to understand my paper? (If readers will find the subject completely unfamiliar, decide whether it's possible to provide the necessary background concisely or whether another topic might be more workable.)	
How can I make this topic interesting to my audience?	

Sometimes, answering questions like those above will prompt your student to further refine the topic—or to change it altogether. That's okay. Most writers work through the steps of the writing process by going back to reconsider and adjust the original plans again and again. However, even if the original topic seems perfect, thinking about resources and readers before getting into the thick of the research process will always help your student work more efficiently.

# Section Three

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# Understanding Direct Objects

Dear Parent or Guardian,

Your student is studying Chapter 2 of the *Holt Handbook* to learn about direct objects (California Written and Oral English-Language Conventions Standard 1.3). You may want to use this activity to help your teenager understand how direct objects work.

A *direct object* answers the question *What?* or *Whom?* after an action word.

**EXAMPLES** Damon left his **backpack** on the bus. [Damon left **what**? He left a backpack. *Backpack* is the direct object.]

Sally walked **Joey** to the library. [Sally walked **whom**? She walked Joey. *Joey* is the direct object.]

Not all sentences containing action words have direct objects.

**EXAMPLES** Damon left early. [Damon left **what** or **whom**? The word *early* tells when Damon left but not what or whom he left. This sentence has no direct object.]

Sally walked for an hour. [Sally walked **what** or **whom**? The words *for an hour* tell how long Sally walked but not what or whom she walked. This sentence has no direct object.]

## Story Objects

**STEP 1** Have your teenager choose five of the following action words.

found	swam	called	planted	lifted
pulled	saw	flew	attended	jumped
fixed	sprinted	drank	tasted	drove

**STEP 2** Next, ask him or her to use these five action words to write a brief paragraph (four or five sentences will do) about any subject. The paragraph can be silly, serious, or anywhere in between. Ask your student to use the five action words just as they appear in Step 1 and to underline them.

**EXAMPLE** James was late for school, so he drank his juice in a single gulp and gobbled his cereal. He then flew to the door and pulled the knob, but the knob broke off in his hand. Acting quickly, James grabbed some tools, fixed the doorknob, and then finally left. He had sprinted about three blocks before he realized that it was Saturday morning and that he didn't have school!

**STEP 3** Finally, together with your student, look at the underlined action words in the paragraph. Which ones have direct objects? To help your student identify the direct objects, ask *What?* or *Whom?* after each underlined word.

**YOU:** "He drank **what**?"

**STUDENT:** "He drank juice. *Juice* is the direct object."

Keep in mind that most of the underlined words will have direct objects, but some won't.

**YOU:** "He flew **what**?"

**STUDENT:** "Nothing answers the question. *To the door* tells where but not what or whom. There's no direct object."

# Understanding Gerunds

Dear Parent or Guardian,

Your student is currently learning about gerunds, which are covered in Chapter 3 of the *Holt Handbook* (California Written and Oral English-Language Conventions Standard 1.1). Here is an activity to help your teenager understand gerunds.

Take a look at the sentence below. What is the name of the action that Bill does every summer?

Bill hikes every summer.

In naming the action, you will likely add the letters *-ing* to the verb *hike* to create a gerund: *hiking*. A *gerund* is a verb form that ends in *-ing* and that is used as a noun (or naming word). Once you use a gerund to give a name to an action, you can then say something about the action.

**VERB** Bill **hikes** every summer. [verb form that shows action]

**GERUND** **Hiking** every summer is the highlight of Bill's year. [verb form that names the action]

## Naming Actions

**STEP 1** Ask your teenager to choose three of the following action words: *paints, reads, rides, talks, draws, sings*. Then, help write three original sentences, each using the action word just as it appears in the list.

**EXAMPLES** My niece Emma **paints** with watercolors.  
Mom **reads** the newspaper each morning.  
Drew **sings** lead vocals in his band.

**STEP 2** Your teenager's next task is to create a gerund to name the action in each original sentence. Point out that gerunds can be formed by adding *-ing* to the verbs.

**EXAMPLES** **painting**  
**reading**  
**singing**

**STEP 3** Now, help your student use each gerund from Step 2 to begin a new sentence. You might encourage your teen to include details from his or her original sentences.

**ORIGINAL** My niece Emma **paints** with watercolors.

**NEW** **Painting** with watercolors is Emma's favorite hobby.

**STEP 4** Finally, for each sentence, work together to identify the name of the action and what is said about the action.

**EXAMPLE** Painting with watercolors is Emma's favorite hobby. [*Painting* is the name of the action, and it is her favorite hobby.]

## Using Adjective Clauses

Dear Parent or Guardian,

At school, your student is studying adjective clauses (California Written and Oral English-Language Conventions Standard 1.1). Adjective clauses are covered in Chapter 4 of the *Holt Handbook*. You can give your student some at-home help using adjective clauses by leading the following activity.

Consider the two sentences below. Both sentences are fine, but neither one has many details.

Rita likes movies.      Sam listened to a man.

One way to add details to a sentence is to use an *adjective clause*. Adjective clauses provide details by answering questions such as *What kind?* or *Which one?* about a person, place, or thing.

**EXAMPLES** Rita likes movies **that have interesting special effects**. [What kind of movies does Rita like? She likes the kind that have interesting special effects.]

Sam listened to a man **who was playing jazz**. [Which man did Sam listen to? He listened to the man who was playing jazz.]

**TIP:** Because adjective clauses often begin with the word *that* or *who*, you may want to have your student think of them as “*that* statements” or “*who* statements.”

### “I’m Thinking of . . .”

**STEP 1** Playing a simple guessing game can be a great way to have some fun with learning. Begin this game by asking your student to think of a familiar thing or person. Your student should keep the thing or person a secret. Then, have him or her say, “I’m thinking of a thing” or “I’m thinking of a person.”

**STEP 2** Now, ask your student to give you some details or clues about the thing or person. He or she can tell you what kind or which one by using the word *that* or *who* to begin an adjective clause. Here is how the game might work.

**STUDENT:** “I’m thinking of a thing **that is round**.”

**YOU:** “Is it a basketball?”

**STUDENT:** “No. I’m thinking of a thing **that measures something**.”

**YOU:** “It’s round and measures something. Is it a clock?”

**STUDENT:** “Yes, it’s a clock.”

**STEP 3** After playing the game a few times, you might want to switch roles. Your teenager could guess as you give clues using adjective clauses.

## Using Pronouns Correctly

Dear Parent or Guardian,

Your student is studying Chapter 6 of the *Holt Handbook* to learn more about correct pronoun usage (California Written and Oral English-Language Conventions Standard 1.3). Here is an activity that will help your student avoid a common pronoun problem.

Choosing the correct pronoun in sentences like the one below can be tricky. Is the pronoun *him* correct, or should it be *he*?

Zack and **him** are washing the car.

First, notice that the example sentence involves two people: Zack and him. Then, try restating the sentence by using only the pronoun *him* from the pair. If the pronoun sounds correct, use it. If the pronoun doesn't sound correct, try another form of the pronoun.

**EXAMPLE** The sentence **Him** is washing the car sounds incorrect, but the sentence **He** is washing the car sounds correct. The correct sentence is *Zack and he are washing the car.*

### Dynamic Duos

**STEP 1** Each of you think of a famous (or not-so-famous) couple, duo, or pair. To get ideas, consider characters from books, movies, or television. You might also choose the names of family, friends, or other people familiar to both of you. Don't share the names with each other.

**EXAMPLES** Bert and Ernie (comedy duo on children's TV show)  
Uncle Pete and Aunt Laura (relatives)

**STEP 2** Next, each of you write a sentence that involves the couple, duo, or pair that you chose in Step 1. In the sentence, use only one of the names and substitute a pronoun such as *he, him, she, or her* for the other name. Also, provide a clue that will help in guessing the identity of the unnamed person.

**EXAMPLE** My little sister often watches **Bert** and **he** on Saturday mornings.

**STEP 3** Now, take a look at each other's sentence and use the instruction above Step 1 to check the correctness of the pronoun.

**EXAMPLE** *My little sister often watches he on Saturday mornings* sounds incorrect. The correct sentence is *My little sister often watches Bert and him on Saturday mornings.*

**STEP 4** Finally, use the clue in the sentence to guess the identity of the unnamed person.

**YOU:** "Is it Ernie? Are you talking about Bert and Ernie?"

**STUDENT:** "Yes, that's right."

For more practice, repeat the steps of this activity, using other couples, duos, or pairs. You might also decide to include well-known groups of three or more. No matter how many people are mentioned, you can apply the same strategy for checking pronouns.

# Understanding Misplaced Modifiers

Dear Parent or Guardian,

To learn about modifiers, your student is studying Chapter 8 of the *Holt Handbook* (California Written and Oral English-Language Conventions Standard 1.2). You can lead this activity to help your teenager learn to spot and correct misplaced modifiers.

Words that describe other words are called *modifiers*. Sometimes a modifier appears to be describing the wrong word or words. In such cases, the modifier is called a *misplaced modifier*. Because a misplaced modifier can cause confusion or unintended humor, it should be moved so that it clearly describes what it should.

**MISPLACED** A girl is riding a bike **with curly red hair**. [Does the bike have curly red hair? The modifier *with curly red hair* should be placed so that it clearly describes *girl*.]

**CLEAR** A girl **with curly red hair** is riding a bike.

## Making Sense

**STEP 1** Together with your student, read the following sentences and discuss why the boldface words are misplaced. To help guide the discussion, you may want to use the questions in brackets following sentence 5.

1. Bart saw three deer **driving to school**.
2. The cow grazing by the fence **with black-and-white spots** belongs to Grandpa.
3. This report involves the Declaration of Independence **written by my little brother**.
4. That woman is sketching a tree **wearing faded blue overalls**.
5. Ryan told us about the new skateboard ramp **in the car**.

[1. What seems to be driving a car? 2. What is odd about the fence? 3. Did the person's little brother write the Declaration of Independence? 4. Is the tree wearing faded blue overalls? 5. Where does the skateboard ramp seem to be?]

**STEP 2** To emphasize the funny images created by the misplacement of the boldface words in sentences 1–5 above, you may want to help your teen make simple, stick-figure sketches based on the sentences. For example, for sentence 1, a sketch could consist of deer driving a car.

**STEP 3** To finish up the activity, help your teenager move the boldface words in sentences 1–5 so that they clearly describe what they should.

**MISPLACED 1.** Bart saw three deer **driving to school**.

**CLEAR 1.** **Driving to school**, Bart saw three deer. [Now, Bart is clearly the driver.]

## Using Commas Correctly

Dear Parent or Guardian,

Your student is studying Chapter 11 of the *Holt Handbook* to learn more about commas (California Written and Oral English-Language Conventions Standard 1.1). Here is an activity that you can use to help support your teen's efforts.

Take a look at the following example. Is there a group of words that can be moved from the end of the sentence to the beginning of the sentence?

Sean ate dinner before he left home.

You will likely have noticed that the words *before he left home* can be moved. By moving these words to the beginning of the sentence, you create an introductory clause. When you use such a clause, follow it with a comma.

**INTRODUCTORY CLAUSE** *Before he left home,* Sean ate dinner.

### Commas to the Rescue

**STEP 1** Together with your teen, read the following paragraph aloud, underlining clauses that could be moved from the end of a sentence to the beginning. Hint: Each of the clauses in the paragraph begins with one of these signal words: *after, although, because, before, if, when,* and *while*.

It is important to know general car maintenance when you get your driver's license. You need to be prepared if you have an emergency. It is a good idea to practice changing a tire while you are learning the rules of the road. I think each state should require new drivers to pass a basic maintenance test before they can earn a driver's license. Fewer motorists would get stranded because more people would be alert to potential car problems.

**STEP 2** Now, ask your student to turn a couple of the underlined clauses in the paragraph into introductory clauses. Remind him or her to add a comma after each clause that is moved to the beginning of the sentence.

**CLAUSE** You need to be prepared if you have an emergency.

**INTRODUCTORY CLAUSE** If you have an emergency, you need to be prepared.

**STEP 3** To wrap up the activity, discuss with your student how the two paragraph versions vary. Does the original version or the version with introductory clauses sound better? How would the paragraph sound if all of the sentences had introductory clauses?

## Understanding Colon Usage

Dear Parent or Guardian,

To learn more about marks of punctuation such as the colon, your student is studying Chapter 12 of the *Holt Handbook* (California Written and Oral English-Language Conventions Standard 1.4). This letter provides you with an activity to help your student better understand one way that colons are used.

A *colon* is sometimes used to introduce an explanation.

**EXAMPLES** The players need a break: They have been practicing all morning.

Henry left school early: He wasn't feeling well.

My cousin is very active: She practices with the school band during the week and does volunteer work on the weekends.

### And Here's Why ...

**STEP 1** Together with your student, take a few minutes to jot down a few brief statements. Each statement can take the form of an opinion, a piece of advice, or a simple claim.

**EXAMPLES** That movie was terrible.

People should eat plenty of vegetables.

I need a new bike.

**STEP 2** Now that you have some statements, make them more convincing by supporting them with reasons or explanations. For each statement, work together to write a one-sentence reason or explanation that completes this thought: *and here's why*. . . .

**EXAMPLES** That movie was terrible. [*and here's why*] The plot was weak, and the characters were unbelievable.

People should eat plenty of vegetables. [*and here's why*] Many vegetables are rich in nutrients.

I need a new bike. [*and here's why*] Mine is falling apart.

**STEP 3** Finally, ask your student to put a colon between each statement and its reason or explanation. To make the colon rule in this activity memorable to your student, you might point out that the colon can stand for the words *and here's why*.

**EXAMPLE** That movie was terrible: The plot was weak, and the characters were unbelievable.

## Using Underlining and Quotation Marks

Dear Parent or Guardian,

Your student is learning about punctuation (California Written and Oral English-Language Conventions Standard 1.5), as discussed in Chapter 13 of the *Holt Handbook*. This letter can be used to give your student extra practice using underlining and quotation marks with titles.

We see titles of books, book chapters, magazines, magazine articles, plays, and songs all the time. Why are some titles underlined (or italicized), while others are in quotation marks? As a general rule, **shorter works**, like short stories and songs, are enclosed in **quotation marks**; **longer works**, such as books and movies, are **underlined** (or italicized).

**EXAMPLES** "The Gift of the Magi" [short story]  
"There's No Business Like Show Business" [song]  
To Kill a Mockingbird [book]  
Singin' in the Rain [movie]

### Guessing Game

**STEP 1** Think of some interests that you each have, such as gardening, biking, collecting, reading, or soccer. Select one of your interests and keep it secret.

**STEP 2** Make up four original titles that give hints about your interest. Include a short story, a song, a book, and a movie. When writing the titles, make sure to use quotation marks and underlining correctly.

**SHORT STORY** "Skating on Thin Ice"

**SONG** "Power-Play Shuffle"

**BOOK** How to Tend Goal Like a Pro

**MOVIE** The Rink Rats

**STEP 3** Now, take turns guessing each other's interest. (Grouped together, the four example titles in Step 2 point toward *hockey*.) Be sure to check each other's original titles for the correct use of underlining and quotation marks.

**STEP 4** Finally, you may wish to choose other interests and continue the game. You could even include other friends or family members in the fun.

## Using Contractions and Possessive Pronouns Correctly

Dear Parent or Guardian,

Your student has been learning more about contractions by studying Chapter 14 of the *Holt Handbook* (California Written and Oral English-Language Conventions Standard 1.1). Here is an activity designed to give your student extra practice with contractions.

Do you ever confuse the words *you're* and *your* or *they're* and *their*? One big difference between the words in these pairs is that *you're* and *they're* are each contractions made up of two words. The apostrophe in each contraction shows where letters have been left out.

**EXAMPLES** **you're** = you + are      **they're** = they + are

On the other hand, *your* and *their* are possessive pronouns.

**EXAMPLES** **Your** room is a mess!

**Their** brother drove us to the football game.

How can you choose which of these words to use in a sentence? Try this test. Spell out the two words that make up the contraction. If the two words make sense in the sentence, use the contraction. If the two words do not make sense, use the possessive pronoun.

**EXAMPLES** She knows that (*you're, your*) doing fine. [The sentence *She knows that **you are** doing fine* makes sense. **You're** is correct.]

Do you know whether (*they're, their*) dog has been fed today? [The sentence *Do you know whether **they are** dog has been fed today?* does not make sense. **Their** is correct.]

### Which Is It?

**STEP 1** Read the following sentences aloud to your teenager, and stress each boldface word. (Make sure that your teen cannot see the written sentences.) Then, ask him or her to repeat each sentence and say whether the boldface word is a contraction or a possessive pronoun. Encourage your teen to use the spell-out test given above.

1. Gabi said that **you're** going to the game tonight.
2. **Their** seats are on the 50-yard line.
3. Don't forget to bring **your** binoculars.
4. I hope **they're** ready on time!

**STEP 2** Now, help your student write four original sentences, using one of the key words (*you're, your, they're, or their*) in each sentence. Then together, check that the spelling of each key word is correct for the meaning you intend.

## Finding Sentence Fragments

Dear Parent or Guardian,

Your student has been studying Chapter 17 of the *Holt Handbook* to learn more about sentence fragments (California Written and Oral English-Language Conventions Standard 1.3). To give your student some help identifying sentence fragments, you might want to use this activity.

A *sentence fragment* cannot stand on its own as a complete thought. Take a look at the following fragments. What seems to be missing in each one?

**FRAGMENTS** Looks good on paper. [The fragment doesn't tell *what* looks good on paper.]  
Because they like learning about ways to improve their health. [The fragment gives an answer to something but doesn't tell *what*.]

**SENTENCES** **That theory** looks good on paper.  
**Readers like this magazine** because they like learning about ways to improve their health.

Experienced writers sometimes use fragments for effect. For example, a writer may use fragments to imitate natural speech or to create a conversational style. However, fragments should not be used in most school assignments. In such assignments, formal language is expected.

### Fragment Find

**STEP 1** To complete this activity, you and your student will need to locate examples of fragments in everyday writing. First, gather some magazines, newspapers, letters, or books. You might also encourage your student to look through a literature textbook for examples from short stories, essays, and plays.

**STEP 2** Next, find some sentence fragments in the resources you've gathered. (Rather than finding the fragments in one sitting, you may choose to be on the lookout for them during the week.) Then, underline, circle, or jot down each fragment. Remind your student that a fragment cannot stand on its own as a complete thought.

**EXAMPLES** Creative, versatile, and respected.  
Chef Ray's recipe: great food and good friends.  
Whenever the governor has free time.  
The world leaders in the Oval Office.

**STEP 3** Finally, use the following questions to lead a discussion about each fragment.

- What is missing from the fragment?
- Does the writer give enough information in the surrounding sentences so that you can make sense of the fragment?
- How would you rewrite the fragment to make it a complete sentence? Would you add it to a sentence before or after the fragment, or would you simply supply the missing information?
- Do you prefer the fragment or the complete sentence? Why?

Remember that fragments are acceptable in some writing situations—but not in most school assignments. School assignments usually require formal language.