

Section One

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Helping Your Student Complete Long-Term Projects

Dear Parent or Guardian,

During this school year, your student will be expected to complete several long-term projects, such as a research report or a multimedia presentation. Successfully completing such a project requires careful planning and significant preparation. This letter contains suggestions that can help your student effectively organize his or her time in order to complete these larger and more complex projects.

FIND SHORT-TERM GOALS Encourage your teenager to break long-term projects into a series of smaller short-term goals. Setting these short-term goals will help your student stay on track while researching, writing, and revising his or her work. Help your student set specific goals similar to the ones shown in the calendar below.

PLAN BACKWARDS First, write the final deadline on a calendar. Then, working backwards, add your short-term deadlines. Tell your teenager to leave room in the schedule to allow for some flexibility. You might also want to encourage your student to show you work at various stages of the project.

Name of Month: _____						
Sunday	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday	Saturday
1 Think of topics for research report	2 Narrow down to two topics	3 Go to the library	4	5 Choose final topic	6 Go to library again	7
8	9 Create outline for paper	10	11	12 Assemble research	13 Return to library for more research	14
15	16 Revise outline	17	18 Write first draft	19 Study for history quiz	20 History quiz	21
22	23 Begin revising	24	25 Proofread report	26	27 Research report due	28
29 Study for history exam	30 History exam	31				

Building Test-Taking Skills: Process of Elimination

Dear Parent or Guardian,

You can help your teenager prepare for the SAT and other multiple-choice tests by talking about and practicing test-taking strategies. In many cases, practicing test-taking skills can significantly improve your student's scores.

KNOWING WHEN TO GUESS Some tests, like the SAT, penalize students for incorrect answers. Randomly guessing on such a test will actually decrease your student's score. But eliminating as many answers as possible before guessing can greatly increase your student's chance of selecting or guessing the correct answer. In fact, with the SAT, if your student can eliminate one answer, he or she should try to guess the answer from the remaining choices.

USE YOUR TEST BOOKLET Also, remind your teenager that with most multiple-choice tests it's possible to write in the test booklet. Therefore, encourage your student to cross off answer choices that they know are incorrect and then evaluate the remaining answers. For practice, work through the following example with your student.

Only the most _____ traveler would visit Antarctica during the harsh winter season.

- A. angry
- B. daring
- C. humble
- D. sloppy
- E. frightened

This example asks for the word that best completes the sentence. Even if a test taker doesn't know the meaning of every answer choice, he or she may be able to eliminate some of the answers. For example, the word *humble* doesn't make sense in the sentence because being humble, or modest, has nothing to do with visiting someplace in a "harsh" season. Eliminating, and crossing out, every answer that is certainly incorrect can help students locate, or at least guess, the correct answer. In this case the correct answer is **B**.

Tips for Using the Process of Elimination

1. Look for wrong answers and cross them off in your test booklet.
2. On the SAT, if you can eliminate just one answer, make your best guess from the remaining choices.

My Test-Taking Tips/ Reminders

- 1.
- 2.
- 3.

Evaluating Public Statements

Dear Parent or Guardian,

California Reading Standard 2.1 requires a careful analysis of information. To meet this standard, your student is developing the skills needed to evaluate and judge the effectiveness of public statements and documents (for example, TV news reports, political speeches, or newspaper editorials). The following home activities can help your student get more practice evaluating media sources.

CONSIDER NEWS WRITING View a television news program with your student and evaluate the overall effectiveness and trustworthiness of the report. Use the chart below to rate the report. Judge the report on a scale of 1 to 5, with 5 representing excellence. Then, ask your student to justify the rating he or she assigns.

EVALUATE A POLITICAL SPEECH Then, use the same chart to analyze a political speech, such as a campaign speech by a candidate or a public announcement by an elected official.

	News Report	Political Speech
Topic		
Summary		
Rating		
Clarity How easy is the report or speech to understand?		
Completeness Does the report or speech omit any important information or leave questions unanswered?		
Bias Is the text subjective, reflecting only the opinions of the writer(s)?		
Trustworthiness Is the main idea of the report or speech supported by facts and details?		

Building Test-Taking Skills: Vocabulary Development

Dear Parent or Guardian,

The verbal section of the SAT places a strong emphasis on vocabulary. Your teenager can increase his or her score on this portion of the test by making vocabulary development a key part of daily life. You can use these home activities to help your student find and learn new vocabulary words.

FOLLOW A VOCABULARY PLAN Students are far more likely to remember words they learn in context rather than words presented in lists. This four-step plan will help your student acquire vocabulary from any source.

- 1. Independently read to increase vocabulary.** Encourage your student to choose challenging texts and circle or write down any unfamiliar words.
- 2. Guess the meaning of words from context.** Always try to guess the meaning of the word based on how it is used in the sentence.
- 3. Look up the word.** Check if you guessed correctly. Use a dictionary to find the actual definition.
- 4. Use the word.** After you learn a word, start using it. You could write a sentence with the new word, or try to fit it into everyday conversations.

MAKE ASSOCIATIONS When learning a word, try to make associations with other words to strengthen both memory and understanding of the new word. For example, when learning that the word *querulous* means *complaining*, make a list of synonyms (*petulant, carping, peevish*) and antonyms (*accepting, uncomplaining, content*).

Word Log			
Word	Predicted Definition	Dictionary Definition	Your Own Sentence

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Reinforcing Literary Concepts: Author's Perspective

Dear Parent or Guardian,

To master California Reading Standard 2.5, your student needs to practice analyzing how authors' ideas and beliefs influence how they write about a subject. You can help your student with this type of analysis by encouraging him or her to reflect on the works of authors read in school or for pleasure out of school. This letter can help your teenager focus in on an author's personality and how it can influence what he or she writes.

DISCUSS THE AUTHOR After your student has read a newspaper article, novel, or other piece of writing, talk about what they know about the author from reading his or her work. Ask what values and philosophical beliefs the author probably holds, based on evidence in the writing.

CAST THE ACTOR TO PLAY THE WRITER Actors are often chosen for roles because people have a certain idea of what type of person he or she is able to portray on film. For example, Tom Hanks almost never plays the bad guy in a movie, and Julia Roberts almost always plays the leading lady. Talk with your student about the personalities and characters of well-known writers—either still living or long since dead—and come up with suggestions for who could best portray them in a movie.

Who Should Play the Writer?

_____ could be played by _____ because
(author) (actor)

_____ could be played by _____ because
(author) (actor)

_____ could be played by _____ because
(author) (actor)

_____ could be played by _____ because
(author) (actor)

Building Your Student's Vocabulary: Technical Vocabulary

Dear Parent or Guardian,

The technical vocabularies of science and mathematics are emphasized in California Reading Standard 1.2. Your student can master many of these technical terms by learning more about Greek and Latin roots, prefixes, and suffixes.

COLLECT WORD PARTS Encourage your student to collect any Greek and Latin roots, prefixes, and suffixes that he or she discovers in math or science textbooks. Use the chart below to keep track of them. Point out to your teenager that whenever he or she finds two scientific or mathematical terms that share a similar word part, such as *biological* and *biorhythm*, or *microscope* and *periscope*, the shared part is very likely a Greek or Latin root, prefix, or suffix. Once your teenager has filled up the chart with suspected Greek and Latin roots, prefixes, and suffixes, he or she can look them up in a dictionary to identify and define them.

CREATE YOUR OWN WORD For further practice, you and your teenager could try to think of some words that are made with the roots, prefixes, and suffixes that appear in your completed chart. Add your words to the box at the end of the page, which contains a few example words.

Greek and Latin Word Parts			
Root		Prefix or Suffix	
-graph- = writing -cosm- = universe -bio- = life -anthrop- = human -scope- = see	-magn- = large, grand -audi- = hear -vid- = see -cogn- = think	-ic = of or relating to peri- = about or around -ology = the study of	-fy = make inter- = between or among semi- = partly
Word List			
anthropology audio magnify			

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Reinforcing Literary Concepts: Evaluating Style

Dear Parent or Guardian,

Every author has a unique personal style. Recognizing the elements that make up an author's style will help your student master California Reading Standard 3.3. Whenever your student reads a text encourage him or her to be on the lookout for the following elements of style:

- **Tone.** What is the tone, or general feeling, of the text? Is it formal or informal? Playful or serious? Controlled or freewheeling?
- **Word Choice.** What kinds of words does the author choose? Is the vocabulary complex and difficult, or simple and direct?
- **Sentences.** Are all the sentences the same length or does the author vary sentence length and style?
- **Irony.** Irony is when the author means the opposite of what he or she actually says. Can you find any examples of irony in the text?

COMPARING STYLES To get some practice with these concepts, ask your student to identify two favorite authors who have very different writing styles. Then, ask your teenager to fill in the chart below to compare the style of these two authors.

Author Comparison		
First Author		Second Author
	Tone	
	Word Choice	
	Sentences	
	Irony	
	Summary of Style	

Building Test-Taking Skills: Strategy Review

Dear Parent or Guardian,

Standardized tests, such as the SAT, are a big part of eleventh and twelfth grade and are used to judge your student's progress. With your help and encouragement your student can prepare and plan for these tests. The strategies in this letter can help make test taking a positive and rewarding experience.

KEEP DATES IN MIND Learn the dates of important tests and note them on a calendar. Encourage your teenager to begin preparation at least one month before the test. This will help get rid of the stress of last-minute planning.

VOCABULARY To score well on tests that focus on verbal ability, your student will need to develop a rich vocabulary. Make daily vocabulary games a part of your home routine. Choose an unfamiliar word or two every day. Then, look up the meaning and take turns using the word in a sentence. Jot down your words in a notebook, and at the end of each week review the meanings.

TEST-TAKING STRATEGIES Review the strategies in the box below, and then encourage your student to add his or her own strategies after each testing experience.

Tips for Standardized Testing

- Be familiar with the test beforehand. You can find out about the test format by reading library or online resources. Also, test directions don't change much from one year to the next, so you'll save time if you already have an idea of what to do when the test begins.
- Use the process of elimination to spot wrong answers and cross them off. Then, make your best guess from the remaining answer choices.
- Some items will be more difficult than others. Do the easier questions first and then go back later and spend the remaining time working on the harder ones.
- Use your test book as scratch paper. Jot down notes and circle or underline key words and phrases. But don't make any extra marks on your answer sheet. They may be scored as wrong answers.

Strategies That Work for Me

Practicing Consumer Skills with Your Student: Verifying Claims

Dear Parent or Guardian,

Every day, your family receives vast quantities of consumer information. From commercials and advertisements to articles and direct mailings, your student needs to be able to determine if information is factual in order to make informed decisions. California Reading Standard 2.3 emphasizes verifying and clarifying claims found in a wide variety of consumer and public documents. These activities can help your student develop these skills.

CIRCLE AND INVESTIGATE Have your student watch for print advertisements that they find particularly effective—those that really make him or her want to use a product. Then, have your student circle every claim in the advertisement and decide how the information could be verified. Emphasize the use of both standard reference sources as well as local experts. For example, if an advertisement claims that a fabric is nonstaining, students might talk with local dry cleaners to find out if that’s really true.

CHART QUESTIONABLE CLAIMS Use the chart below to keep track of claims that sound outrageous or unfounded. For each questionable claim, note the source used to check its truth and the outcome of your student’s research.

Verifying Claims in the Media		
Claim to Be Tested	Verification Sources	Outcome: True or False?

Encouraging Independent Reading

Dear Parent or Guardian,

Independent reading is an essential tool for mastering the California Reading Standards. It's recommended that students read two million words this year on their own. Keeping track of this challenging task can help your student plan and succeed with an ambitious reading schedule.

WORDS PER WEEK Have your student figure out the number of words he or she reads in a normal week by filling out a one-week reading journal. Ask your student to write down everything he or she reads in newspapers, in online resources, and in books and magazines. Ask your teenager to estimate the number of pages he or she reads each day of the week. Then, multiply the number of pages by the estimated number of words on each page to estimate how close your teenager is to meeting the suggested two-million-word goal.

KEEPING A READING LOG After evaluating the number of words read in an average week, encourage your student to look at his or her reading choices and set specific new reading goals. For example, if your student recognizes that he or she spends too much time browsing through random Internet sites and not enough time reading books, set a goal to increase the number of books read each month. Keep a chart like the one shown below to set, and then keep track of, reading goals.

Calendar							
	Sunday	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday	Saturday
Estimated Number of Pages							
Estimated Number of Words							
Total Number of Words							
Reading Goals							
Books I'd Like to Read	Magazines I'd Like to Read			Subjects I'd Like to Learn More About			

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Section Two

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Writing a Persuasive Editorial

Dear Parent or Guardian,

In the Writing Workshop in Chapter 1 of *Holt Literature and Language Arts*, students learn how to write an *editorial* (California Writing Standard 1.3). An editorial tries to persuade readers to believe something or to take a particular action. This letter introduces the key elements of an editorial and gives you and your teenager an activity to help him or her practice coming up with a good thesis statement for an editorial.

The Key Elements of an Editorial

Editorials, unlike news reports, express a writer’s opinions or beliefs. They are usually written about a controversial subject and try to persuade readers to accept a certain opinion. Although editorials are written on many different topics, they share some key elements. Knowing these elements will make it easier for your student to read and write editorials. You might want to go over the following elements of editorials with your student:

- An editorial addresses a specific topic.
- An editorial contains a clear thesis statement.
- Editorials often contain a call for action. For example, if an editorial talks about “volunteering,” it may call on community members to volunteer for one weekend each year.
- Editorials usually assume that the audience is familiar with the subject. Therefore, the writer might not give all the background information on the topic.
- Editorials often assume that the reader already has some opinions on the topic and attempt to address those opinions.

Activity One: Taking a Closer Look at an Editorial

To get a better idea of what key elements in an editorial often look like, ask your teenager to search around your home or at a local library to find some example editorials. They can normally be found in a daily newspaper or in a magazine. Read through some of the editorials with your student. Then, have your student decide which editorial is the most effective. Take a closer look at that editorial by working through the following steps.

1. The first, and most important, element of an editorial is the *topic*. The topic is an issue that concerns the writer. For example, a writer might choose “my school’s dress code” as the topic for an editorial. Ask your teenager to identify the topic of the editorial he or she chose and write it on the line below.

Topic:

2. The next element of an editorial is the *thesis*. A thesis is what you get when you combine a topic with an opinion about that topic. For example, a student writing an editorial on a school dress code might come up with the following thesis statement: “The school’s dress code should be abolished.” This statement clearly identifies both the topic and the writer’s opinion about that topic. Have your student restate the thesis of the editorial and write it on the following lines.

Thesis statement:

3. Now, look at the body of the editorial, where the writer gives reasons to support the thesis statement. With facts, examples, and other evidence, the writer attempts to persuade the reader that the thesis statement is correct. Ask your student to underline and number all of the reasons listed in the editorial.

Activity Two: Coming Up with a Topic and an Opinion

As the previous activity suggests, the thesis statement is the most important part of an editorial. It's normally one of the first things that one reads, and everything that follows is meant to prove that the thesis statement is correct. The following activity will give your teenager a quick review on how to develop a thesis statement for an editorial.

In the first column of the following chart, ask your student to list four issues that he or she has strong opinions about. Then, in the second column, ask your student to write what those opinions are. He or she should model the thesis statements on the one included in the chart. You might want to complete the chart together; one of you could come up with a topic and the other could guess what that person's opinion about the topic will be.

Thesis Statements	
Topic	Opinion
Our local park ...	needs a new basketball court.

Finally, choose the thesis statement you both think could be turned into the best editorial. Talk about what kinds of arguments you could use to support the thesis statement and how interesting and relevant it would be to the audience of the editorial—your student's classmates and teacher.

Writing a Reflective Essay

Dear Parent or Guardian,

In the Writing Workshop in Chapter 3 of *Holt Literature and Language Arts*, students learn how to write a *reflective essay* (California Writing Standard 2.3). A reflective essay shares a writer's thoughts and feelings about a personally significant event. This letter gives some information on the reflective essay and gives you an activity that you can do with your student to help him or her prepare to write a reflective essay.

A Subject Your Teenager Is an Expert On

Normally, when a student has to write an essay for school, he or she has done research to find a good subject for the essay. But with a reflective essay your teenager *is* the subject of the essay. All your teenager has to do is look back on his or her life and choose a memorable and influential experience. The essay will then tell the story of that experience and explain why it was significant.

Thinking of the best event to write about, however, and then writing about it in the essay can still be a challenge. The following activities, which you can do with your teenager, will help him or her select a topic and then organize it.

Activity: Sifting Through Memories

The first, and most important, step is to choose a topic for the essay. Your student should think back on the experiences that taught him or her something or changed his or her view of the world. To help come up with some ideas, read through the following suggestions with your student.

- Look through a family photo album together.
- Think about your own memories. You probably have memories of important events in your teenager's life. Chances are, if you consider an event to have been important, your teenager might feel the same way.
- Look at published reflective essays, such as memoirs or biographies. Or check the TV listing to see if you can find any interviews with famous or important people. Reading or seeing someone else's reflections might give your student some ideas on what to write about.

While choosing a topic for the essay, your teenager should keep in mind that the intended audience for this essay will be fellow classmates and his or her teacher. Therefore, your teenager should only write about things that he or she is comfortable talking about and sharing with other people.

Evaluating the Experience

Once your student has chosen an experience to explore, talk about why and how the experience was significant. To get a good start on this process, ask your teenager the following questions.

Reflection Questions

Questions

Answers

How did you feel during this experience?
What did you feel when you thought about it shortly afterwards?
How do you feel about it now?

What did you learn about others or yourself from this experience?

How did this experience influence what you believe about people or life in general?
How have your beliefs changed or developed since then?

If your teenager is having a hard time answering any of these questions, he or she might want to consider another topic for the essay. If not, the answers to these questions may provide him or her with some valuable information or ideas when writing the essay later on.

Helping Your Student Plan a Historical Research Report

Dear Parent or Guardian,

In the Writing Workshop of Chapter 4 of *Holt Literature and Language Arts*, students learn how to report *historical research* (California Writing Standard 2.4). A historical research report investigates a controversial event by analyzing different sources of information. Because your teenager will invest a good deal of time and effort in this paper, it's important that the topic be manageable, researchable, and one for which there are many available sources of information. This letter suggests some brainstorming steps to help your student find an ideal topic for this research report.

Activity: Finding a Research Topic

1. Finding the right topic for a research paper can seem almost impossible. There are so many possible topics that one could write about, it's hard to know which one to choose. This year, your student's research assignment is somewhat limited: The subject of the paper should be a controversial historical event that is discussed in several sources. (An event is considered controversial if there are many differing opinions about it. For example, the United States's use of the atomic bomb in World War II is still a controversial topic.)

Still, it may seem overwhelming to decide *which* event to investigate. Asking your student the following questions may help him or her come up with a short list of possibilities.

- What is your favorite historical period? (Are you interested in recent history or in the distant past?)
 - Do you have a favorite historical figure? Was this figure involved in an important and controversial historical event?
 - Are there any films, novels, or plays that you have read about controversial historical events? What events did they deal with? Are you interested in learning more about those events?
2. Once your student has a list of some possibilities, ask him or her to take another look at the events on the list. Sometimes topics are so huge (American history, for example, or World War II) that the paper would be far too long. Other topics are so specific (for example, What was General Washington wearing when he crossed the Delaware?) that your student will not be able to find enough resources for the paper.

Topics that are too big can usually be broken into smaller, more manageable parts. For example, instead of talking about *all* of American history, your teenager could focus on one small event or a series of small events. So, if a topic is too large, encourage your teenager to quickly think up a list of smaller subtopics that make up the larger topic. Your teenager should then pick the subtopic that is most appealing. This exercise will also be helpful if a topic is too specific. A list of the more general topics that are related to a specific topic might help your teenager find a subject for the report that is still interesting, but more reasonably sized.

3. Once your teenager has chosen a research topic, he or she should consider how difficult it will be to find resources about the topic. Also, your student should consider how interesting and understandable this topic will be to its readers. (In this case, your student's teacher and classmates are the readers.) The following questions will help your student think about possible resources for the paper and about his or her audience. Read through the questions in the chart with your teenager. Then, invite your student to write down answers for his or her topic in the chart.

Questions	Answers
What historical event am I interested in?	
How can I further narrow this topic, if necessary?	
Can I find a variety of sources on this topic?	
Can I find sources representing all relevant perspectives on this topic?	
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 information or whether another topic might be better.)	
How can I make this topic interesting to my audience?	

Sometimes, answering questions like these will cause your student to make some changes to the topic—or change it completely. That’s okay. Many writers, after they’ve done some research or even after they’ve started writing, continue to adjust their topic. No matter how perfect a research topic seems at first, it still might turn out to be unworkable for a research report. Therefore, encourage your student to apply the ideas and activities from this letter to his or her research topic again and again, until the topic seems right.

Writing a Descriptive Essay

Dear Parent or Guardian,

In a Mini-Workshop in Chapter 5 of *Holt Literature and Language Arts*, students learn how to write a *descriptive essay* (California Writing Standard 2.1). This letter introduces the descriptive essay. Following this introduction there is an activity that you can do with your teenager to help him or her develop a topic and begin gathering details for a descriptive essay.

The Descriptive Essay: What It Is and Tips on Choosing a Subject

Descriptive essays, as their name suggests, *describe* a person, place, or thing. You can think of descriptive essays as kind of like painting a picture with words. Through a careful choice of words and details, the writer vividly describes a person, place, or thing to readers. In fact, if the writer does a very good job, readers should be able to form a mental image of whatever the writer describes, even if they have never seen it or anything like it before.

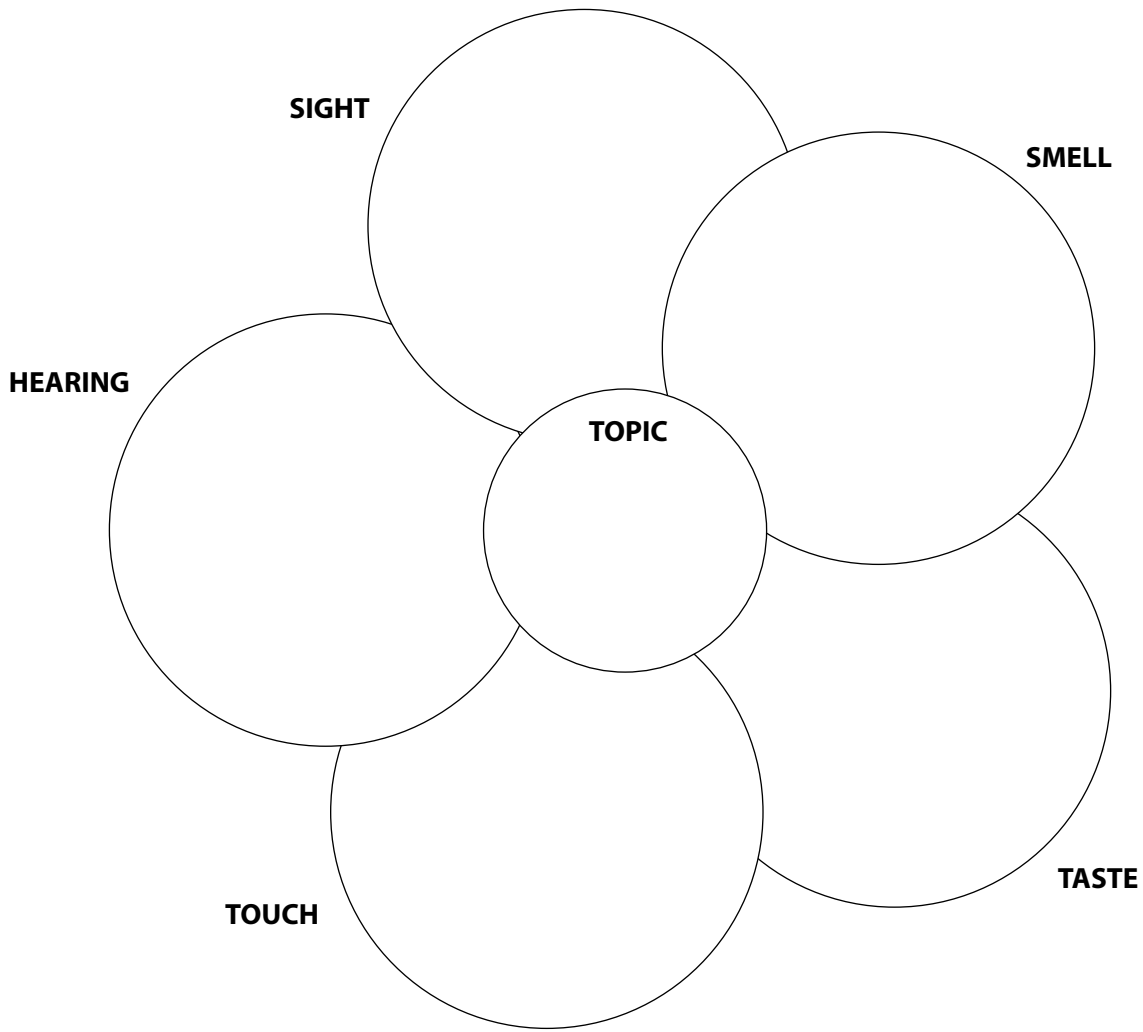
Like all essays, choosing the right subject is the first, and most important, step. Go over the following tips with your student to help him or her choose a good subject for the essay.

- **Choose a subject that you’ve had many opportunities to observe.** In other words, don’t try to describe the Hoover Dam if you only rode over it in a car once. Instead, describe the small stream that flows through the woods near your school.
- **The subject is meaningful to you.** No matter how many details you might come up with for a subject, if you don’t care about it, your readers won’t either.
- **The subject should have some complexity.** Be sure you can say something fresh in your essay, either by choosing an unusual subject or by describing a subject from a point of view your readers might not have considered.
- **But choose a subject that you can cover in a 1,500-word essay.** If, when you start writing, you see that the subject is too large, you might want to focus on just one part of the subject.

Activity: Using All Your Senses to Write a Good Description

Once your teenager has selected a good subject for the essay, he or she can begin thinking about how to describe the person, place, or thing he or she chose. Focusing on the five senses—sight, smell, taste, touch, and hearing—is a good place to start. Many of the memories that your teenager has about that subject can probably be revealed by remembering how it affected those five senses.

After talking with your teenager about the subject he or she chose, fill in the following diagram together. Try to fill it in with very specific information. For example, if your student chooses to write about a lake near your home, don’t just describe it as “wet” or the water as “blue.” Those words won’t tell readers what makes that lake unique or interesting. Instead, you might write in the “sight” circle that it’s shaped like a jelly bean, or in the “hearing” circle that you heard lots of frogs croaking nearby.



Your teenager now has a good start on a descriptive essay. By adding more detail and then creating an outline for the paper, he or she will be able to write a descriptive essay filled with detailed, sensory descriptions of his or her subject.

Writing a Biographical Narrative

Dear Parent or Guardian,

In a Writing Workshop in Chapter 5 of *Holt Literature and Language Arts*, students learn how to write a *biographical narrative* (California Writing Standard 2.1). A biographical narrative is a true story about a person that reveals that person's character. This letter introduces some elements of a biographical narrative and gives you an activity that you can do with your teenager to help practice writing a biographical narrative.

Elements of a Biographical Narrative

A biographical narrative is a more formal version of something we all do in our everyday lives. For example, if a friend of yours wants to learn about someone you know, he or she will ask you to describe that person. Your description would be a kind of biographical narrative. To tell something about that person, you would carefully select details: how tall he or she is, how he or she talks, what his or her job is, and so on. You might even tell a short story about that person to show how he or she acted in a certain situation. In other words, you would tell a story that illustrates that person's character. Like the biographical narrative in your student's textbook, this imagined description contains two main elements:

- detailed information about the subject's appearance or personality
- an incident that reveals something about the subject's character

Both of these elements are central to the essay your teenager is asked to write in this writing workshop.

Activity: Choosing the Right Person

The most important part of this writing assignment is choosing the right person to describe in the essay. Since the description has to be based on what that person is actually like and on an actual incident that sums up how that person acts, you really have to know the person well. This is not an essay you can write about a stranger. Therefore, your student should choose someone he or she knows very well, a person whom he or she will not have to interview in order to learn the information needed for the essay. (This probably means writing about a family member, a neighbor, or a close friend.)

1. Once your teenager has chosen a subject, work through the following questions with him or her to evaluate whether this subject is suitable for the essay.

Questions About Possible Subjects	
Do I know many details about this person's life, appearance, and personality?	
Do I know an incident from this person's life that reveals what kind of person he or she really is?	

If the answers to both of these questions are “yes,” the person your teenager chose will probably make a good subject for a biographical narrative.

2. The following chart will help your teenager come up with details about the subject. It can also provide your student with a helpful outline that he or she can refer to when it comes time to actually write the narrative.

Organizing Chart	
What are some important details about this person's appearance?	
What words would you use to describe this person's personality? Try to come up with at least three adjectives.	
What incident best reveals this person's personality? Describe the incident in a few sentences.	
What exactly does this incident tell you about the person?	
Is there anything interesting or important about the setting in which this incident took place?	
Was there anything unusual or interesting about your subject's appearance or behavior during this incident?	

Section Three

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Using Infinitives in Sentences

Dear Parent or Guardian,

Your teenager is studying infinitives this year (California Written and Oral English-Language Conventions Standard 1.1). Information about infinitives is found in Chapter 3 of the *Holt Handbook*. Here's an activity you can use to help your teen understand how useful infinitives are.

Many *infinitives* are made up of the word *to* plus a word that shows action. How are infinitives useful? Take a look at the examples below. In the first example, the word *hang* simply shows action, but notice what it can do as an infinitive in the next four examples. The infinitive *to hang* can be used in many different ways.

ACTION WORD *hang* They **hang** the pictures. [shows action]

INFINITIVE *to hang* **To hang** the pictures is their job. [tells what their job is]

The picture **to hang** is over there. [tells which picture]

Peggy used a nail **to hang** a picture. [tells the purpose for using the nail]

Next time, Jerry wants **to hang** a picture. [tells what Jerry wants]

Adding a Little Variety

STEP 1 Together with your student, choose three words from the following list: *ride, plant, call, surf, read, see, write, open, buy, leave, help, thank*.

STEP 2 Next, write three sentences using the action words you chose in Step 1. Do not use *to* before the action words in the sentences.

EXAMPLES Gary rides his bicycle every day.

Maria plants herbs in her garden.

I called my team members about the cancelled game.

STEP 3 Now, help your student write new sentences using the three action words as infinitives. (To form an infinitive, add the word *to* before each word you chose in Step 1.) Try placing the infinitives in a variety of places: at the beginning, middle, and end of a sentence.

EXAMPLES **To ride** his bicycle five extra miles was Gary's plan.

According to Maria, the herb **to plant** is basil.

I stayed up late **to call** my team members about the cancelled game.

STEP 4 To extend the activity, you and your teen may want to discuss what the infinitive in each sentence does.

EXAMPLE **To ride** his bicycle five extra miles a day was Gary's plan. [tells what Gary's plan was]

Using Adverb Clauses

Dear Parent or Guardian,

Your student is studying Chapter 4 of the *Holt Handbook*, which covers adverb clauses (California Written and Oral English-Language Conventions Standard 1.1). To help your teenager practice using adverb clauses, you may want to use this activity.

Read the two sentences below. Although both sentences are fine, neither one has many details.

Tom saw an eagle.
We went to the park.

Now, notice how the boldface word groups in the examples below add details to the original sentences. These word groups are called adverb clauses. **Adverb clauses** often answer questions such as *How? When? Where? Why? or To what extent?*

EXAMPLES Tom saw an eagle **while he was jogging around the lake**. [The word group *while he was jogging around the lake* tells when Tom saw an eagle.]
Because we all wanted to enjoy the nice weather, we went to the park. [The word group *Because we all wanted to enjoy the nice weather* tells why they went to the park.]

TIP: Words that can signal the beginning of an adverb clause include *while, because, so that, if, when, until, and before*.

Planning Ahead

STEP 1 Begin by asking your teenager to think about his or her goals. To help your teenager get started, you might ask questions such as, “What would you like to accomplish within the next year? What do you plan to do after high school? What career would you like to pursue?”

STEP 2 Once you and your teen have discussed several goals, ask him or her to write each goal in a short, direct sentence.

EXAMPLES I would like to start a weight-lifting program.
I plan to attend Harrison Community College.
I would like to pursue a career in science.

STEP 3 Now, help your teenager add an adverb clause in each sentence to include more details. Here is a list of words that might help: *while, because, so that, if, when, until, and before*. Using one of these words followed by the word *I* will ensure that your teen uses an adverb clause.

EXAMPLES I would like to start a weight-lifting program **so that I can get stronger**.
I plan to attend Harrison Community College **until I complete four semesters of coursework**.
Because I love physics, I would like to pursue a career in science.

STEP 4 Finally, take another look at the word groups added to each sentence. What kind of detail does each word group give? Does it tell *how, when, where, why, or to what extent?*

EXAMPLE I would like to start a weight-lifting program **so that I can get stronger**.
[This word group tells *why* I want to start a weight-lifting program.]

Understanding Subject-Verb Agreement

Dear Parent or Guardian,

Your teenager is studying Chapter 5 of the *Holt Handbook* to learn about subject-verb agreement (California Written and Oral English-Language Conventions Standard 1.1). Using this activity, you can give your student some at-home practice with agreement.

Which verb is correct in the sentence below?

The dust (*is, are*) thick.

The verb *is* goes (or agrees) with the subject of the sentence, the word *dust*. The dust **is** thick. What is the correct verb in the next sentence?

The dust on those old, torn-up books (*is, are*) thick.

Although the word *books* is distracting, the word *dust* is still the subject. The correct answer is the same. After all, the writer is trying to say that the dust is thick, not that the books are thick.

Here's the point: As a general rule, a verb needs to agree with its subject, not with a word that comes between the verb and its subject or with any other word.

It All Adds Up!

STEP 1 Together with your student, pick four of the following word groups.

that needed serious repairs	beneath the swaying trees
sitting on the coffee table	in the corner
that I would like to read	with my favorite songs

STEP 2 Now, work together to come up with four sentences that follow the pattern below.

Name of a Thing + Word Group + Verb + Anything Else

EXAMPLE The bike that needed serious repairs is in the garage.

STEP 3 Now it's time to check those verbs. Does each verb agree with its subject, rather than with some other word? If needed, change any verb that doesn't agree with its subject. You can help your student test the correctness of the subject-verb agreement by marking through the word group chosen in Step 1.

EXAMPLE The CD ~~with my favorite songs~~ are on the table. [This is incorrect. It should be *The CD...**is** on the table.*]

STEP 4 Even if your teen had no trouble with the subjects and verbs in the sentences, knowing the basic point of this activity might help your teen with trickier sentences in future assignments. To emphasize this point, you might want to work together to create another sentence based on the pattern in Step 2. This time, come up with your own word group—a longer, more complicated one. Remember to test the subject-verb agreement by marking through the distracting word group.

EXAMPLE The dog ~~with the long tail, white fur, and black spots~~ is in our yard again.

Using Modifiers

Dear Parent or Guardian,

Your student is studying Chapter 9 of the *Holt Handbook* to learn about modifiers (California Written and Oral English-Language Conventions Standard 1.1). Here is an activity that you can use to help your teen understand what modifiers are and how to use them.

In a world without modifiers, we would have some dull sentences, such as the one below.

It was night.

Think of a *modifier* as a descriptive word or word group added to a basic, bare-bones sentence. Notice how the modifiers in the right-hand column below add details to the basic sentences. The details answer questions such as *When? Where? How? Why? Which? and What kind?*

BASIC SENTENCE

It was night.

We walked toward the house.

This house was a place.

I wanted to go.

MODIFIERS ADDED

It was **a dreary, overcast** night.

We **cautiously** walked toward the **gloomy** house.

This house, **which sat at the top of a wooded hill**, was a place **of mystery**.

Because I was frightened, I wanted to go **home**.

A Few Details

STEP 1 First, ask your teenager to read the following story aloud.

My friend and I decided to explore the house on my grandparents' property. We climbed the porch steps and pushed open the door. Creeping up the staircase, we found a hall with many doors. My friend wanted to begin our exploration in the attic, but we heard a noise that frightened us. We ran down the stairs, out of the house, and back to my grandparents' house. Later we found out that my sister had made the noise.

STEP 2 Next, work together to list some modifiers that could be added to the sentences in the story. To get started, for each sentence, try asking some of these questions: *When? Where? How? Why? Which? What kind?*

EXAMPLE My friend and I decided to explore the house on my grandparents' property.

When did they decide to explore?

Which friend?

Which house?

after lunch

my **best** friend

the **old** house

STEP 3 Finally, add the modifiers to the sentences. Feel free to change or add modifiers as you go. After all, making refinements is part of the writing process.

EXAMPLES **After lunch**, my **best** friend and I decided to explore the **abandoned** house on my grandparents' property. We **carefully** climbed the **rickety** porch steps and pushed open the **front** door, **which let out a loud screech**....

Using *Fewer* and *Less* Correctly

Dear Parent or Guardian,

Your teenager is studying Chapter 11 of the *Holt Handbook* to learn about common usage errors in writing and speaking (California Written and Oral English-Language Conventions Standard 1.1). You may wish to use the activity below to give your teenager practice using the words *fewer* and *less*.

As a rule, use *fewer* with items that can be counted, and use *less* with items that cannot be counted.

How do you know whether an item can be counted? Try counting it!

EXAMPLES The kitchen requires (*fewer, less*) gallons of paint than the bedroom does. [*Two gallons, three gallons, four gallons ... Yes, gallons can be counted, so fewer is correct.*]
The kitchen requires **fewer** gallons of paint than the bedroom does.

I have (*fewer, less*) paint than you do. [*Two paint, three paint, four paint ... No, paint cannot be counted, so less is correct.*]

I have **less** paint than you do.

Using *Fewer* and *Less* Around the House

STEP 1 Together, look around and choose at least ten familiar items.

EXAMPLES lamp
silverware
CDs

STEP 2 Now, help your student use *fewer* or *less* with each item. If the item can be counted, use *fewer*. If not, use *less*. Ask your teenager to write the appropriate word before each item.

EXAMPLES **fewer** lamps
less silverware
fewer CDs

STEP 3 To extend the activity, take another look at the items in Step 2. Together, can you think of a way to change some of the items in such a way that if you used *less* originally, you now use *fewer*, and vice versa? For some items, you will need to be creative! For example, if you originally used *less clutter* in Step 2, you could now write *fewer empty glasses*. You might want to ask your teen to create a chart like the one below.

EXAMPLE

fewer lamps	=	less light
less silverware	=	fewer spoons
fewer CDs	=	less music

Using Correct Capitalization

Dear Parent or Guardian,

Your student is studying capitalization (California Written and Oral English-Language Conventions Standard 1.2) in Chapter 12 of the *Holt Handbook*. This activity can be used to help your teenager identify when a name needs to be capitalized.

Capitalized words are everywhere. In fact, they are so familiar that you may not pay much attention to them. So why do we capitalize some words and lowercase others? One reason is to distinguish between a proper noun and a common noun. A *proper noun*, which is the specific name or official title of something, is usually capitalized. On the other hand, a *common noun*, which is the general name of something, is typically not capitalized.

PROPER NOUNS	COMMON NOUNS
---------------------	---------------------

Spot	dog
<i>A Tale of Two Cities</i>	book
Antonio's Foods	store

TIP: Unimportant words in the middle of a proper noun are not capitalized. Some of these words include *a, an, the, and, of, in, to,* and *with*.

EXAMPLES *Romeo and Juliet* Lake **of** the Woods *Fun with Kites*

Searching for the Proper Words

STEP 1 Working together, brainstorm a list of ten common nouns. You may want to use the three listed below and then add seven of your own. To get other ideas, try looking around your home or neighborhood.

COMMON NOUNS

restaurant
uncle
magazine

STEP 2 Once the list is finished, help your student come up with a specific name or title for each common noun. Be sure that you correctly capitalize the proper nouns.

COMMON NOUNS	PROPER NOUNS
---------------------	---------------------

restaurant	Bluebonnet Cafe
uncle	Uncle Chris
magazine	<i>Pet and Owner</i>

Note: It's okay if your student doesn't come up with specific names for every common noun. For example, it may be difficult to think of a specific name for a common noun such as *desk*.

STEP 3 Finally, to emphasize the skill in this activity, you might want to complete the activity again. This time, you could begin with a capitalized proper noun and then ask for a corresponding common noun. Remind your teen that the general name of something is typically not capitalized.

Using Commas

Dear Parent or Guardian,

Your teenager is studying Chapter 13 of the *Holt Handbook* to learn about punctuation (California Written and Oral English-Language Conventions Standard 1.2). Here is an activity you can use to help your student understand when to use commas with certain kinds of word groups.

The following boldface word group gives *nonessential*, or unneeded, information and is separated from the main thought by commas.

NONESSENTIAL Jimmy, **who lives next door to me**, plays guitar. [Without this unneeded word group, the main thought is the same: Jimmy plays guitar.]

On the other hand, the boldface word group below gives *essential*, or needed, information. An essential word group is not separated from the main thought by commas.

ESSENTIAL Every student **who participated in the fund-raiser** is leaving early. [Without this needed word group, the main thought would seem to be that all students—whether participating in the fund-raiser or not—get to leave early.]

TIP: The commas signal that the nonessential words could be taken out of the sentence without changing the main thought.

NONESSENTIAL My cousin, **wanting to hear the latest music**, always asks to borrow my new CDs. [Without the word group, the main thought is the same.]

ESSENTIAL People **bringing a canned food** will get a free T-shirt today. [This word group is needed to point out *which* people will get a T-shirt. Only those who bring canned food will. Without the word group, the main thought would seem to be that all people will get a T-shirt.]

“Now, Is That Really Needed?”

STEP 1 First, read the following sentences aloud.

1. Aunt Sandra **who lives in Colorado** loves to hike.
2. All cars **that are parked illegally** will be towed.
3. People **talking to Professor Johnson** always ask questions about physics.
4. Gary **wanting a good book** spent hours browsing in the library.

STEP 2 Next, for the sentences above, work together to decide whether the boldface word groups are essential or nonessential. To help your student, use the tip provided earlier.

EXAMPLE Aunt Sandra ~~**who lives in Colorado**~~ loves to hike. [Without the boldface word group, the main thought is the same: Aunt Sandra loves to hike.]

STEP 3 Finally, separate any nonessential word group from the main thought by using commas. Remember that the commas indicate that the information is not needed and could be taken out of the sentence.

EXAMPLE Aunt Sandra, **who lives in Colorado**, loves to hike.

Using Semicolons

Dear Parent or Guardian,

Your student is using Chapter 14 of the *Holt Handbook* to learn more about punctuation (California Written and Oral English-Language Conventions Standard 1.2). Using the information in this letter, you can help your teenager review one of the ways semicolons are used.

A *semicolon* (;) is sometimes used to join two complete thoughts that are closely related.

EXAMPLES Ellen just called David; he is on his way here.

When we visit the state park, Leslie enjoys bird-watching; I prefer exploring caves.

Putting It All Together

STEP 1 Start by filling in each blank in the charts below. The responses should be either all likes or all dislikes.

Student's Likes or Dislikes	
sporting event	:
food	:
book	:
TV show	:
movie	:
holiday	:

Your Likes or Dislikes	
sporting event	:
food	:
book	:
TV show	:
movie	:
holiday	:

STEP 2 Now, help your student write brief sentences identifying his or her responses from the chart in Step 1. Then, help your teen do the same for your responses. Try to vary the wording in each sentence.

EXAMPLES I love basketball.

My mom likes track.

I don't like green beans.

My mom never eats green beans.

STEP 3 Remind your student that a semicolon can be used to combine two thoughts that are closely related in meaning. Then, working together, use a semicolon to join some related sentences from Step 2.

EXAMPLES I love basketball; my mom likes track.

I don't like green beans; my mom never eats green beans.

STEP 4 Finally, take another look at the sentences. You may want to add or change words to make the sentences sound better together.

EXAMPLES I love basketball; my mom likes sports with less contact, such as track.

I don't like green beans; my mom doesn't either.

Using Ellipsis Points

Dear Parent or Guardian,

Your teenager is studying Chapter 14 of the *Holt Handbook* to learn more about punctuation (California Written and Oral English-Language Conventions Standard 1.3). Using the information in this letter, you can help your teenager practice using ellipsis points.

Have you ever come across three dots (. . .) in a newspaper or magazine article? What do those dots mean, anyway? *Ellipsis points* (. . .) are used to signal that information has been left out of a quotation. Your teenager will likely need to use ellipsis points in research papers or other reports to shorten quotations from books, magazines, and other sources. Notice how the following quotation has been shortened. The writer has chosen to focus on only certain information.

ORIGINAL “City hall’s new underground parking garage, which will create much-needed parking for city employees and for the general public, will cost \$500,000 less than what policymakers and city planners had expected because construction costs are falling citywide.”

SHORTENED “City hall’s new underground parking garage . . . will cost \$500,000 less than . . . expected because construction costs are falling citywide.”

Important Points

STEP 1 With your teenager, take turns reading aloud the following quotations.

1. “Mayor Thompson, a man who has spent all of his life here, wants to do all he can—as an elected official and as a citizen—to see our city grow and progress, especially in the areas of education, transportation, and downtown development.”
2. “When I sit down and put pen to paper to write about nature, I notice that the task is an easy and almost effortless one because the sounds I’ve heard, like the wind howling or waves thrashing, and the sights I’ve seen, like deer bounding through shoulder-high grass, almost seem to move my hand to form the words.”
3. “When you own a business, there’s always something to do, and once you put yourself out there, you’re always busy doing something to ensure that the product is selling and growing in popularity.”

STEP 2 Next, work together to shorten the quotations by striking through any words in the middle of each quotation that aren’t important for your focus. The words remaining in each quotation should make a complete statement. Here’s an example of one way to shorten sentence 3.

EXAMPLE “When you own a business, ~~there’s always something to do, and once you put yourself out there,~~ you’re always busy doing something to ensure that the product is ~~selling and~~ growing in popularity.”

STEP 3 Finally, ask your teen to write out the shortened quotations. Check that ellipsis points signal where unneeded information has been left out of each quotation. (Each quotation can be edited more than one way using ellipsis points.)

EXAMPLE “When you own a business, . . . you’re always busy doing something to ensure that the product is . . . growing in popularity.”

Understanding Similar-Sounding Words

Dear Parent or Guardian,

Your student is studying Chapter 15 of the *Holt Handbook* to learn about words that sound the same but that have different meanings and spellings (California Written and Oral English-Language Conventions Standard 1.2). You can use the following activity as a way to help your student with some of these similar-sounding words.

SIMILAR-SOUNDING WORD PAIRS

BRAKE	[verb]	to stop or slow down
	[noun]	a device for stopping or slowing down
BREAK	[verb]	to cause to come apart or to shatter
	[noun]	a fracture
COARSE	[adjective]	rough, crude
COURSE	[noun]	path of action; study or group of studies; part of a meal
WAIST	[noun]	the midsection of the body
WASTE	[noun]	unused or useless material; useless spending
	[verb]	to use foolishly

The Art of Spelling

STEP 1 With your teenager, read the word pairs above and discuss their meanings.

STEP 2 Now, each of you pick one of the word pairs. Feel free to use other similar-sounding word pairs from the *Holt Handbook* (such as *capital* and *capitol*, *peace* and *piece*, or *stationary* and *stationery*). Now, working together, come up with a memory tool to help you remember the meaning and spelling of each word in the group. Here are some ideas for creating memory tools.

- Make a simple sketch in which you include the word. For example, for the word *waist*, you might sketch a simple figure wearing jeans and spell out *waist* where the belt would go. Then, you could produce a sketch for the word *waste*.
- Try the suggestion above with a picture from a newspaper or magazine. You could even make a collage of pictures. Be sure to include the correctly spelled word.
- Try rhymes or other tricks. You'd be amazed at what you could come up with to remember the words. For example, how can you tell *hear* ("to sense something with the ear") and *here* ("at this place") apart? The word *hear* has the word *ear* in it: *hear*.

STEP 3 Discuss your work. What makes your memory tools effective? Could you apply any of the memory tools to other assignments, such as learning vocabulary? Do you have memory tools for other subjects? What are they?