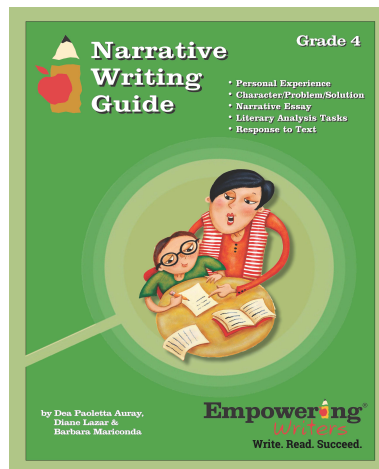




Grade 4 Narrative Writing Guide

Student Pages for Print or Projection

SECTION 2: Beginnings



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Name _____

STARTING OFF ON THE RIGHT FOOT!

One way to make your writing more interesting and entertaining is by starting off with an irresistible, attention grabbing beginning! Here are some techniques authors use to begin their stories:

1. **AN ACTION** - *Put your main character in your setting doing something interesting and relevant to the story.*

Ask: What would you do?

Ex. I raced after the car, waving wildly as I watched my best friend drive away from our neighborhood.

2. **DIALOGUE** - *Have your main character say something.*

Ask: What might you say or exclaim?

Ex. “Don’t forget to call, text, or write to me!” I shouted as my best friend drove away from our neighborhood.

3. **A THOUGHT OR QUESTION** - *Show the main character’s thoughts, or raise a story question.*

Ask: What would you wonder or worry?

Ex. Will I ever see him again, I wondered, as my best friend drove out of our neighborhood heading for his new home.

4. **A SOUND** - *Grab the reader’s attention through the use of a sound.*

Ask: What might you hear?

Ex. Vroom! The sound of the engine starting made my eyes water as I watched my best friend drive away from our neighborhood.

Beginning Tips - Begin your story as close to the main event as possible. For example, if it’s a story about finding a lost dog, don’t begin two weeks earlier when the pet is safe at home. Instead, begin with your main character in frantic pursuit of the animal. If you’re writing about a camping trip, don’t begin by waking up, packing your gear and driving to the location — begin at the site! Get right into the action so that you don’t lose your reader! Also, since it is very difficult to weave many characters throughout your story, a good strategy is to have your main character start off alone.

Name _____

ANALYZE THIS BEGINNING! (1)

Read this opening sentence. It is from a chapter in R.J. Palacio’s book titled *Wonder:

I know I’m not an ordinary ten-year-old kid. I mean, sure, I do ordinary things. I eat ice cream. I ride my bike. I play ball. I have an Xbox. Stuff like that makes me ordinary. I guess. And I feel ordinary. Inside. But I know ordinary kids don’t make other ordinary kids run away screaming in playgrounds. I know ordinary kids don’t get stared at everywhere they go.

Think about what you know about story beginnings. Circle the technique or techniques that the author used to grab your attention.

- An Action
- Dialogue
- Thoughts, Questions
- A Sound

After reading this opening, write down what you are wondering about on the lines below.

CHALLENGE: Now it’s your turn to find an example of a good story or chapter beginning that uses the same technique as R.J. Palacio used above. Be sure to write down the title of the book, page number, and the author’s name.

**Wonder by R.J. Palacio, Knopf Books for Young Readers, 2012*

Name _____

ANALYZE THIS BEGINNING! (2)

Read this opening sentence. It is from a chapter in Sally J. Pla’s book titled *The Someday Birds:

BAM! A jolt. Time stops while the car silently spins

Think about what you know about story beginnings. Circle the technique or techniques that the author used to grab your attention.

- An Action
- Dialogue
- Thoughts, Questions
- A Sound

After reading this opening line, write down what you are wondering about on the lines below:

CHALLENGE: Now it’s your turn to find an example of a good story or chapter beginning that uses the same technique as Sally J. Pla used above. Be sure to write down the title of the book, page number, and the author’s name.

* *The Someday Birds* by Sally J. Pla, HarperCollins, 2017

Name _____

ANALYZE THIS BEGINNING! (3)

Read this opening sentence. It is from a chapter in Sharon Creech’s book titled **Moo*:

We did not wait. We jumped on our bikes and pedaled across the lawn and down the walk and into the road and round the bend. Luke was leaning so far forward he looked like a turtle splayed out on his bike. We sailed down the hill, and only then, at the bottom, did Luke wave his arm to the side and we pulled over and stopped by the iron bear.

Think about what you know about story beginnings. Circle the technique or techniques that the author used to grab your attention.

- An Action
- Dialogue
- Thoughts, Questions
- A Sound

After reading this opening, write down what you are wondering about on the lines below.

CHALLENGE: Now it’s your turn to find an example of a good story or chapter beginning that uses the same technique as Sharon Creech used above. Be sure to write down the title of the book, page number, and the author’s name.

**Moo* by Sharon Creech, HarperCollins, 2016

Name _____

ANALYZE THIS BEGINNING! (4)

Read this opening sentence. It is from a chapter in Sid Fleischman’s book titled **The 13th Floor: A Ghost Story*:

“Anchor!” shouted Captain Stebbins through his speaking trumpet. “Drop anchor!”

Think about what you know about story beginnings. Circle the technique or techniques that the author used to grab your attention.

- An Action
- Dialogue
- Thoughts, Questions
- A Sound

After reading this opening line, write down what you are wondering about on the lines below:

CHALLENGE: Now it’s your turn to find an example of a good story or chapter beginning that uses the same technique as Sid Fleischman used above. Look in your school or classroom library. Be sure to write down the title of the book, page number, and the author’s name.

** The 13th Floor: A Ghost Story by Sid Fleischman, Greenwillow Books, 2007*

Name _____

ANALYZE THIS BEGINNING! - MAKE-IT-YOUR-OWN

Read this opening sentence from _____ :
Title

by _____

Think about what you know about story beginnings. Circle the following technique or techniques that the author used to grab your attention.

- **An Action**
- **Dialogue**
- **Thoughts, Questions**
- **A Sound**

After reading this opening, write down what you are wondering about on the lines below.

Now it's your turn to find an example of a good story or chapter beginning that uses one of the strategies for entertaining beginnings. Look in your school or classroom library. Be sure to write down the title of the book, page number and the author's name.

Name _____

LEARNING TO ICE SKATE

REMEMBER: Attention grabbing beginnings often use one of the following techniques:

- ACTION: What would you do?
- DIALOGUE or EXCLAMATION: What would you say?
- A THOUGHT/QUESTION: What are you wondering/worrying?
- A SOUND: What would you hear?

Read this story beginning. It is not very interesting. The reader may not be entertained enough to want to read on. Revise this story beginning so that it is interesting and entertaining. Use one of the four techniques listed above. (Do not write the whole story—just the beginning.). Then compare the before and after version. Which would you rather read?

I went to the ice rink and met my instructor. I was ready to learn how to ice skate.

CLIMBED A HUGE TREE - MODELED REVISIONS FOR EACH TECHNIQUE

AN ACTION:

I raced over to the tree and grabbed hold of the lowest lying limb as I hoisted myself up and over the branch. This huge tree was perfect for climbing.

DIALOGUE:

“I’m gonna get to the top!” I shouted as I stared at the enormous, inviting tree in front of me.

A THOUGHT/QUESTION:

This is the biggest tree I’ve ever seen, I thought. I hope I can climb to the highest branch.

A SOUND:

Whoosh! I heard the sound of the wind swaying the branches of the biggest tree I’d ever seen. My heart thumped wildly as I considered scaling to the top.



Name _____

FROGS IN THE POND

REMEMBER: Attention grabbing beginnings often use one of the following techniques:

- ACTION: What would you do?
- DIALOGUE or EXCLAMATION: What would you say?
- A THOUGHT/QUESTION: What are you wondering/worrying?
- A SOUND: What would you hear?

Read this story beginning. It is not very interesting. The reader may not be entertained enough to want to read on. Revise this story beginning so that it is interesting and entertaining. Use one of the four techniques listed above. (Do not write the whole story—just the beginning.). Then compare the before and after version. Which would you rather read?

I was bored. There was nothing to do. There was nothing on T.V. Maybe I would go to the pond and catch frogs.

Name _____

BEFORE AND AFTER REVISION ACTIVITY (1)

Read this story **beginning**. It is BORING!

This is a story about when I went camping in the forest.

Revise this story **beginning**. Use one of the following techniques to make this beginning ENTERTAINING!

- **Action** - Ask: what might you be doing/how would you be moving at the campsite?
- **Dialogue or an Exclamation** - Ask: what might you exclaim at the campsite?
- **Thoughts, Questions** - Ask: what might you think, wonder or worry?
- **A Sound** - Ask: what might you hear at the campsite?

Name _____

BEFORE AND AFTER REVISION ACTIVITY (2)

Read this story **beginning**. It is BORING!

I found a hundred dollar bill.

Revise this story **beginning**. Use one of the following techniques to make this beginning ENTERTAINING!

- **Action** - Ask: what would you be doing/how would you be moving if you found that much money?
- **Dialogue or an Exclamation** - Ask: what might you say or exclaim out loud if you found that much money?
- **Thoughts, Questions** - Ask: what might you think, wonder or worry as you pick up the money?
- **A Sound** - Ask: what might you hear as you find the money?

Name _____

BEFORE AND AFTER REVISION ACTIVITY (3)

Read this story **beginning**. It is BORING!

My mom made me audition for the talent show.

Revise this story **beginning**. Use one of the following techniques to make this beginning ENTERTAINING!

- **Action** - Ask: what would you be doing/how would you be moving if you were getting ready for the talent show?
- **Dialogue or an Exclamation** - Ask: what might you say or exclaim out loud as you were getting ready for the talent show?
- **Thoughts, Questions** - Ask: what might you think, wonder or worry as you get ready for the talent show?
- **A Sound** - Ask: what might you hear as you get ready for the talent show?

Name _____

Taking the Plunge

I stepped up on the diving board, dripping wet and shivering. I really wanted to complete this dive. My swim coach called, “Remember what you learned, Gavin! Give it a try!” Reluctantly I drew my arms over my head, hands overlapping, fingers slanting toward the water. I bent my knees and tucked my chin. My heart raced and I pressed my eyes shut. A wave of dizziness came over me.

“Come on already,” shouted the others in the class. Their voices echoed through the huge open room. Others in the pool swam laps, the sun reflecting off the crystal clear water. Children splashed and played in the low end, their happy voices mocking me.

I just couldn’t do it. It was like I had turned into a statue. My face grew hot. “Chicken!” someone yelled. I could feel their eyes on me. I stepped off the diving board and plunged, feet-first, into the pool, swam as quickly as I could, climbed out, and headed to the locker room. I could hear the thwack of the diving board followed by a splash as each of the others did their dive. Ashamed, I got dressed without even drying off so I could get out of there before the others.

Out in the car Grandpa looked up from his book. “You’re early,” he said with a smile. “And you’re soaking wet! Did you forget your towel?”

I sighed. Tears burned the backs of my eyes.

“Hey buddy,” Grandpa said. “What’s the matter?”

I took a deep breath and bit my bottom lip. “I can’t do it,” I said. “The dive. I just freeze up there.”

“Everyone’s scared at first,” Grandpa said.

“No,” I argued. “They all can do it except me.” I swiped a tear that escaped from the corner of my eye. “I’m not going back there, no matter what.”

Grandpa looked at me kindly. “Not so fast,” he said gently. “Would you take a lesson with your old Grandpa?”

“You dive?” I asked.

(continued)

“I used to compete, back in the day,” he said with a wink.

“I don’t know...” I began.

“Saturday, you and me,” Grandpa said. “I’ll take you to my buddy’s pool. Nobody watching. I promise you’ll come out of there a diver!” He dropped me off in front of the house. “See you Saturday at 10:00 sharp!” he yelled. I managed a wave and slunk into the house. The last thing I wanted was to disappoint Grandpa.

Friday night I thought about calling Grandpa and telling him I had a cold. But I couldn’t bring myself to do it. So, Saturday morning came, and at 9:55 I heard the beep of the horn outside. My stomach felt queasy and my knees like rubber as I climbed into the car. “Have a donut,” Grandpa said, throwing me a bag. I groaned and Grandpa eyed me with narrowed eyes. “You’ve got yourself in quite a state,” he said. “Gavin,” he said, “it’s all up here...” He tapped his finger on the side of his head. “Courage is a state of mind,” he said. “It’s all about how you think.”

I rolled my eyes and stared straight ahead. In no time we were at his friend’s pool. It wasn’t huge, but it must have been deep. There, at one end, was the highest diving board I’d ever seen, a huge ladder leading to the platform. Surprisingly, we didn’t head for the diving board. We went to the edge of the pool. Grandpa was wearing his funny golf hat and a pair of baggy plaid swim trunks. “Now,” he said, “Show me your form.”

“I can dive in from the side,” I said. “That’s not the problem!”

“Shut it and show me your form,” Grandpa barked. I shrugged and stood, poised, hands overhead, chin tucked, knees bent. “Now, when I say ‘dive’ push off like a spring! Focus on aiming with your hands and let them lead the way. ‘Now DIVE!’”

I cut through the water like a knife, surfaced and shook the water from my hair.

“Great job!” Grandpa yelled, applauding. “Now, ten more times – except for this. Use your imagination. Imagine you’re climbing the ladder, walking to the edge of the board. Pause, let your toes grasp the edge, stare straight down into the water. And DIVE!”

(continued)

I tried it. Pretending to climb the ladder I lifted my right, then left leg. I walked to the edge of the pool, imagining I was on the narrow diving board. Clinging to the edge of the imaginary board with my toes, I stared into the water. “You’re sixteen feet up,” Grandpa called. “Same water down below!” I played along. When he yelled “DIVE” I did it again. And again. Each time I allowed myself to get more into the fantasy. Pretty soon I started to believe it.

The next swim practice Grandpa came to watch. Before I headed into the locker room he tousled my hair and said, “Remember...courage is all about how you think!” He tapped the side of his head and nodded.

When it was my turn I went through all the familiar motions, remembering what it felt like from the edge of the pool. It all felt familiar. “Focus!” I said to myself. “It’s just water. Same as always.”

I climbed the ladder, walked to the edge just like I had at the pool. “DIVE!” the coach yelled. And I did! All it took was an instant. SPLASH! A perfect dive!

Everyone cheered. I heard Grandpa yell, “That’s my boy!”

As I climbed out my coach said, “Good form Gavin!” But I knew my success wasn’t about form. I waved to Grandpa and climbed the ladder for another high dive.



Name _____

LITERARY ANALYSIS TASK: TAKING THE PLUNGE

You've read the story Taking the Plunge. Write an essay identifying the techniques the author uses to create an entertaining beginning and explain why this is important for the reader. Explain what you learn about the main character's motivation and conflict. Provide evidence from the text to support your ideas.

THINK ABOUT IT: Is this a narrative or informational assignment?

Your teacher will walk you through the following STEPS:

1. Read, annotate, analyze, and summarize the story.
2. Fill in the following:
 - Who is the main **point of view character**? _____
 - What is the **setting**? _____
 - What is the main character's **motivation**? (What does she/he **want**?) _____

 - What is the **conflict**? (Who or what stands in the way of the main character's motivation?) _____
 - Fill in the summarizing framework that outlines the **plot**.

This story is about _____ .

The problem / adventure experience _____ .

The problem was solved, experience or adventure concluded when _____ .

- What is the **theme**? _____

3. Consider the task:

What techniques does the author use to create an entertaining beginning?

What do you learn about the main character's motivation and conflict?

4. Your teacher will MODEL this process with you. You may use the sentence starters to help you cite examples in the source text.

Sentence Starters for Literary Analysis:

- The technique(s) the author used_____.
- The author also used_____.
- This compelling beginning included_____.
- To begin, the author used_____.
- The reader discovers that_____.
- We see that_____. The author reveals_____.
- (Character's name) was motivated by_____.
- _____contributed to the story conflict.
- The conflict was that_____.
- In this story_____.
- The reader understands this when_____.
- As the story unfolds we learn that_____.
- The plot centers around_____.
- In the story, evidence suggests that_____.
- It isn't long before we discover_____.
- Through the text we learn that_____.
- Clearly, the theme was _____.
- In paragraph _____ we see that _____.
- We know this because _____.
- We see this when_____.

Name _____

NARRATIVE EXTENSION TASK: BEGINNINGS

You've read the story Taking the Plunge in which Gavin wanted to dive, but his fear held him back. Imagine Gavin a month or two later getting ready to dive in a competition. Write an entertaining beginning for this new story that clearly shows Gavin's feelings about this new challenge.

THINK ABOUT IT: Based on Gavin's experience in Taking the Plunge, how do you think his feelings about diving had changed? How differently would he feel and behave at the competition?

REMEMBER: Here are the techniques you might use. Then, use the productive questions to help generate your beginning. Use one or more of these techniques in your entertaining beginning.

Action - Ask: *what would Gavin do?*

Dialogue/Exclamation - Ask: *what might Gavin say or exclaim?*

A thought or question - Ask: *what would Gavin wonder or worry?*

A sound - Ask: *what might Gavin hear?*
