

An Italian Menu of Writing Ideas

Restaurant attendees: Remember, using this two-page menu is completely optional and should be consulted only if you are stuck coming up with your own topics for future writing assignments. It's preferable if you come to class with your own ideas to write about in your notebooks, but if that's difficult for you, here is a menu of interesting choices.

"A special notebook sticker?" you ask. If you are interested in earning a special writer's notebook sticker, you need to create a "meal" from this menu that includes: 1 appetizer, 1 soup, 1 entrée, and 1 dessert. There is also an optional "salad" course, which your teacher may or may not use this month.

Appetizer Choices: (Select one of these **writing trait-inspired** activities to record in your notebook.)

Good Lead Bruschetta: First, brainstorm three different settings where a scary or suspenseful story might take place. Then for each of your three settings, compose a one- or two-sentence introduction that would start a scary or suspenseful story in a really interesting way for your reader. Illustrate the introduction you like the best. Trait focus: IDEA DEVELOPMENT (brainstorming) and ORGANIZATION (introductions).

Synonym Calamari: First choose just one of these five basic emotions to title this entry: happiness, sadness, anger, love, or hate. From memory, brainstorm and record as many synonyms (in noun format!) for the emotion you selected as your title, then use the thesaurus or ask a friend to come up with 3-4 more synonyms. Beneath your list of synonyms, describe what someone experiencing would look like to an observer. Illustrate, if you have time. Trait focus: WORD CHOICE (using precise nouns) and IDEA DEVELOPMENT (relevant details).

Perspective Prosciutto: Think about a time you were grounded or scolded by an adult who's a relative. If you happen to be a totally perfect child at home, then you may create a fictional scenario where you were naughty. Write a 45-second speech/reprimand, using in the voice of the adult you are thinking about, that sums up what it is that you did to be scolded and makes clear how the adult felt about your behavior. Trait focus: VOICE (perspective).

[Alphabet] Soup Choices: (Select one of these **word-play activities** to record in your notebook.)

Minestrone: Create three acrostic poems for three *proper* (capitalized) *nouns*: use a person (like Einstein) you might write about someday for the first poem, a place (like Jupiter) you might write about someday for your second poem, and a product's name (like Corn Flakes) you might write about someday.

Italian Sausage Soup: In Frindle by Andrew Clements, the book's main character creates a new word for pencil ("frindle") and hopes that everyone will begin using his invented word instead of *pencil*. What classroom item would you create a new word for? What would be the word? Write a paragraph that both explains why you'd assign the object the new name you've chosen for and your strategies for helping others begin using your new word.

Traditional Wedding Soup: Create an alphabet list for one of the following two topics: *things that frighten children but not adults* or *things that frighten adults but not children*. How many letters of the alphabet can you represent with your list? 26= a perfect score, 18-25= a great score, 12-17=a good score, 11 or less=a bad score but at least you tried, right? Right?

This Month's Creative Salad: (With each menu, your teacher might share a unique challenge that will help you add a very creative page to your writer's notebook. This creative page—or writer's notebook "salad"—is healthy for your higher-level thinking!)

Personified Abstraction Pasta Salad: Inspired by Robin Pulver's very funny kids' book—Punctuation Takes a Vacation—students will create a writer's notebook page that personifies an abstract noun by imagining what that abstraction would do if it went on a vacation or a holiday. Click [here](#) to access this notebook suggestion on-line. Enjoy!



Entrée Choices: (All “entrées” are actually three-step pre-writing tasks designed to help you think about any upcoming writer’s workshops. Choose an entrée that will help you become excited about writing a rough draft.)

Narrative Fettuccini: In *Alexander and the Terrible, Horrible, No Good, Very Rotten Day* (by Judith Viorst), the main character narrates a single very bad day in his young life. Prepare to write an original story about a student having a really bad day on—of all days—*school picture day*!

- First, brainstorm and record 10-15 different things that would make school picture day really bad; be creative.
- Second, prioritize the list by asking, “If I had to choose just five to focus on, which five would make my reader laugh the most?” and circle those; decide which order they should be shared in your story. Would the funniest item better at the beginning, the end, or in the middle?
- In your notebook, compose the introductory paragraph that would launch your story in a way that lets the reader know this is going to be a very funny story.

Persuasive Pasta Primavera: Ask yourself, “What’s the very best book I’ve read in the last year, and what could I do to convince another person to read it (without giving away too much of the story)?” Prepare to write an organized review of the book that a friend might read by following these steps:

- First, draw a quick picture of the main character or your favorite character, and right next to the drawing record all the things that you liked about the character as well as a list of admirable qualities the character showed in the book.
- Second, create either a “Top Five Exciting Moments” or a “Top Five Reasons to Read This Book” list. Ask a friend to look it over and help you decide which three reasons—from either list—would convince them to read the book the most.
- Create a graphic organizer in your writer’s notebook that outlines 1) how you’ll introduce your book review, 2) what order you’ll present your three (or more) best persuasive arguments, and 3) how you’ll conclude your review. In your notebook, compose the introductory paragraph that would launch your story in a way that lets the reader know this is going to be a very funny story.

Expository Eggplant Parmesan: Every four years, we enjoy the summer Olympics. It’s fun to watch ‘the best of the best’ put it all on the line and see their passion for their sport propel them into the history books with amazing feats. It’s hard to imagine that every one of those athletes started because they loved their sport so much that they couldn’t imagine spending their time doing anything else. What is your favorite physical activity, that if you could, you would spend every free moment pursuing? It could be a sport, a hobby, an organized activity, or anything else you spend time actively pursuing on a regular basis. How did this activity become popular? Research the activity in order to write about it!

- Take ten minutes and write down EVERYTHING you already know about your activity. What skills and equipment are needed; what space is needed; who participates; the rules of the game or expectations of participants, etc. Then write down things that you wished you knew—like who invented your activity and why; why is this a popular activity? There are so many questions—ask your own questions and then take some time before our next class period to research and answer these questions.
- On a different day, organize all of your ideas both those you already knew and those you had to research to learn. Create appropriate categories or put everything in chronological order.
- Write an amazing paragraph that shares several pieces of your newly-learned information. Write the paragraph so that you could give it to someone and make them interested in learning about your favorite activity. Maybe this paragraph might become the opening few lines for your next English essay!

Dessert Choices: (Choose one dessert from the menu and create a notebook entry that also includes a funny illustration or a picture that can be taped/glued next to your writing. Have fun! Dessert should be fun!)

Colored Gelato Rhymes!
Select a color (obviously not orange!) and compose a paragraph that contains as many words you can think of that rhyme with your color! Provide an illustration.

Tiramisu Transformations!
Design an amazing original animal that is built out of the most amazing characteristic of five other actual animals. Draw the animal and explain what it has the ability to do.

Silly Spumoni! Think of an original character for an original story you haven’t written yet. The character must have a very silly-sounding name. Write about the character’s personality and provide a picture!