



Prompts that Start with a Question...



***an effective technique for teaching
students to write better introductions***



Corbett Harrison, Educational Consultants, LLC

<http://corbettharrison.com>

© 2011 All rights reserved



Prompts that Start with a Question...



Three personal observations about using questions in a writing classroom:

1. Good questions are hard to write—for both teachers and students; I believe students *can* learn to create good questions, but only through solid modeling and with lots of feedback from a teacher who has worked on improving his/her own ability to ask questions that challenge different cognitive levels.
2. We teach students to begin their writing by asking the reader a question; this technique (“*Would you like to hear about my summer vacation?*” for example) creates a recognizable introduction to writing, but—in truth—starting with a question rarely creates a very interesting introduction.
3. I find teaching good questioning strategies during pre-writing and ultimately forbidding the use of questions as introductions creates much stronger writers and writing in my students’ journals and portfolios.



Prompts that Start with a Question...



The prompts at WritingFix all start with a question. Why is that?

Ready to do some writing?
WritingFix's Random Daily Writing Prompts

Instructions for student writers: Click the button until you discover a writing prompt that sparks an idea in your brain. Write freely for ten or fifteen minutes, not worrying about the conventions or writing. Just get some good ideas down on paper that you can expand upon later.

Click the button below to be dealt a random prompt from our collection.

CLICK here for a random writing prompt.

One of the very first pages I created for the WritingFix website back in 2001 was the “Random Daily Writing Prompt Generator.” Each prompt that we have collected and posted over the years begins with a question. This is based on a teaching strategy I use with my own students.



Prompts that Start with a Question...



The prompts at WritingFix all start with a question. Why is that?

Ready to do some writing?
WritingFix's Random Daily Writing Prompts

Instructions for student writers: Click the button until you discover a writing prompt that sparks an idea in your brain. Write freely for ten or fifteen minutes, not worrying about the conventions or writing. Just get some good ideas down on paper that you can expand upon later.

"Do you watch or look away? Write about a time you (or a character you invent) had to get a shot."

[CLICK here for a random writing prompt.](#)

WritingFix provides these questions with the prompts...

I taught my students—whenever they received a writing prompt—to brainstorm *interesting* questions that an *interested* reader might ask them, as if the reader knew the prompt the writer had received and could ask a question. The questions, I taught them, shouldn't be yes/no questions. The questions should dig for an interesting detail that the writer might be able to address. I called this pre-writing technique "Brainstorming the un-asked question."



Prompts that Start with a Question...



The prompts at WritingFix all start with a question. Why is that?

Ready to do some writing?
WritingFix's Random Daily Writing Prompts

Instructions for student writers: Click the button until you discover a writing prompt that sparks an idea in your brain. Write freely for ten or fifteen minutes, not worrying about the conventions or writing. Just get some good ideas down on paper that you can expand upon later.

"Do you watch or look away? Write about a time you (or a character you invent) had to get a shot."

[CLICK here for a random writing prompt.](#)

With an interesting *un-asked question* in mind, my students can follow this instruction: "Pretend that question has actually been asked of you by a silent voice in your head, and let your first sentence (or two) answer the voice; once answered, you can tell the rest of the story, but answer that question first before an interested reader has the chance to ask it. Take the opportunity to answer the un-asked question!"



Prompts that Start with a Question...



The prompts at WritingFix all start with a question. Why is that?

Ready to do some writing?
WritingFix's Random Daily Writing Prompts

Instructions for student writers: Click the button until you discover a writing prompt that sparks an idea in your brain. Write freely for ten or fifteen minutes, not worrying about the conventions or writing. Just get some good ideas down on paper that you can expand upon later.

"Do you watch or look away? Write about a time you (or a character you invent) had to get a shot."

[CLICK here for a random writing prompt.](#)

Here are two introductions I wrote that address the question above. Which do you prefer?

1. **When I get a shot, I like to watch. Like that car accident that you can't look away from, I must watch that little silver needle insert my skin.**
2. **My mother looks away when they do it to her, but not me. I stare that needle in the eye when they take my blood or give me an injection.**



Prompts that Start with a Question...



The prompts at WritingFix all start with a question. Why is that?

Once I have my one- or two-sentence answer to the question as my lead (or *hook* or *introduction*), I can begin telling the whole story. More often than not, this technique creates a much better introduction than starting with an actual question. Do you agree?

My mother looks away when they do it to her, but not me. I stare that needle in the eye when they take my blood or give me an injection.

A few months ago, I found myself standing on line to receive this year's influenza vaccine. The year before, there had been a shortage, and I remember standing in line behind seventy-five people and eventually being told that there wasn't enough of the vaccine. I was pleasantly relieved to find just three people in front of me this year.

When my turn had come, the nurse rolled up my sleeve and said...(etc.)



Prompts that Start with a Question...



The prompts at WritingFix all start with a question. Why is that?

Ready to do some writing?
WritingFix's Random Daily Writing Prompts

Instructions for student writers: Click the button until you discover a writing prompt that sparks an idea in your brain. Write freely for ten or fifteen minutes, not worrying about the conventions or writing. Just get some good ideas down on paper that you can expand upon later.

"What did you wish for most? Write about a time when it was just too cold."

[CLICK here for a random writing prompt.](#)

You try it...Can you come up with 2 possible leads inspired by WritingFix's provided question?

1.

2.



Prompts that Start with a Question...



The prompts at WritingFix all start with a question. Why is that?

Ready to do some writing?
WritingFix's Random Daily Writing Prompts

Instructions for student writers: Click the button until you discover a writing prompt that sparks an idea in your brain. Write freely for ten or fifteen minutes, not worrying about the conventions or writing. Just get some good ideas down on paper that you can expand upon later.

"What stopped you? Write about a time when you tried to get home but couldn't."

[CLICK here for a random writing prompt.](#)

And again...Can you come up with 2 leads inspired by WritingFix's provided question?

1.

2.



Prompts that Start with a Question...



The prompts at WritingFix all start with a question. Why is that?

At the time I made this PowerPoint, there were **504 different writing prompts** stored in WritingFix's Daily Prompt Generator—all of those prompts beginning with an interesting question that I added to help writers craft an introduction, if they didn't have an idea for one.

At my own website (<http://corbettharrison.com>), I offer a 30-page document that shares the 504 prompts in one document, so you don't have to hit the button at WritingFix 504 times.

For \$7.50, you can purchase this 30-page document from me, and you will also receive **a longer version of this PowerPoint**, which contains two additional tools I use in my classroom to teach my students to create their own "un-asked" when preparing a piece of writing.

Click [here](#) to directly access the page at my website where you can purchase my 30 pages of prompts and the longer version of this PowerPoint.

--Corbett Harrison