

In September, I had been asking my students to begin to observe the world as writers and to record thoughts and interesting things that happened to them. During the second week of September 2011, I had an interesting experience at my bank on my way home. I told them the situation almost made me blow a gasket, but I convinced myself to laugh about it. I told them I thought the story might make the basis of an interesting persuasive piece of writing.

Here is a paraphrase of the story I told them out loud the day before I wrote about it in my own writer's notebook. I made sure they understood that I often like to say my writing ideas out loud before committing them to a page in my notebook; I told them they should learn to do the same because saying your idea out loud is a great way to pre-write.

"I think I have a funny to story to share, guys.

"So my on-line business is doing a bit better this year than it ever has before. You guys should really learn to set-up webpages because you might be surprised how easy it is to start your own business...you, know, if you have a good idea to base it on. A few years back, I set up a pretty basic account when I started my business, and based on recent success, I thought it was time to setup a better account with more privileges and options.

"I went in to the bank in August right before school started, and asked how we would go about doing this. They set up the new account right then. I told them I needed a few weeks to make sure all the automatic deposit and payment options for the old account were re-programmed to go into the new account. They told me when I was ready to delete the old account, I should transfer any remaining money into it online, then come in to the branch so I could sign in front of a witness that I wanted the old account deleted.

"On Saturday morning, I transferred all the money out of the old account and into the new account. Yesterday (Tuesday), I went to the bank branch and sat down with the lady who was going to have me sign the old account away. Somehow, the account had earned one cent in interest since Saturday. Thinking about it now, I probably should keep any account that still earns interest when it's empty, but at the time, I wanted the account gone. I told the banker lady she could keep the penny, but she said no. I would have to officially withdraw the one cent.

"I'm not kidding, you guys, but it took twenty minutes to withdraw the penny. I had to fill out a withdrawal form, I had to go stand in line with a bunch of other people, and when I got to the front of the line, the man actually asked me for my photo ID. I seriously almost lost it right then, but it occurred to me that this might be a funnier story if I didn't blow up and make a spectacle of myself; I don't much care for people who yell at people when they enter places of business.

"I think the guy could see I was trying not to explode and I could tell he appreciated that I stayed calm because he cracked a joke: 'And how would you like that penny today, sir?' he asked, implying that I had some sort of choice.

"So I took a deep breath and told him with a slight smile, 'Give me the shiniest penny in your drawer.' He smiled back, dug for it, and found a brand new 2011 penny. It's right here in my pocket. It's even got the new backing; no more Lincoln Memorial on the back of new pennies, I guess. I am trying to decide if this story would work better as a narrative, an expository, or a persuasive piece of writing. What do you guys think?"

At this point, I had shown them the penny, and they offered me advice. Most wanted me to make it a narrative. No one thought it would make a good expository. A few suggested persuasive, and we talked about what persuasive message might I try to convince people with the writing. One of my seventh graders said that "You should always laugh at life," and I told her that I think she'd convinced me to make my story go that way.