

Improve Writing Using Mentor Texts

Questions to Guide Thinking and Discussion

Background

A **mentor text** is a piece of writing that can serve as an example of good writing for student writers. Students can improve their own writing by reading the mentor text and then identifying, thinking about, and discussing the writing techniques and approaches used by the writer. The goal is to provide students a model they could emulate in crafting their own piece.

As an instructor or family member, you can choose a mentor text you think exemplifies good writing. You also can help the student choose a mentor text of his or her own. For more on what constitutes a good mentor text, read [“Using Mentor Texts to Learn From the Best and Improve Students’ Writing”](#) by Sean Thompson and Dr. Deborah K. Reed.

Instructions

1. Directly teach students the elements of writing they should recognize in a mentor text.
2. Have the student(s) read the mentor text. The text can be read aloud with the student(s) or read individually.
3. Have the student answer the questions in the worksheet below. The questions are designed to get the student(s) thinking and talking about the writing techniques and approaches used by the writer in the mentor text.
4. Provide time for students to write while attempting to emulate the mentor text writer’s techniques and approaches in their own writing. Whether in the classroom or at home, join the students and write alongside them.

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Name: _____ Date: _____

Mentor Text Title: _____

Author: _____

1) In five sentences or less, describe the main point and content of the mentor text.

2a) Literary text: What **point of view** (first, second, or third person) did the writer use? Why do you think the writer chose that point of view? How would the story change if it was written from a different point of view?

2b) Informational text: From what **perspective** was the text written? How would the information change if told from a different perspective?

3a) Literary text: What do you notice about the **narrative structure** of the mentor text? Can you be specific about particular structures used such as character development, setting, plot, foreshadowing, flashback, etc.? What was the writer trying to accomplish overall with the text, and how did the narrative structure choices the writer made help with that?

3b) Informational text: What do you notice about the **structure** or organization of the information in the mentor text? Can you be specific about what text structure was used? Common text structures include: Description, cause and effect, comparison/contrast, order/sequence, and problem-solution. What was the writer trying to accomplish overall with the text, and how did the text structure help with that?

4) What do you notice about the **word choice** the mentor text used? Identify a word or phrase the writer used effectively. Why did the writer choose to use them? What was the author trying to accomplish?

5) Identify another **technique** used by the writer. What did you like about the writer's use of this technique? What did it attempt to convey to the reader? Was the writer successful?

6) How would you describe the technique or approach the writer used for the **first paragraph** or **lead** of the mentor text? Why do you think the writer chose to use that technique or approach?

7) How would you describe the technique or approach the writer used for **ending** the mentor text? Why do you think the writer chose to use that technique or approach?

8) What techniques or approaches will you take from this mentor text and **apply to your own writing**? Be specific. It must be something you can point to in the mentor text.

9) How will you apply the technique or approach to your writing?

10) Identify one technique or approach from the text that **you have used before** in your own writing. Describe how you used it, and how it went.

11) If you want to know more about **the choices the writer made** when composing the mentor text, what one question would you ask the writer to help you think through similar choices when you are writing?