

## **An Inclusive Approach to a Reading and Writing Workshop with the Habits of Mind**

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As writers it is always important to develop and improve your writing to create the best piece possible. This process takes time, commitment, and mental energy. While the fundamentals of writing emphasize grammar, structure, fluency, and style, it is also important to focus on developing habits.

What do I mean by habits? As in all aspects of life, in order to be successful in a particular job, sport, hobby, etc., one needs to develop and build on the habits necessary to complete the task with success. For example, one of the greatest American writers of the 20th century, F. Scott Fitzgerald, is best known for his novel *The Great Gatsby*. Fitzgerald is believed to have had a learning disability, which was most likely dyslexia. It is reported that he was kicked out of school at the age of 12 for not focusing or finishing his work, and he had a very hard time spelling, but he succeeded as a writer despite his disability. Fitzgerald is just one of several famous writers who had obstacles to overcome in order to succeed. And today many consider *The Great Gatsby* to be “The American Novel”.

The idea here is to develop the habits as an internal compass that will successfully guide you through the entire writing process--from concepting, inquiry, and research through outlining, drafting, and revising. Forcing yourself to be mindful of presenting these habits is the main focus. Below is a list of sixteen Habits of Mind that can be applied in many aspects of life, although in this particular case we are going to focus on their use in writing.

### **Habits of Mind**

#### ***Persisting - Are you going the extra mile and working to complete your writing goal?***

Example: You have forty minutes of workshop time, so you set a goal for yourself to complete a well-developed introductory paragraph. As you push yourself to finish this goal, consider the commitment you are putting forth; the idea is not to just get it done so you can be ready to leave class, but it is to complete the piece of work with excellence. Persisting through distractions is key here. You have a computer in front of you, and youtube is a click away--it's tempting. This is where you remind yourself that not only did you commit to completing the paragraph, but that you are also practicing ***Persisting***. This is being mindful of the habit.

#### ***Managing Impulsivity - How did I manage my pacing of work?***

Example: We all have been there . . . it's Wednesday night and your analytical essay is due first block tomorrow morning. You hate this feeling of stress, anxiety, procrastination, and regret. You hate knowing that you need to pull an “all-nighter” to get it done. So how can you prevent this from happen over and over?

Well, when you receive a writing assignment, make sure you put the final due date on your calendar, and then plan the project out: consider a timeline of personal due dates for different sections along the way. This kind of tracking will alleviate stress and anxiety, which in the end will eliminate your impulsivity. Ultimately, this habit will positively impact all aspects of your life, whether it's getting to the airport on time or wrapping up your boss's project ahead of schedule.

***Listening with Understanding and Empathy - Are you listening to other viewpoints?***

Example: Get into the habit of listening closely to what others have to say when presenting information and conversing. The idea is to try and understand another person's perspective and feelings, especially when they differ from your own; in other words, put yourself in the other person's shoes. An argumentative discussion about a topic within a classroom is a great example: certain topics can elicit valuable conversation and offer the opportunity to understand opposite ideas and perspectives. Picking up on a peer's tone of voice, emotion, and conviction will allow you to empathize with them. This habit is very useful, even necessary, when researching, outlining, and drafting claims and counterclaims.

***Thinking Flexibly - Is there another way to write this?***

Example: During the narrative writing process you go back and edit your paper. You find two paragraphs that you believe suffer from one or more of the following: they're ineffective, uncaptivating, and/or just plain boring. Ask yourself, "What can I do to improve and make these better paragraphs?" Many times within your writing you have opportunities to show your ideas in a way that most writers would never think of--this is thinking flexibly!

***Thinking about Thinking (Metacognition) - How did you organize your thinking? What was the process you used to begin your writing? Know your knowing!***

Example: You receive a literature analysis essay assignment and feel completely overwhelmed due to the lack of knowledge about the process of literary analysis. At this point you know that you need to figure something out. When problems arise like this, try this checklist:

- Take some time to research the issue you are having
- Search out some examples of good high school-level literary analysis essays
- Talk with friends/peers about the issue
- Ask the teacher questions

In my personal past, this was most successful in helping me understand what I needed to do in order to be successful. I know myself and what works best for me!

***Striving for Accuracy - Are you asking, is this my best piece of writing?***

Example: After finishing an argumentative essay you are a little unsure about the proper way to cite works. Set aside the time to research, proofread, and edit the citations within your paper. Do it again! And oh yeah, what about the 6 traits, did I use them? What about grammar, structure, and fluency? Check the paper again!

***Questioning and Posing Problems - Are you asking other people questions?***

Example: Before you begin workshopping and writing your feature article blog, make a list of questions you have in relation to the style of writing. Pose some problems to your peers or teacher about issues that might occur in the writing process. The idea is to get a clear understanding of the writing style before you begin.

In another way, you have to do a video essay, but you've never done one and have no idea what software to use or how it works. Don't throw your hand up in confusion or put your head down in despair; ask your peers within the class as well as your friends outside of the class if they know something about video essays. Fifteen years ago it would stop here, but times have changed. What do I mean? Ask youtube.

***Applying Past Knowledge to New Situations - Have you thought about connections to what you have learned in prior courses on the topic?***

Example: While brainstorming topics for your video essay script, think about topics that interests you while tapping into prior learning in your life and classes. You think of a topic-- *The Return of Vinyls*; this allows you to pull upon the early 1900's, which you studied intensively during freshman year. In addition, you love music and the history of music. These two areas of prior knowledge can mesh together to make for a great video essay. You are not quite sure how yet, but they will!

***Thinking and Communicating with Clarity and Precision - Are you communicating your ideas with clear writing, thinking, and speaking?***

Example: An effective approach to making sure your thoughts and ideas are communicated clearly in your writing is to read your paper out loud to yourself or a friend. Ask yourself and a peer, "Is this essay communicating what I want it to?" "Does it sound like I want it to sound?"

***Gathering Data through All Senses - Have you considered the senses within your writing, explaining the sights, taste, touch, and smell?***

Example: Make the reader feel that he or she is physically there in the story. Show the use of sound, taste, sight, and touch. Check this out from a sophomore's narrative feature:

*"As soon as we walked inside, my mind, still deep in thought, was assaulted by an overflow of senses. The lights in the lobby flashed purple and pink. Huge speakers blasted pop songs. Drag queens swirled around offering free samples. There was more designer perfume in the air than oxygen. I loved it."*

***Creating, Imagining, Innovating - Is your writing imaginative and original?***

Example: Writing a narrative feature blog about a trip to Hawaii with your family seems like an interesting topic that could be easy to write about. Although, what would make it even more exciting? Think about the big take-away from the vacation and then focus on the experiences that lead to that. Let's face it, the reader doesn't want a chronological laundry list of everything you did: first we went to the beach, and then we swam with sea turtles, and finally we ate at a lua--this is expected. Developing a thematic insight in your narrative by showing a gradual

transformation or an unanticipated understanding is the main goal. Remember, when the narrator or character changes, then so can the reader.

***Responding with Wonderment and Awe - Are you inquiring about your topic? What is exciting?***

Example: You have the opportunity to choose your own topic for an argument project. Don't just grab something off a list of top debates; select something that's always intrigued you or that's always bugged you. This is how you will inspire both yourself and your audience. Even though you may be happier with no assignment at all, seize the opportunity to explore a topic that you really want to know more about.

***Taking Responsible Risks - Are you trying different approaches to writing?***

Example: During the writing process you feel that improved word choice within your piece will help the reader understand your ideas and knowledge on the subject. When tweaking your word choice, you have some doubts about whether it's awkward or sounds fake or develops the appropriate voice in the piece. Realize that these concerns are good to have; you are encouraged to question this in your writing. When you revise with a peer or teacher, you should have these discussions. Taking these risks will develop you as a writer.

***Finding Humor - Is it funny?***

Example: Before beginning a writing task, think about the funny aspect and making someone laugh. Often when you read a funny anecdote within a piece, it seems to draw you in and want to read more. Ask yourself, "Would my humor in the introductory paragraph captivate the reader?" Remember, you're not trying to constantly crack jokes and get your reader to fall off his chair belly laughing; when appropriate, getting the reader to chuckle inside and smile here and there is what it's about--your writing becomes well-rounded. It becomes enlightening AND entertaining.

***Thinking Interdependently - Have you worked together with other peers to get ideas? Maybe they have some insight!***

Example: Before selecting an argumentative topic, share your ideas with a group of students--the more you share with the better. You can benefit from this experience in a big way by obtaining new ideas, information, insights, and perspectives that you hadn't considered. Plus, your peers will be a big help with your project down the road.

***Remaining Open to Continuous Learning - Have you gone back to research more information to add to your already great piece of writing?***

Example: You decide to have a writing conference with your teacher about your narrative feature article. While conferencing, your teacher keeps pointing out, "you need to show, not tell." After the conference you think about the meaning of that statement and realize it is something that you never ever think of while writing. With that feedback you begin to research some additional examples that show this idea, which in turn assists in developing your skills as a writer and a storyteller.

