The Writing Teacher’s Activity-a-Day offers 180+ ready-to-use, reproducible activities that are designed to enhance writing skills of all secondary students. Written for teachers in grades 6–12, the book’s classroom-tested activities are designed so that teachers aren’t required to do any extra grading. Partnering techniques along with new oral assessments and peer-editing strategies not only reduce teacher paper load but provide immediate feedback for students. The Writing Teacher’s Activity-a-Day is filled with writing prompts and sample passages written in student-friendly language that connect abstract literary concepts to students’ own lives. In addition, the engaging examples serve as models to encourage students to create their own Quick Writes.

Praise for The Writing Teacher’s Activity-a-Day

“The most difficult area to teach in language arts is writing, and this text now makes it easier—it will become a teacher’s best friend! The book is the perfect marriage to the writer’s workshop lesson plan model, giving specific examples of writing for each necessary skill to be taught, and will surely enhance and support your mini-lessons. Implementing these activities will help both the student and teacher grow as writers. In 33 years of teaching language arts, I’ve never seen anything like it!”

—Donna Kortvelesy, M.S., NBCT, Professional Development Specialist, Millville Public Schools, Millville, New Jersey

“Anytime I see a book by Mary Ellen Ledbetter, I grab hold of several copies for use in my classrooms and trainings. Teachers beg for them! In The Writing Teacher’s Activity-a-Day, she has taken the objectives that are so hard for students to grasp and for educators to teach and has put together an easy-to-read, easy-to-teach book of amazing activities for everyday use.”

—Janet Coleman, Ed.D., Educational Consultant and Trainer, Fort Worth, Texas

MARY ELLEN LEDBETTER, M.A., is a noted presenter and educational consultant specializing in boosting language arts skills in K–12 students. She has extensive teaching experience in public schools as well as at the college level. Her previous books include Ready-to-Use English Workshop Activities and Writing Portfolio Activities Kit, both from Jossey-Bass, and she is the author of many popular self-published works including Something for Every Day, All About Me, and You Say—I Say.
Jossey-Bass Teacher provides educators with practical knowledge and tools to create a positive and lifelong impact on student learning. We offer classroom-tested and research-based teaching resources for a variety of grade levels and subject areas. Whether you are an aspiring, new, or veteran teacher, we want to help you make every teaching day your best.

From ready-to-use classroom activities to the latest teaching framework, our value-packed books provide insightful, practical, and comprehensive materials on the topics that matter most to K–12 teachers. We hope to become your trusted source for the best ideas from the most experienced and respected experts in the field.
The **WRITING**
Teacher’s
**ACTIVITY-A-DAY**

180+ Reproducible
Prompts and Quick Writes
for the Secondary Classroom

Mary Ellen Ledbetter
WHAT MAKES THIS BOOK DIFFERENT

As I travel to classrooms across the United States and Canada, I see an increasing need for quick, original, student-friendly activities that can be used as engagement strategies, extended to a day’s lesson, or become the basis of a mini-unit.

Teachers want strategies that will focus student attention and at the same time address the needs of district and state curricula. These ready-to-use exercises provide writing models so that students will understand the necessary components of the final products.

The format of the book provides teachers with a quick reference to effectively incorporate the writing, reading, and grammar skills presented into their own classrooms.

Because these lessons can be graded orally (calling on three or four students or partners per day until a grading column is full), *The Writing Teacher’s Activity-a-Day* will quickly become a teacher’s best friend. When higher-level thinking, process, and product are expected every day, lifelong learning occurs.

- *Short writing examples* on any skill or in any mode are hard to find. One of the most time-consuming parts of a teacher’s preparation is finding samples that appeal to students. The activities provided in *The Writing Teacher’s Activity-a-Day* make the teacher’s job much easier.

- Research proves that most writing assignments that fail do so because students do not have *models on which to base their own final products*. The writing samples and exercises in this book are designed to instill confidence in students so that they feel they can be *successful in any writing-on-demand situation*. 
• Most books for writing teachers do not use writing samples to teach *language arts terminology*. The book is unique in that it is a collection of, for the most part, paragraph-length material that *integrates writing, grammar, and reading strategies*.

• Some activities even provide *step-by-step approaches to producing multi-paragraph essays*, turning what is usually perceived by students to be an intimidating process into a much simpler, easy-to-accomplish task.

• *The Writing Teacher’s Activity-a-Day* serves a variety of uses: *Engagement exercises* (warm-ups), bases for an *entire period’s lesson*, and approaches to *mini-units*.

• All of the lessons are *easy-to-access activities* that can be used *at any point in any curriculum*.

• The activities are *student-friendly exercises* that can be used as *individual, partner, or whole-class assignments*.

• The format of the book allows for oral assessments in stages, to provide *immediate feedback* to student writers so that revision can occur *during the process*, rather than after the final draft, when these strategies are too late.

### How to Use the Sample Writings

The *short sample writings* that make up most of the assignments have several purposes:

• Research has shown that students need to study examples of good writing every day to analyze the components and synthesize what makes the piece exemplary. Even if the teacher chooses only to *read the pieces aloud and discuss the various aspects of the writing (such as structure, elaboration, voice)*, learning has occurred.

• The activities require that students take a more active role in their reading by *applying a skill to the writing*. When there are multiple activities, teachers are free to choose *just one question*, thus using the skill as an *engagement activity*, or *all of the questions*, broadening the *scope of the lesson*. 

•
The longer pieces can be used in several ways:

- *Essays in all modes* are broken down into manageable parts (such as introduction; first, second, and third bodies; and conclusion) and can serve as an introduction to that form of writing.
- The multiparagraph essays can provide a quick review of a mode just covered in class or serve as a reminder of certain types of writing that may appear on state tests.
- Essays in all modes are easy-to-understand examples on which students can base their own multiparagraph writings.

**How the Book Is Structured**

The book is alphabetized by literary and compositional terms so that teachers can readily incorporate the exercises into their lesson plans as called for by their districts’ curricula.

The grammatical terms are used as they apply to writing, not in isolation. For instance, the section on action verbs asks students not to simply identify the verbs but rather to concentrate on how action verbs are used as one method of elaboration in writing. This strategy enables students to see the connection between the use of grammar and the skill of writing.

Activities focused on specific literary or reading terms present students with examples of these methods in a short piece of writing, which not only gives students practice in identifying literary vocabulary but also allows them to study how the same skills can be a natural part of their own writing. For instance, when students study the conflict section, which is divided into internal and external conflict, they simultaneously see the terms at work in an established piece and project how these same terms will apply to their own writing.

**Smiley-Face Tricks (Voice)**

Smiley-Face Tricks are being used in schools across the country as a concrete way to conquer the abstract concept of *voice*. Countless teachers have testified to the success their students have had using the “tricks.”
The quality of students’ writing improves dramatically, and students not only use the tricks in their writing but identify them in literature as well. These stylistic devices are in the book separately in alphabetical order, but having them together as a ready-to-use handout (with different examples) makes it even more convenient for teachers.

Smiley-Face Tricks

The name in parentheses credits the student writer of each example.

1. Magic Three. Three groups of words, usually separated by commas, that create a poetic rhythm or add support for a point, especially when the three word groups have their own modifiers.
   
   I am the water when the land turns stale with dryness, the curve when everything else is straight, and the only human in a world of aliens (Jerad).

2. Figurative Language. Nonliteral comparisons—such as similes, metaphors, and personification—add spice to writing and can help paint a more vivid picture for the reader.
   
   His fancy car ran like a hummingbird on a warm, silent day (Chris).

3. Specific Details for Effect. Instead of general, vague descriptions, specific sensory details help the reader visualize the person, place, thing, or idea being described.
   
   During our hunting adventures, boring, brown sticks would become rifles, my miniature poodle would turn into a fierce hunting dog, and teeny ant hills would grow before our eyes to monstrous mounds of dirt. We would travel through the knee-high grass that tickled our legs like spiders. When there was a slight breeze, we would take cover because we believed with all our hearts that it would soon become a horrible hurricane named Hunter (Samantha).

4. Repetition for Effect. Writers often repeat specially chosen words or phrases to make a point, to stress certain ideas for the readers.

   I never played Peter Pan and flew to Never-Never Land. I was never Cinderella getting ready for the ball to dance the night away with
Prince Charming. I was never Jane waiting for Tarzan in our tree hut (Catherine).

5. Expanded Moment. Instead of speeding past a moment, writers often emphasize it by expanding the action.

    I stare off into the heavens
    while my math teacher tries to
    explain to the class something
    about inverting and multiplying
    I wonder why I would do that
    when I like adding and subtracting
    just fine
    My mind is nowhere close to room 134
    Instead I’m closer to the clouds
    the ones that look like marshmallows
    jet-puffed marshmallows
    I stare again
    this time at the teacher
    with her one beady eye
    the teacher who screams at us
    if our eyelids happen
    to flutter closed
    like butterflies
    I blame the parents
    They’re the ones who sent her
    to the planet Earth (Megan)

6. Humor. Professional writers know the value of laughter; even subtle humor can help turn a “boring” paper into one that can raise someone’s spirits.

    You, yes, you Justin, were the guilty one who, while I took off my shoes to enjoy the hot pavement in early spring, put a frog in them. I didn’t look at my shoes when I put them back on. It was the squish that gave your plot away (Elizabeth).
7. **Hyphenated Modifiers.** Sometimes a new way of saying something can make all the difference; hyphenated adjectives often cause the reader to sit up and take notice.

   It was one of those *please-don’t-make-me-go-to-school* mornings (Sharlene).

8. **Full-Circle Ending.** Sometimes students need a special ending, one that effectively *wraps up* the piece. One trick is to repeat a phrase from the beginning of the piece.

   *All the neighbors thought Aunt Matilda a little strange.* They had thought so when she had first moved in and was seen chasing Luna moths over the rooftops at night in her dressing gown. There was a touch of madness in her beady, black eyes, and she had long ago given up even trying to appear sane. She was friends with all the policemen in the town, since not a day went by without somebody calling to complain about Aunt Matilda’s rattlesnake collection. The police had gotten to know her quite well, and they loved her wrinkled face and toothless smile. She spoke of them as “my boys,” and they all had a lovely relationship. They were the ones who helped her out of the pond in back of her rundown mansion when she fell in and discovered the alligators. They didn’t even arrest her. *On second thought, maybe not everyone thought Aunt Matilda a little strange* (Bart).
Oral Assessments: Grading

Most of the activities in this book can be graded using the “Oral Assessment” technique explained in this section. Teachers could choose to grade the multiparagraph essays and even some of the one-paragraph essays as a major curriculum requirement, perhaps reading them while conferencing with the students. No papers at home!

Oral Assessment

Benefits: To ensure that students are successful with all components of an essay, teachers need to call on every student at least once to read aloud whatever part of an essay or paper will help the teacher’s assessment and the class’s learning and will give the student writers immediate feedback.

Environment: If the teacher sits at a student desk in front of the room, he or she becomes part of the learning community, struggling for that perfect phrase just as the students are doing.

Grading: The grade book can be open and used for daily grades. Every grade does not have to reflect the value of 100. The importance of the grade can be achieved by weighting the denominator. For instance, a daily grade might be worth 30 points, whereas an essay for which the entire creative process takes two weeks to complete might be assigned 500 points.

At the end of the marking period, all the possible points are added to designate a “perfect” score, each student’s points are added, and these points are then divided by the possible points to ascertain the student’s grade.

Models: Remember that students should have several models. The process of reading the essays as a class and then breaking the works into their parts (for example, introduction, first body) will give students a clear picture of the desired final product.

Procedure: For a five-paragraph essay, for instance, the following could be considered:
1. Introductions: After the teacher and students have written for five or ten minutes on the introduction, the class stops and the teacher reads his or her own introduction to the class.

a. The teacher can then call on perhaps three students to read their entire introductions, giving them their grades as they do so. If something is wrong (for example, the piece is missing a hook or the thesis statement is incorrect), the teacher can consider allowing the student’s classmates to receive extra credit for explaining what needs revision. More learning occurs if the teacher does not mark the student writer down, but instead gives the writer a few extra minutes to revise while another student reads. This way, the entire class benefits by hearing the components.

b. Next, several other students might read only their hooks. The class can discuss whether these attempts to grab a reader’s attention are strong enough and exemplify voice. The teacher should then give students who have read their hooks their daily points.

c. Finally, a few students can read their thesis statements. The three aspects that their papers will address should be evident and expressed in parallel structure. Points go to these students as well.

2. Bodies:

a. Depending on the grade and ability level of the class, ten or twenty minutes should be allowed for writing each body, which means that students will probably be able to write and revise only one body per period. (Teachers should stress that a body should be about a “spread hand” in length in order to include three points and elaboration.)

b. Again, teachers should read what they have written.

c. Teachers should call on no more than three people to read their entire first bodies. If more read, the class becomes inattentive. If a student who is called on to read says that he or she is not finished, teachers can simply tell the student to read what is completed so that they can be assured that the student is headed in the right direction. The rest of the rough body, then, needs to be finished as homework.
d. Next, teachers might call on several students to read their topic sentences to make sure that the subject matter of their first paragraphs is clear.

e. Several more can be called on to tell the class what their three points are (for example, their reasons, the subpoints of the paragraph).

f. Finally, others can read several of their best Writing Trick examples.

g. Grades are given for all.

3. Conclusion:

a. The conclusion is graded in the same manner as the introduction, with several students reading their entire conclusions, a few more with their attention-getters (or their attempts to leave the readers with a good taste in their mouths), and some others reading the restatements of their thesis.

b. With students sharing various parts of their essays, the whole class benefits.