

## Pre-writing

During pre-writing the goal is not to get the student to start writing, but to get the student interested in one or several topics he or she could write about. Students who are not familiar with the purposes of writing may have a hard time. They are the ones who have learned to write solely to please the teacher. Modeling the various purposes of writing explicitly, and doing a “think aloud” during the modeling is a great help.

Writing Menu This strategy should be used during the first two or three weeks of the writing program before we ask students to produce their first “menu.” The teacher sits in front of the class and models writing a personal list of topics to write about. I like to include something about a relative, a food item, a movie I’ve seen, a place I’ve been to, a problem I’m having, something about a best friend, and a pet peeve as items. The teacher then models, by thinking out loud, how to pick one item to write about *today*. The list gets stored in a writing folder, expanded, and used many times as a source of ideas.

Conversation Very young or reluctant writers can learn that conversation leads to great writing topics to choose from, but the habit of stopping to notice needs to be established. I like to call on a teacher’s aide, parent, or another teacher to come into the classroom and ask me about my week (I give them a list of possible questions to ask). As they ask and I respond, I think out loud and stop to jot down ideas on a post-it. The students are then asked to re-enact this role play with a buddy, and take turns asking each other.



Visualization This strategy works out great for poetry, but also for letter-writing and even reports and essays, because it requires the writer to brainstorm topics and pick take a position on the subject. While everybody closes their eyes, I play some soft music in the background and show them how I “travel with my mind.” After 2-3 minutes of silence, I stop the music and tell them about the thoughts and ideas that came to my mind while I was quiet, then ask them to do the same for a slightly longer period of time. After the music stops, they are asked to share it with a partner, then to write down a list of topics.