



Activities for Student Writing Groups

By Stephenie Hovland

You have gathered a group of students who like to write, set up a meeting schedule, and even bought a few snacks for the first meeting. Now what? You can do the same activities every time you meet, or you can mix things up a bit by bringing new ideas to your students who crave creativity. Try some of these ideas on your group and see which fit them best. (These ideas can be done virtually or in person.)

1. **Critique one another.** Most writing groups use this activity as a staple. They critique each other every time, but may change up some of their other activities. Consider how your group will critique. Each person can read a section aloud, then let others make a comment. Or, each person can bring a written paper that gets passed around the group. Give the students about five minutes before encouraging them to move on to the next person.

2. **Mini-lesson.** Though this is not a class, writing groups are all about writing better. Some groups may like the idea of the teacher-in-charge leading a five-minute lesson. Keep it short. Try to pull literature into the lesson, so students will notice good writing as they read. Consider giving students handouts that list a summary or tips from the mini-lesson.
3. **Read to the students.** The teacher can read one page or one paragraph to the student group in order to focus them on a certain technique. This would be a great starting activity for each meeting. It could also be used after the mini-lesson. Students can listen for great beginnings, description, character development, metaphors, unusual grammar usage, poetic language, dynamic endings, etc.
4. **Pre-writing.** Some students may feel like they need a nudge to begin writing. You can do some pre-writing activities, like writing prompts or word association, to get them started. Then, encourage them to write for a set amount of time. Beginners may be challenged by three minutes, while advanced writers can go much longer. Ask students if they would like to read anything aloud, or if they got some ideas for future writing.
5. **Role-play.** Beginner writers may enjoy acting like a character from their favorite book. It could even be an inanimate object. Older students often like to get into character from their own work. Ask them to choose a character, then interact with another character. They should ask each other questions about their favorite food, what they did last week, how they look, etc. Encourage them to act and talk in character, without saying their name (unless asked). This will help develop their sense of character development.

These ideas can work with most groups, in person or virtually. Try them, and see which ones your group responds to best.