Twelve Things You and Your Students Can do with *Starting Lines*

*Everything below is based on work I have done in my class or have seen done in other classes. I offer up everything as a **SUGGESTION**. If you do any of these things, let myself or Ilene Miele know how they went. Also, if you come up with a new way of working with **Starting Lines** let us know. We'd love to hear what you do with the collection!* We even publish approaches to Starting Line on our website at
http://www.startinglinesmagazine.com/instructional-materials/.
--Chris Dean, deanc1@ucsb.edu

1. **WORK ON BEGINNINGS AND ENDINGS.** Assign a section of the text, say "Exploring Genres." Ask students to read either, or both, the first or final paragraph of a piece **and choose one** piece to read in its entirety, based upon the beginning or ending they liked best. **In class:** have students gather in like groups, based upon what they read, and have them come up with a list of reasons they connected and liked the beginning or ending they read, ask them to choose three *great sentences* from what they read, and ask them what they might change and why about what they read. **The next move:** get students to draft, or redraft, the opening or closing a piece after they have discussed, in detail, what makes for openings and closings that work—in whatever genre(s) you are looking at. **The purpose and point:** students often struggle starting and ending pieces, and *Starting Lines* is replete with pieces that have either fine beginnings or endings; however, fortunately, the pieces aren't perfect. There's a lot of good discussion that can come from looking at beginnings and endings of pieces written by students for a student audience.

2. **REVERSE OUTLINE A PIECE**. Often times one of the best ways to understand the structure of a piece, and how to create a well-structured piece of writing, is to take it apart via a reverse outline. **In class:** After reading a piece you assign, have folks create a reverse outline for the piece. A reverse outline involves writing down what each paragraph or chunk of text "does" in the text (its rhetorical purpose) and what it "says" (its literal meaning) in no more than one sentence. You can also assign student groups to do a set of paragraphs or chunks; thus, having student groups focus on particular chunks of text—rather than the whole. **The next move:** once you have the reverse outlines down, you want students to share their outlines, and start to talk about how a piece does or doesn't hang together. You can easily morph from this to having the students do this sort of outlining on a piece **that they are currently writing**, so that they can perceive how their piece does, or doesn't, hold together. **The purpose and point:** This sort of exercise helps students see a number of things: how the macro structure of piece does work (and at times doesn't work); how to make their own work more cohesive (by reading their work carefully); and it provides a good model of overall structure of a piece to students. (Hey, we didn't include terrible pieces in *Starting Lines*!)

3. **LOOK AT THE PICTURES.** One of the wonderful things about the 2020 issue of *Starting Lines* is that "Boundary Crossings" for Writing 2 is replete with images. **In class**: you ask students to read a text before or even in class, and ask them these questions in a large or small group setting: **what do the visual elements add to the main message of the piece; what might the visual elements distract us from in the piece; what seems to be function of the visual elements—rhetorically speaking; how would the piece be different without the visual elements present?** **The next move:** Get students to try, in a piece in process, to include some visual elements, preferably (for us here at *Starting Lines*) images that they have created, be they charts, graphs, photos, or something else. **The purpose and**

point: the point here is to move students into some sort of discussion, and then play, with visual rhetoric. The visual dimension of texts is increasingly important (as you can see in Scott McCloud and others' work), and it make sense to help students think a bit about how visual elements might be incorporated into text—effectively.

4. **GRAMMAR AND STYLE IN CONTEXT.** Any of the pieces in *Starting Lines* should work for this. What you want to do is to make sure to tether this activity to grammar and style in students' writing. **In class:** You need not have students read anything before doing this. You take a section of text that uses something you want to talk about, say comma usage, and you put that text in-front of them as a *sentence combining exercise.* You will first want to do a mini-lecture (say ten to fifteen minutes) on something you want to address, then you take a section text (it can be anything from a sentence to a paragraph) and you break it up, as you see below:

   Use one comma and "when" to combine together a. and b. into one sentence. Or come up with some way to get all of the sentences together.
   a. I was young.
   b. I loved to tell stories
   Your Sentence:_____ _
   _____.

   Students will then combine together the "kernel" sentences into one sentence, alone or in groups, and you can talk a bit afterwards about WHY they did what they did, the rules of grammar involved, and issues of style. **The next move**: After doing sentence combining, it's often grand to actually have students work on their own writing. **The purpose and point**: In 1946, a former head of NCTE said that there was "no link" between grammar drills and improvement of grammar in students' writing, and things haven't changed since then. One way that has proven efficacy in terms of getting students to learn to use complex grammatical and syntactical constructions in their writing is sentence-combining. Thus, you can "do grammar" and have an effect if you do something like what is described above. To take a closer look at sentence combining generally, go to these URLs: https://styleacademy.byu.edu/exercises/sentence-combining/ and http://guidetogrammar.org/grammar/combining_skills.htm.

5. **GRADE TOGETHER.** It is often pretty revealing to grade a piece from *Starting Lines* with your class, both for your students and you. What I tend to do is hand out the rubric I use to evaluate a final draft of piece to students, go over the rubric, and then ask folks to work in teams of three to come up with a grade and a comment that will, "help the student keep writing, but show what isn't working in the piece." **In class:** Students work on this and talk to me about this for about 15-20 minutes, then we get together and figure out what grade the class has given the piece, and why. The "why" is what's important here. This exercise allows you to check in with your students about their standards for evaluation, get good language to use in your response to students, and it allows you collectively to think a bit more deeply about what "good writing" might specifically means in your class for a given genre of work. **The next move:** Tell the students a bit about how you evaluate their writing, what you're looking for in the piece under discussion, and share what you would say if the piece was still in process. This gives students a sense of how you approach something they care about a lot: grading. However, it is not you JUSTIFYING A GRADE to a given student. **The purpose and point:** you need to talk about what you value in writing to your students, and it often is very helpful to all involved to connect this talk to a document that *was not produced by anyone in the class.* You learn a lot about your students' standards doing this, and, encouragingly, I typically learn that my students are pretty honest in their evaluations of their own and others work.

6. **PLAY "WHAT'S MISSING HERE?"** One thing I love about *Starting Lines* is that our students do great work, but not necessarily perfect work. Thus, there will be places in texts where arguments falter, evidence isn't present, or something (anything from descriptive text to a needed statistic) isn't there. So, what you can do is to put a small chunk of text in front of students and ask them to do two things: **figure out if there is anything to add to the chunk of text, and then to write out that chunk of text. In class:** In class, I typically do this by having students open up *Starting Lines* to a piece we have read for that day. What we then do is divide up chunks of the text, and I ask them to look for a **specific something** that is missing (anything from descriptions that might make things "pop" to a missing piece of evidence that would make an argument stronger); mark the missing thing (with pens); and then fill in the gap through solo or group writing. We then talk about what they wrote, how it improves upon, or doesn't improve upon, what is written, and the discussions often lead to doing THE SAME WORK IN THEIR WORK. **The next move:** I generally have students bring out a draft and try to add to their piece what we have been working on in the exercise. This way, there is a direct and immediate connection between the class activity and their work. **The purpose and point**: I think it's important for students to realize that very good work is never perfect or, in fact, perfectly finished. This sort of activity helps students get that, and it has, in my experience, helped students dig into their pieces and revise.

7. **ASK "WHAT WORKS AND WHAT COULD BE WORKED ON?"** With this activity, you simply ask the two questions above to groups of students, ask them to write down some answers, and then talk about the answers. This can help you and your students talk about everything from genre conventions to voice and tone. **In class:** Students read a text, assigned for that day, from *Starting Lines,* or you can even ask them to choose between two texts. They group up and create something written (to have a task that centers group work), and then they report back on what does and doesn't work. As they talk, I write down, on a board, what they come up with. I then comment or add onto what they say. **The next move:** Depending on what's said and your REASON for doing this, you can take this activity in a lot of directions. I often do this BEFORE doing peer review, being sure to hit upon how I want students to respond. Thus, we practice peer review before we do it, which is a key move to make if you want peer review to succeed. However, I have also moved into specific writing activities and even in-class research depending on what's said. **The purpose and point**: This is an incredibly versatile activity that I use multiple times during a quarter. I think it also gets at a fundamental rhetorical point: you need to effectively get your piece to "work" for a specific audience. That's really what this activity is all about.

8. **READ A PIECE FOR PURE PLEASURE AND ADMIRE IT.** This is very simple: you simply read a piece and enjoy it collectively, talking about WHY you liked it. **In class:** You simply get students, in groups or as a full class discussion, to talk about "what worked," and get them to be *really specific about what worked.* **The next move**: I find this to be a really useful activity to do before peer review, so that students learn how to say **specific positive** things that might help a fellow writer; the key thing to work on with this activity is getting past "empty praise*."* **The purpose and point:** students need to know that they and others produce work that is praise-worthy, and we, critical thinkers that we are, can give short-shrift to specific praise in student work. This activity has always helped me remember that I want to try to see what works in student work—in addition to what could be improved.

9. **Think about Citation.** Look at a piece, perhaps in the "Inquiry" section of *Starting Lines*, that uses APA and compare it to one that uses MLA. **In class:** You ask students to look at **in-text citations** for an APA formatted piece, then at an MLA one. Ask them questions along these lines: **what is different about these in-text citations, and why do you think that MLA (which is used by folks in English Studies and Linguistics) might be different from APA (which is used by folks in fields Psychology and Education)**. **The next move**: This is a good bridge to talking about genre (which is obvious), and how to handle citations. One thing I would definitely bring up is that paraphrased material MUST BE CITED. This shocks some Writing 2 students. **The purpose and point:** students need to understand how to do in-text citations, but they should also know why they have to do in-text citations.

10. **Can I use "I?"** Ask students to look for "I," which is a pronoun that some of them have been told to NEVER USE. (Actually, it's likely that their previous teachers told them not to use "I" in a particular context, but memory is a strange animal.) As we all know there are times to use "I" in writing in a particular genre for a particular discourse community, and there are times to not do that. **In class:** Have students look at piece that uses "I," somewhere in it. Ask questions like: why do you think the author used "I" here? Was it appropriate to do so, why or why not? Why would you or wouldn't you use "I" in the piece we're writing? *This sort of work I tend to do in small groups first, then move to a larger discussion. I also follow this up with students writing with "I" for a particular reason.* **The purpose and point:** There is a lot of lore and bad memory surrounding the use of "I" in writing. There are also other examples of admonitions (for instance the use of passive voice) that students believe are rules or laws— *not conventions.* The use of "I" is just one way to talk about conventions and the flexibility that writers have meeting audience needs and desires.

11. **Blog or Journal about Pieces**. One thing that the great Mashey Bernstein did, and you can see a full write-up of Mashey's idea at http://www.startinglinesmagazine.com/instructional-materials/, is to have his students write 10 total log entries that asked them to write about *Starting Lines* pieces across Writing 1/Linguistics 10 and Writing 2 sections. Mashey had students do everything from examining how students created effective first lines to answering this really interesting prompt: "Suggestions if you had the essay for peer review." The point here is to get students to, "read like a writer." This can be private writing that you could bring into the classroom and ask students to share responses.

12. **Get Digital**. This is a big ask, but it could change how you approach teaching pretty profoundly. Ask your students to look at the digital pieces online in *Starting Lines* at http://www.startinglinesmagazine.com/digital-writing/. Then have them attempt to create a digital piece in your class, or to remediate an essay as a digital piece. Kathy Patterson has taught remediation pieces many times in many classes, and could give you some great ideas. (To see a few pieces that Kathy's students have created go to http://www.startinglinesmagazine.com/digital-writing/.) As for me, I have kept things pretty simple by using screencasting technology (http://screencast-o-matic.com/home) and Prezi (http://prezi.com) to allow students to do very straight-forward multimedia pieces. This is an involved process, but I would be happy to talk to you about the enormous possibilities for you and your students in using Audacity. Send me an email at deanc1@ucsb.edu.