

# Purposeful Writing! Cartwright / English Language Arts / Greenville High School

## Overview

As assigned during the academic year, students will write a variety of nonfiction pieces in genres of their choice. In order to add authenticity to this writing process, their work may be published for public consumption and comment.

Students may choose the genre and the subject for each assignment (at least one every two weeks). However, students must use all genres during the academic year. In other words, if a student chooses to write a sports report one week, that student should not write another sports piece the next week; instead, they should (for example) choose to write a CD review or interview a relative or do a memoir.

## Genres to choose from

Biographical narrative: Interview someone to record a recollection of a special event or time in their life.

Feature story: Write an article about someone or some current event in order to go deeper into a subject (to add insight and/or background information) than a news article would. Typically requires interviewing and some primary research.

Sports story: Recap a game, interview a sports figure, research and write about a famous player or coach, or comment on a current development in sports. Requirements depend on the type of story chosen.

Memoir: Write a reflection of a significant occurrence or event in your life.

Art review: evaluate a work of art to inform the public of its qualities and to recommend it to potential patrons. Review subjects might include:

Books

Music CDs or web casts

Blogs

Video games

Movies

Visual arts

Technical writing: instruct others how to plan, assemble, and/or operate a technology (tune a four wheeler, use Google Sketch-up, build a shed)

Editorial writing: respond to a local, national, or global issue in the news and/or of concern to you.

Letter to the editor: write a letter to the editor of a blog, magazine, newspaper, or TV news station to comment on or disagree with a position they have taken.

Social commentary: let the world know how you feel about what you observe around you.

Research: look into something you've always wanted to know about, and share your new knowledge with the world.

Other?

**Steps in the process.**

Analyze examples from your chosen genre to determine the genre's unique features and purpose, and audience. (See and complete Article Analysis sheet)

Determine the appropriate features, purpose, and audience for your piece. (See and complete Article Planning sheet)

Produce the piece:

Brainstorm

Pre-plan/outline

Draft

Revise

Layout

Edit

Submit

**Grade:**

Each piece will receive two grades:

A writing standard grade using the attached rubric(s).

A work habits grade based on the timeliness of submissions.

**Due date for first article:**

## Article Analysis

To prepare for your own nonfiction writing, choose a good example of the genre you wish to write in. For instance, if you wish to do a profile on a sports figure, find the kind of article you'd like to write in *Sports Illustrated* and identify important characteristics the article has that will help you to produce something like it.

Use this analysis sheet to determine the articles characteristics. Record your observations below.

Title of article and the publication in which you found it: \_\_\_\_\_

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**Subject of article** Who or what is the article mainly about?

**Purpose of the article** Why was the article written?

**Main Topic** What is the main topic or message of the article?

**Name at least three important ideas or points in the article:**

1)

2)

3)

**Audience for the article:** for what specific people or types of people was the article written? Why do you think so?

**Style, voice, and diction** Diction is the style of writing an author uses that gives the writing a unique personality and perspective. This style is achieved through word choices -- vocabulary, phrasing--that together create a consistent attitude or point-of-view meant to appeal to a certain audience. Give examples of words, phrases, or whole passages from the article you think are particularly effective or stylish, and briefly explain why each passage is effective or stylish. How do the word choices you've identified contribute to the purpose of the article? Use the back of this sheet to record your findings and observations.

## **Style, voice, and diction**

Examples of and observations on word choices in the article:

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**Purposeful Writing Criteria: Cartwright / ELA / Greenville H.S.**

## **Reviews** (CDs, movies, books, games, dance recitals, concerts, etc.)

The text should be at least 500 words.

The article should conform to the features of a typical review given the subject matter. In other words, your music CD review should examine similar aspects of the product as any other similar review you'd find in *Rolling Stone*, *The New York Times*, *Wired*, or other periodicals featuring such reviews.

Features to consider and include:

- Different book sections, game levels, songs, scenes, and/or characters are examined and evaluated (based on the structure of the product)
- There is an overall evaluation of the product and some level of recommendation to the reader
- Key personnel featured in and/or responsible for the reviewed product are acknowledged and evaluated
- Relevant dates and locations are acknowledged
- Your likes and dislikes—and your reasons why—are a major feature of your review
- Vocabulary and diction are targeted to a particular audience—the style fits the subject and should appeal to the hoped-for reader
- Pictures of the reviewed product and some of its related themes and personnel are included, and the photos have captions and credits
- The review is formatted in columns and has other appealing visual elements: side bars, pull quotes, line elements, etc.
- Workmanship is of publishable quality: your review is well-edited, looks great, and is thorough and thoughtful

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### Feature story based on an interview

The text should be at least 500 words.

The story must be based on an interview you conduct and should include the characteristics and structure of a typical feature story. In other words, your story is first-and-foremost a story about a person or event that *you write*; the interview content serves to support your story and give your reader first-hand access to your subject. Your article is NOT an interview-based Q&A, nor is it an interview transcription. Your story should have characteristics similar to any feature story you'd find in *Rolling Stone*, *The New York Times*, *Wired*, *Newsweek*, or other periodicals featuring such stories.

Feature story characteristics to consider and include:

- The story should have an angle—a purpose—that drives the writing
- The writing puts the reader in a specific moment and location through provision of sensory details
- The writing makes the interview subject alive and particular to the reader by describing the physical features of the subject—clothing, gestures, attitude, setting, tone of voice, etc.
- The story features direct quotes from the interview that give voice to the interview subject. The quotes used are particularly effective in
  - revealing the unique personality of the subject, and/or
  - preserving phrasing and language from the interview that is particularly important or revealing
- Relevant dates and locations are acknowledged, and the importance of related events told in the story is made clear generally and with respect to the subject
- Vocabulary and diction are targeted to a particular audience—the style fits the subject and should appeal to the hoped-for reader
- Pictures of the interviewee and/or event settings are included, and the photos have captions and credits
- The article is formatted in columns and has other appealing visual elements: side bars, pull quotes, line elements, etc.

- Workmanship is of publishable quality: your story is well-edited, looks great, and is thorough and thoughtful

**Purposeful Writing Criteria: Cartwright / ELA / Greenville H.S.**

## **Sports story based on interviews and/or event observation**

The text should be at least 500 words.

The story must be based on interviews you conduct and/or observations of a sports event you attend and should include the characteristics and structure of a typical sports feature story. In other words, your story is first-and-foremost a story about a sports person, sports issue, or sports event that *you write*; the interview content serves to support your story and give your reader first-hand access to the sports event, issue, or personality that is the focus of your piece. Your article is NOT an interview-based Q&A, nor is it an interview transcription. Your story should have characteristics similar to any sports feature story you'd find in *Sports Illustrated*, *The Sporting News*, *Newsweek*, *the Boston Globe* or other periodicals featuring such stories.

Sports feature story characteristics to consider and include:

- The story should have an angle—a purpose—that drives the writing
- The writing puts the reader in a specific moment and location through provision of sensory details
- The writing makes the interview subject and/or event vivid and particular to the reader by describing the physical features of the sports personality (clothing, gestures, attitude, tone of voice, etc.) and environment of the subject/event (location, crowd noise, game conditions, weather, grounds, surroundings, smells, etc.)
- As appropriate, the story features direct quotes that give voice to the interviewees and/or to differing viewpoints related to a controversial subject. The quotes used are particularly effective in
  - revealing the unique personality of the subject, and/or
  - preserving phrasing and language from the interview that is particularly important or revealing
- Relevant dates and locations are acknowledged, and the importance of related events told in the story is made clear generally and with respect to the subject
- Vocabulary and diction are targeted to a particular audience—the style fits the subject and should appeal to the hoped-for reader
- Pictures of the interviewee and/or event settings are included, and the photos have captions and credits

- The article is formatted in columns and has other appealing visual elements: side bars, pull quotes, line elements, etc.
- Workmanship is of publishable quality: your story is well-edited, looks great, and is thorough and thoughtful

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## “How To” article

The text should be at least 500 words.

The article will provide the details of a process by which your reader can accomplish something—thanks to your guidance and descriptions. Your article might teach someone how to build a birdhouse, buy a snowmobile, trap a bear, make a quilt, cook a meal, market a product, or do any number of things that interest you. Your story should have characteristics similar to any “how to” article you’d find in *Scientific American*, *Woodworking*, *Fine Cooking*, or other periodicals featuring such articles.

“How To” article characteristics to consider and include:

- The story should have a clear purpose: to show others how to accomplish something
- The writing gives the reader details and explanations in a sequential and logical order—the directions are clear and effective
- The writing is rich in technical description, yet also appeals to human interest by including humor, insight, and/or anecdotes
- As appropriate, the article might feature direct quotes from experts in the field to add insight and spice to your article
- Vocabulary and diction are targeted to a particular audience—the style fits the subject and should appeal to the hoped-for reader
- Pictures, diagrams, and other graphic illustrations of the process and finished product help the reader to visualize the hoped-for outcome and the necessary steps to achieve the outcome.
- The article is structured and formatted to ensure accurate and effective conveyance of directions and supporting elements and contains other appealing visual elements
- Workmanship is of publishable quality: your story is well-edited, looks great, and is thorough and thoughtful

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## **Personal narrative**

The text should be at least 500 words.

A personal narrative is a piece of writing in which you recount a true story about yourself. Because it is a story, your narrative should contain all the elements of drama: it should have a beginning, a middle, and an end; there must be some conflict in the story (although the conflict need hardly be serious); there must be descriptive language that gives your settings, situations, and characters life; and, it should have relevance to people in general through the exploration of some aspect of human nature. Your narrative should have characteristics similar to others you'd find in essay collections, newspaper columns (such as humorist Dave Barry's), periodicals such as *Atlantic Monthly* and *The New Yorker*, and chapters in autobiographies and memoirs.

Personal narrative characteristics to consider and include:

- The narrative should focus on telling a *story* about an event in your life
- The writing puts the reader in the specific time and place in which your story occurs through provision of sensory and temporal (time-related) details
- The writing works as both a remembrance of an event in your life *and* as a way by which your reader can think about human nature in general. In other words, your story should entertain, instruct, and emotionally affect your reader.
- Unlike a short story or novel, a personal narrative primarily tells and describes. Little direct quotation or dialogue is used; instead, your reader hears your mind at work
- Vocabulary and diction are targeted to a particular audience—the style and tone fits the subject and should appeal to the hoped-for reader
- Photos may enhance the story, and would have captions and credits
- The article is artfully formatted to match the tone of the narrative and to help convey your intended effect
- Workmanship is of publishable quality: your story is well-edited, looks great, and is thorough and thoughtful

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# Poetry

Combined, text(s) should be at least 300 words.

Of all written idioms, poetry is the most difficult to define, and the quality by which one judges poetry is often highly subjective. Here are some expectations readers can have related to any poem: the poem achieves a “unity of effect” (it leads us *mostly* toward a single truth, idea, or insight); it uses poetic devices to enhance impact and meaning (sound strategies such as rhythm, repetition, rhyme, alliteration, etc.; sense strategies such as metaphor, irony, imagery, etc.; and, organizational strategies such as form, shape, verses, etc.). The poem(s) you write might be similar to those found in periodicals or collections such as *Atlantic Monthly*, [www.bartleby.com](http://www.bartleby.com), *The New Yorker*, and *The Utne Reader*.

**Note:** poem length should be dictated by the artistic needs of the poet; therefore, the minimum word length may be met by the submission of more than one poem.

Poetry characteristics to consider and include:

- The power and accuracy of *each word* contributes to the poem’s overall message; the language is dense and meaningful
- Powerful images appeal simultaneously to the senses and to our thoughts as symbolic representations
- The natural, emotional, and, perhaps, spiritual worlds are brought together through insightful and vivid language
- Sound strategies (rhythm, repetition, rhyme, alliteration, etc.) make the poem memorable and impactful
- Sense strategies (metaphor, irony, imagery, etc.) convey deep meaning and interrelationships among ideas, insights, experiences, and/or realizations
- Organizational strategies (form, shape, verses, line or space breaks, etc.) contribute to meaning and flow.
- Vocabulary and diction are critical tools by which meaning is conveyed
- Art work or other visual elements may accompany and enhance the poem
- The poem’s title is meaningful and provides guidance to the reader to help the reader interpret the poem’s intended message
- Workmanship is of publishable quality: your poem is well-edited, looks great, and is thorough and thoughtful

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## **Editorial/Opinion piece**

The text should be at least 250 words.

An editorial is a piece published in a periodical that states an opinion on a current event or takes a side in a public discourse—usually to influence readers to act in accordance with the editorial’s position. While the basic point-of-view of your editorial is generated by your opinion, a good editorial is, at its heart, an *argument*. A good argument goes beyond opinion by offering facts that support the opinion, and it anticipates and addresses likely objections to or differences with your position. Your editorial/opinion piece should have characteristics similar to any editorial you’d find in *The Kennebec Journal*, *The New York Times*, *Wired*, *Newsweek*, or other periodicals featuring such editorials.

Editorial characteristics to consider and include:

- The editorial should have a clear opinion or position on a current, relevant issue of public concern that drives the writing
- The editorial should go beyond opinion to bring in facts or the thoughts of others to strengthen your argument
- The writing makes the editorial stronger through the use of rhetorical strategies such as effective repetition, the use of metaphors or anecdotes, the use of rhetorical questions, and effective appeals to logic *and* the reader’s emotions
- The editorial anticipates and addresses contrary or objecting views
- The editorial directly or indirectly suggests a specific course of action relevant to the issue of public concern
- Vocabulary and diction are targeted to a particular audience—the style and narrative voice fits the subject and should appeal to and influence the reader
- The editorial is formatted according to the form it is to be published in—web log, newspaper, magazine, etc.
- Workmanship is of publishable quality: your editorial is well-edited, looks great, and is thorough and thoughtful

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## **Favorite pastime article**

The text should be at least 400 words.

A “favorite pastime” article is a piece of writing in which you describe and reflect on an activity you love doing that brings you great satisfaction or that has great significance for you. Such pieces should be fun to read, and lend themselves to enthusiastic, energetic, and often humorous writing. In a way, such an article is almost like a feature story written about yourself—by yourself. Your pastime article should have characteristics similar to others you’d find on social network sites, on blogs, or in specialty periodicals such as *Modern Dance*, *Guitar Player*, *PC Gaming*, or *Teen People*.

Favorite pastime article characteristics to consider and include:

- The narrative should focus on describing the attributes and significance of an ongoing activity in your life (hobby, extra-curricular activity, life-long experience)
- The article describes in considerable detail a specific environment in which the pastime occurs (e.g. stage/theater for dance, living room or den for gaming, etc.)
- The article richly describes your own involvement in the pastime, and conveys your enthusiasm for your participation in it
- The article directly or indirectly communicates how and why the pastime is among your favorites
- Vocabulary and diction are targeted to a particular audience—the style and tone fits the subject and should appeal to the hoped-for reader
- Photos may enhance the story, and would have captions and credits
- The article is formatted in columns and has other appealing visual elements: side bars, pull quotes, line elements, etc.
- Workmanship is of publishable quality: your article is well-edited, looks great, and is thorough and thoughtful

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## **Graphic novella (short comic book)**

The graphic novella should have a *minimum* of twenty frames.

A graphic novel is a sophisticated story told through a comic book-style medium. A graphic novella is a shorter version of a graphic novel, but in either case, the novella should contain all the elements of full drama: it should have a beginning, a middle, and an end, and there must be some conflict in the story (although the conflict need hardly be serious) that is resolved. The novella will feature dialogue and some “stage direction” kinds of comments, but artwork replaces the narration normally found in prose. Your graphic novella should have characteristics similar to others you’d find in stores such as Newbury Comics or Bull Moose Music or in any number of modern comic books or graphic novels.

Graphic novella characteristics to consider and include:

- The story should have a protagonist and antagonist engaged in a conflict
- The story has an interesting plot and dramatic situation, and the conflict is resolved in the course of the story. The progression of the plot is conveyed through logically sequenced frames
- The setting, characters, and action are vividly and effectively drawn
- Color or gray scale elements add depth and mood to the line drawings
- The title of the novella is meaningful and apropos to the story
- There is dialogue and stage direction made effective through word choices and idiomatic language that realistically reflect the characters’ backgrounds, circumstances, personalities, and attitudes
- Character is revealed compellingly through the unified elements of the novella
- Vocabulary and diction are targeted to a particular audience—the style and tone fits the subject and should appeal to the hoped-for reader
- The novella is visually effective in its organization and overall artistic approach
- Workmanship is of publishable quality: your story is well-edited, looks great, and is thorough and thoughtful

## Purposeful Writing Criteria: Cartwright / ELA / Greenville H.S.

### Short story

The short story should have a *minimum* of 750 words.

Familiar to all, a short story is a self-contained story with the usual dramatic elements: a plot with rising action, a climax, and a resolution; rich descriptive writing accounting for setting, character description, back story, and (perhaps) characters' thoughts; and, a conflict that drives the story. Short stories typically describe events taking place in a short period of time, as if we are observing a moment in time in which the story's main characters are struggling with something or someone. Short stories differ from novels and personal narratives in that they *show* rather than *tell* a story. The use of frequent dialogue is a key to *showing* the characters and advancing the plot. Your short story should have characteristics similar to others you'd find in books and periodicals such as *The New Yorker*, *The Atlantic Monthly*, *The Utne Reader*, and various short story collections.

Short story characteristics to consider and include:

- The story should have a protagonist and antagonist engaged in a conflict
- The story has an interesting plot and dramatic situation, and the conflict is resolved in the course of the story. The progression of the plot is conveyed through narration and dialogue.
- The setting, characters, and action are vividly and effectively described.
- The main characters are made interesting and compelling through writing strategies that make them unique and recognizable
- The title of the story is meaningful and apropos to the story
- The dialogue is realistic and helps define character
- The scope of the story is limited to a short time frame and modest actions; reading the story is as if we are dropping in on a single moment in a person's life during which something important is happening.
- Vocabulary and diction are targeted to a particular audience—the style and tone fits the subject and should appeal to the hoped-for reader
- The story has a single, unifying effect; its mood and purpose are maintained throughout
- Workmanship is of publishable quality: your story is well-edited, looks great, and is thorough and thoughtful
- Ideally, the story will be surprising and/or thought-provoking

## Purposeful Writing Criteria: Cartwright / ELA / Greenville H.S.

### Research paper (personal choice)

The text should be at least 500 words.

In this context, a research paper is similar to a feature story or expository essay (an essay that explains something), except you are writing about a subject that requires you to identify, use, and attribute (acknowledge) sources in order to fully explain your subject or argue your position. Your paper may or may not try to show a scientific correlation or support a hypothesis, and that's OK either way, so long as you use sources to support whatever it is you're writing about. Your story should have characteristics similar to any research-based feature story or essay you'd find in *The New Yorker*, *The Atlantic Monthly*, *Newsweek*, or other periodicals featuring such articles.

Research paper characteristics to consider and include:

- The paper should examine an issue, explore an idea, or explain something, and should use sources (other than just your own opinion or experience) to support your position or purpose.
- The subject of the paper should have real interest for you, the writer
- The sources you use are like your teammates—use these sources to help you “win” your case, explore your idea, or explain your subject
- Research sources are acknowledged with in-text citations and (at least) an informal bibliography
- Vocabulary and diction are targeted to a particular audience and purpose for writing—the narrative voice/style fits the subject
- Pictures, diagrams, and other graphic illustrations might be used to help the reader better understand the subject.
- The paper is structured and formatted to best convey your idea, and the paper is organized to have a cumulative, logical progression
- Workmanship is of publishable quality: your story is well-edited, looks great, and is thorough and thoughtful