

# FROM THE FIELD

## Writing Adventures: Encouraging Student-led Topic Selection and Grammar Analysis



### Liz Falconer

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It seems like some of my best teaching ideas have risen from finding ways to get out of monotonous grammar correction, which is both time consuming and seems to have increasingly little return on investment. Partly because of this aversion, I was recently compelled to create, for my Level 5 ELL class, weekly assignments that I call “Writing Adventures.” Student feedback has been positive, including comments such as “This is very helpful” and “This is interesting.” It is easily adaptable; here is how it works:

First, I created a weekly discussion assignment in Canvas that uses a fantastic copyright-free image source, Unsplash: This is a writing adventure!

- Go to [unsplash.com](https://unsplash.com) and scroll down the front page until you find an image that you like.
- In the discussion below, write about the image. You can describe it, make a story about it, or write about what it reminds you of. About 100 words would be great.
- Add the image to your discussion post. (Copy and paste or download and add)
- Make sure to copy and paste the photo credit as well. This is an important digital citizenship skill.

Each week, I displayed a different image from Unsplash under the instructions.

### **My preparation**

I pull 1-2 sentences that need improvement from each post, and compile them in a Google Document. I title it “Sentence Improvements” and leave space between each one. I print the document for handouts, to be used later.

After they have completed the assignment, I tie the computer lab work to our classroom activities. I project

their posts on the overhead, along with their chosen image, and each student has the chance to stand up in front of the room and read their post aloud. I refrain from analyzing the grammar and instead focus on the overall stories they have told, how they have related their interests and lives to a picture, or how they have used their imaginations. The images at unsplash are compelling; I have them choose whatever they want from the front page, but you could easily use categories as well. The class loves this.

Then - either right afterwards or in the next class - I distribute the *Sentence Improvement* handouts to everyone, and they take a look at the sentences individually and decide what they might do to improve them. (Missing articles? Tenses match?) They work on this on their own. I remind them that there are many ways to write a sentence, and that there is often not just one option.

Then I pair them up and they compare edits and discuss them with partners or small groups. The debate between them is great to see — it really puts their critical thinking skills to use.

After they are done discussing, I project the Google Document and ask them how they edited the sentences. Then, I type in the suggested improvements while everyone watches. There is often more than one variation on how the sentences can be changed. They take notes. We have an open discussion about each sentence.

This has led to lively discussions and lots of learning as they work together to improve their writing. It empowers them both as writers and lifelong learners who, instead of waiting passively for the teacher to correct them, are working actively to find their own mistakes. Lastly, they greatly enjoy seeing what others are writing and learning about each other.