

Learn Writing by Studying a Writer
Lesson Packet #1 – February 2015
***The Change Agent* <changeagent.nelrc.org>**

Introduction:

This lesson offers students the opportunity to read three articles by the same writer, an adult learner who is now in community college. Students will analyze his writing techniques (using CCR writing standards 1-4) and then deploy what they have learned by writing their own essay (W.CCR.5).

Reading level: 7-8 (grade level equivalent)

Lesson objectives:

- To provide adult learners with peer-written articles, which can inspire and motivate students to feel, “If he can do it, I can do it.”
- To give students a chance to see how a writer grows and develops over time. (The three articles in this lesson plan are written by the same adult learner over a two-year period.)
- To provide students with an opportunity to “reverse engineer an article” so they can lay bare the structure of the piece.
- To provide students with an opportunity to analyze and understand various writing techniques so that those elements are demystified and clarified.
- To give students a chance to try out their own writing after investigating writing modeled by a peer.

Standards addressed: CCR standards for writing 1-2 (on structure) 3-4 (on craft) and 5 (on planning, editing, and revising).

Materials: The three articles listed in the grid on the next page + the grid itself.

Steps:

1. Who is Timothy Lovett? Read the three bios. that accompany each article. Discuss what you learn about the writer.
2. Scan the three articles for information about what topics they cover. Identify the range of themes.
3. Share the grid on the next page with students. Explain that the first column is one of the writing standards that they need to be skilled at for college and career, as well as for most high school equivalency tests. The second column includes questions that help them uncover and understand that standard and apply it to the text.
4. Read “The Best Job I Ever Had” together out loud. Go through the questions in the right column, and ask students to discuss them and answer them. Do the activity of “reverse engineering” the essay and creating an outline out of the story.
5. Read the next two essays and again use the questions and activities in the right column to guide your discussion.
6. Discuss the three articles together. They are presented here in the order they were written. How does Timothy’s writing change over time? Do you think he grows and develops as a writer? If so, how?
7. Finally, give the students a chance to practice what they’ve learned. Ask them to choose a topic, plan how they will write about it, write about it, and then edit and revise.

**Use “The Best Job I Ever Had” (#36), GLE 8, by Tim Lovett to Teach
CCR Writing Standards 1-2**

Write arguments to support claims in an analysis of substantive topics or texts using valid reasoning and relevant and sufficient evidence. (W.CCR.1)

Ask students to identify which arguments Tim makes to support his claim that Hallmark was the best job he ever had. Are all the arguments equally strong? Why or why not? Strip the essay down to an outline showing key arguments and evidence – as an exercise to show the “bones” of the piece. Show how by doing this “reverse engineering,” you can see how the author “built” the essay.

Write informative/ explanatory texts to examine and convey complex ideas and information clearly and accurately through the effective selection, organization, and analysis of content. (W.CCR.2)

How are the arguments organized? How does the author “preview” what he is about to say. Find specific examples in the text of how the author lets you know what he’s going to be talking about. Reflect on the headings. What role do they play? What conclusion does Tim draw?

**Use “Meat of the Matter” (#39) GLE 7, by Tim Lovett to Teach
CCR Writing Standards 3, 4**

Write narratives to develop real or imagined experiences or events using effective technique, well-chosen details and well-structured event sequences. (W.CCR.3)

What techniques does the author use to express himself? What temporal words does he use to signal event order and provide closure? Give examples of well-chosen details. What is the structured event and over-arching metaphor that this piece hangs on?

Produce clear and coherent writing in which the development, organization, and style are appropriate to task, purpose, and audience. (W.CCR.4)

Who is the audience for this piece? How did the author speak to his audience? Underline places where the author’s style reveals itself especially strongly.

**Use “Day One” (#40), GLE 8, by Tim Lovett to Teach
CCR Writing Standards 3, 4**

Write narratives to develop real or imagined experiences or events using effective technique, well-chosen details and well-structured event sequences. (W.CCR.3)

What techniques does the author use to express himself? Note his use of juxtaposition and figurative language. Give examples of well-chosen details. Does the author succeed in describing his actions, thoughts, and feelings? Why or why not?

Produce clear and coherent writing in which the development, organization, and style are appropriate to task, purpose, and audience. (W.CCR.4)

Who is the audience for this piece? How did the author speak to his audience? Underline places where the author’s style reveals itself especially strongly.

Student Writing Assignment (Writing Standard 5)

After studying these articles and having students analyze them using the questions above in the right column, ask students to write their own essay. They could pick topics similar to Tim’s – for example, the best job they ever had, how they feel about meat, or a time they experienced “Day One.” Or they could pick their own topic. Their writing should reflect what they have learned from Writing Standards 1-4 – i.e., their writing should include valid arguments, be well organized, use details, and show style appropriate to the purpose. They should plan, edit, and re-write.

The Best Job I Ever Had

Timothy Lovett

I don't think you ever forget your favorites in life, like your favorite teacher, or your childhood friends, or your first love. When I worked as an order selector at Hallmark Cards in Enfield, Connecticut, it was the best job I ever had. There were many reasons why I liked that job. The work was interesting, my colleagues were fun, the company was family oriented, and I believed in the product. These elements added up to an unforgettable experience and a lifetime of friendships.

Like Bees in a Beehive

At the Hallmark warehouse, we filled multiple customer orders by using a "selecting" process. We would get our orders and push-carts and set off on a trek around the warehouse tracking down cards for our customers. I am sure if you looked

By the end of the day, we might have walked eight to ten miles and selected thousands of cards.

down from the top of the warehouse, we all looked like bees in a beehive, scrambling back and forth from the order desk to the selecting aisles.

When we were done with our order, we pushed our box onto a conveyor, and the box would ride high above the warehouse, zigzagging its way through an industrial matrix before reaching the shipping area and being loaded onto a truck. By the end of the day, we might have walked eight to ten miles and selected thousands of cards.

Family Friendly Business

There are not many companies that provide flexibility to manage your work life and personal life simultaneously, but Hallmark is such a company. Let's say that your child is a student in middle school, and the carpool falls on you this week,

but you have to work from 7AM to 3PM. Hallmark has a program called "Mother Hours." This allows you to tailor your work schedule around your life, so you could go to work at 6AM and leave at 8AM to bring the neighborhood children to school and return to work by 9:30 AM. Then you would stay until 4:30 PM to make up the hours you missed. I wish more companies did this.

My favorite event is "bring your child to work day." When I was a kid, I always wanted to go to work with my father, but I was never allowed to, so I never got to see what he did for a living. When I became a father, I wanted to show my children what I did for a living. When I got the chance to do this, I was like a kid on Christmas. I think I was more excited than my son. I couldn't wait to get him in that warehouse and show it off. My co-workers felt the same way because the warehouse was flooded with children. By the end of the day, the children filled orders, ate a few doughnuts, and my son got to see how I paid for his video games.

Good Co-Workers

I think it is important to like the people you work with because it makes the day go by faster and makes work palatable. When Hallmark hires, they usually hire the family and friends of employees because they believe that if they hire good people, those people have surrounded themselves with other good people. Judging by the work environment, they are correct. I loved my co-workers. They became my friends and my family, and I still have relationships with most of them. Those people played important roles in my life. We celebrated birthdays, we took trips together, and I even watched two of my co-workers get married.



I have never before met a group that I enjoyed so much, and that is another plus for Hallmark's hiring practices.

Believe in the Product

It is very important to believe in the company that you work for and the product or services it provides. Hallmark makes and sells cards, and cards can be a beautiful tool for supporting human relationships. Let's say a guy is attracted to a woman, but he doesn't know the right words to say to her; a card may be the difference between "just friends" and "until death do us part." The "Lordy, lordy; guess who's forty?" card can add humor to getting older. The "I'm sorry card" expresses the most poetic way of saying I messed up, and I want to make it right. Cards bring people together because they carry warmth and depth. When the sender writes a personal message inside of a card, it enhances the sentiment and gives the card power.

Hallmark Cards is the last of a dying breed: they believe in making work a positive experience, supporting families, and bringing people closer together. Hallmark products make people happy and feel relevant. It was my pleasure to work for them; I made many friends and even more great memories. They say if you love what you do, you'll never work a day in your life, so I guess I didn't work at all in my four-year Hallmark career, and I do feel a little guilty for receiving all those paychecks. Maybe I'll send them a Thank You card.

They say if you love what you do, you'll never work a day in your life.

Timothy Lovett is an aspiring comedian/writer out of Springfield, Massachusetts by way of Lorain, OH. He hopes to start college in the spring of 2013 to study computer networking and IT security.

Take It Further

"If you love what you do, you'll never work a day in your life." Discuss this idea. Have you ever had a job that didn't feel like work? If yes, describe it. If not, imagine what such a job could be.

Hallmark offered "Mother Hours." Some companies call this "flex time." Write down a schedule that would work for you. Is flex time important to you?

Express gratitude! The author appreciates Hallmark so much, he says at the end of his article that maybe he'll send them a Thank You card. Do you have an employer, mentor, or friend who has helped you in your work life? Write him or her a Thank You card. Be specific about what you are grateful for.



Let's Get Down to the Meat of the Matter

Timothy Lovett

BEFORE YOU READ:

- 1) Consider the idiom, "meat of the matter." What does it mean? Try using it in a sentence.
- 2) What does it mean to be "at the top of the food chain?"
- 3) Share what you know about where your meat comes from.

"Beware! I hunger," I bellow as I enter the hunting ground. The air is cooler here and it triggers a slight tingling sensation along my arms. The scent of prey surrounds me, setting my salivary glands in motion, and my primal instinct is ablaze. I stalk the aroma, paying close attention to my surroundings while heeding the warning signs.

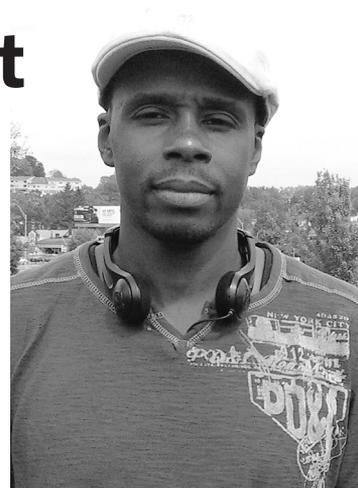
On the "Hunt"

There are other hunters here with me; I give them a nod of respect when we make eye contact. We survey the land for a prize. However there is no competition among us because there is game aplenty here. I lick my canine teeth, which are designed for tearing flesh. My stomach is filled with hydrochloric acid that is designed to break down proteins, but my greatest tool is my fully developed brain. I am the alpha; I sit lonely at the top of the food chain, and I am the greatest species ever to be born of mother earth!

"Number 17... Now serving number 17." And I am number 17, as the woman behind the deli counter calls out.

I Like My Meat Already Packaged

After my basket is a pound heavier from the sliced deli style turkey, I walk over to the meat section and I think to myself how much I love meat. I love the smell of it cooking over an open flame, the look



of the charred lines across the cut, and the juices that flow into your mouth as you chew it. I adore it, but I never really think about how it

gets from the animal to the supermarket. As far as I am concerned, it's just born there. I never try to make the connections between farm and food any more than I try to make the connection between cotton fields and the shirt I am wearing.

Brisket by the Bucket, Please!

Standing over the tenderloins, I pondered further on this. I drink milk, but I would never drink milk directly from a cow, I would never go up to a slaughtered pig and cut out a rack of ribs. I remember my father taking me fishing as a boy, and I caught a smallmouth bass by its eyeball. Not only did my father make me take the hook out of its eye, he made me cut its head off, and gut its body. I haven't been fishing since, and I didn't eat fish for some time after that. "I don't think I would enjoy you as much if I had to gut you myself," I say to the pack of pork chops I put in my basket.

"I don't think I would enjoy you as much if I had to gut you myself," I say to the pack of pork chops I put in my basket.

We are omnivores so we can survive on beans and broccoli. It's just that I prefer brisket by the bucket, and I stand by that 100 percent.

Did the Animal Feel Pain? I Don't Know. Just Tell Me if It's on Sale

Eighty percent lean ground beef is on sale this week, and this is why it goes in my basket over cube steak. The sale plays the biggest part in my meat consumption, not if the animals feel pain or not. I tried to explain this to another supermarket patron while she was trapped in the checkout line with me. "Do you think a lion cares if a gazelle feels pain?" I asked her. "Does an alligator think that young wildebeest may be a little uncomfortable being snapped in half? That's just nature's way, and it is neither good nor evil. It is just the way of the world." The store patron said that I was cruel, and the checkout lady made me bag my own groceries. Now *that's* cruel.

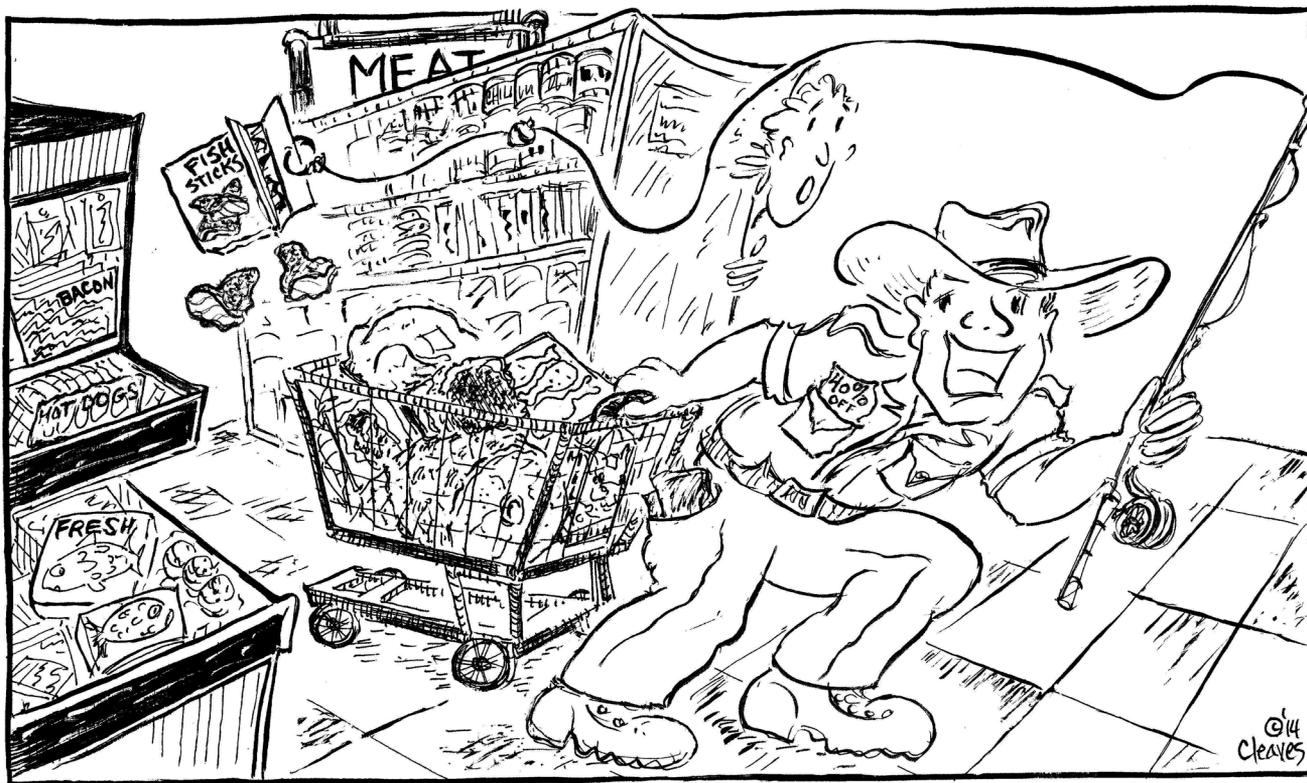
"I'm still going to hunt and fish, ladies," I blurt out as I make off with the spoils. It's just

now I hunt for coupons and fish for my debit card because I want the entire flavor of meat. But I want it without the gore. That's the true meat of the matter.

AFTER YOU READ:

- 1) According to the author, what is the "meat of the matter"?
- 2) The author uses humor to make his point. Circle the places in the text that you find funny. Explain what exactly makes them funny.
- 3) Find out more about where meat comes from. See p. 27.

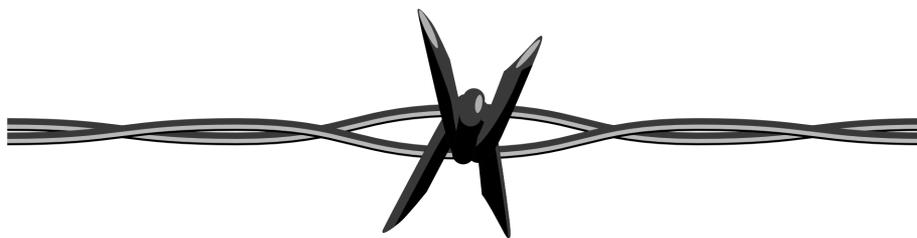
Timothy Lovett currently lives in Northampton, MA. He is studying computer security and IT at Springfield Technical Community College. He is also an amateur comedian who enjoys Crossfit and creative writing. By next year, Tim hopes to complete his Associates degree, conquer Murph (a workout), get paid for a comedic gig, and complete a collection of short stories.



Describe what you see in this illustration. What elements of the story are captured here? Cartoon by Ann Cleaves.

Day One

Timothy Lovett



Nothing can prepare you for the sound of the heavy door slamming behind you for the first time. The deafening noise echoes throughout the corridor; the startling crash slowly fades into roaring silence. The reality that you are trapped in this space runs through your mind as you stare at the

Body paralyzed, your mind races, rejecting the notion that you can stay here for another minute, much less settle into what is now your home.

slab of metal that is the bed. Body paralyzed, your mind races, rejecting the notion that you can stay here for another minute, much less settle into what is now your home.

You stand in the middle of the 5 x 10 cell with iron bars at your back, its gaps filled with Plexiglas, preventing even your hand from escaping. Your only knowledge of your surroundings comes from the television shows you watched and books you read within the comfort of your own home. You recognize the toilet/sink combo from the TV, and immediately decide that you will not drink from it or do anything that would cause you to flush it.



You gaze into the eyes of the person looking back at you in the scratched mirror. The anger, frustration, sorrow, guilt, and hidden tears make the reflection barely recognizable. The images scraped into the wall serve as a mural of those who came before you. As you read the names – Spider, Pookie, J Dub – you’re not thinking about who they were, but how they got out.

Inside this modern-day dungeon there is no indication of time, and after days without sunlight, you will no longer know if it is day or night. Movies and books can’t prepare you for the florescent light shining into your cell, so omnipresent that your skin feels violated.

But the scariest thing is the loss of freedom. Not the petty privileges such as going to the movies or deciding what to eat. It’s the loss of the ability to save your own life. In case of a fire, exit here. In case of a tornado, go here. You wrestle with the realization that you are property. You are the dog or cat that watches its owner leave you in the house every day while you wait to be fed and walked.

When there are no distractions to keep the voices in your head at bay, you are forced to listen to all the words, advice, and judgments you’d always ignored. You

The florescent light shining into your cell [is] so omnipresent that your skin feels violated.

replay the events that led you into this place. You think about what you could have done differently, imagining a different outcome, because anything is better than giving into the guilt and regret. You try not to think about the people who put their faith in you. It is much easier to picture the people who thought that you would end up here one day, because at least you didn’t disappoint them.

Eventually, when dinner comes around, it's a sandwich and black coffee. You eat the dry, tasteless sandwich because you don't know the next time you will be fed, and because it provides you with a distraction from your tortured thoughts.

You are the dog or cat that watches its owner leave you in the house every day while you wait to be fed and walked.

Because you are freezing you drink the bitter beverage and are thankful for its fleeting comfort. You feel temporarily energetic and ready to take on the world, but

you aren't part of the world right now. You aren't even part of society. And now you are restless, anxious, but with no place to go.

The air conditioning must be set on "meat locker." The TV never showed you how the T-shirt on your back can be stretched out to make a body tent, but you figure it out pretty quick. Anything to stop your body from shivering. In desperation, you submit to the slab and try to lie perfectly still so as not to disturb the pocket of heat you built, but that only makes your hips hurt and go numb. You toss and turn trying to find some type of comfort, hoping that maybe in the morning you will wake from a bad dream.

You used to fight sleep, but now sleep is fighting you. Just as you finally manage to doze off, the guards on shift change wake you up to search you again, as if you had taken a run to the corner store. When they leave, you lie back on the metal slab, but your mind doesn't say "Goodnight." It says, "Welcome to Day One."

Timothy Lovett is a college student at Springfield Technical Community College. He is in the Computer Security program and scheduled to graduate in 2015. Tim is an amateur comedian and aspires to do public speaking, but most importantly he wants to keep writing.



Investigate the Writing



Two writing techniques defined:

- 1. Juxtaposition:** two contrasting things placed close together
- 2. Figurative language:** when you describe something by comparing it with something else. *Metaphors* and *similes* are examples of figurative language.

Explore them further

Part of what makes Timothy's writing so powerful is his effective use of juxtaposition and figurative language. Go through the piece and circle examples of juxtaposition (hint: there are two in the first paragraph) and underline examples of figurative language (hint: he compares prisoners to pets). How do these literary techniques add to the piece? How do they help Timothy communicate his message?

Now it's your turn

Write about a time you: a) have been trapped in a place or in a situation, or b) experienced "Day One" of a new place or a new situation. Try using juxtaposition and figurative language to express what it was like.

Share your work

Work with a partner. Give and get feedback on each other's work. Pay special attention to the use of juxtaposition and figurative language. Use the feedback to edit your piece and make it stronger.