

Teach Your Students

How to

Take Notes

Easy-to-use, systematic steps to effectively teach your
middle school and high school students
critical note-taking skills from auditory sources.

Sharon Watson

A publication of Writing with Sharon Watson



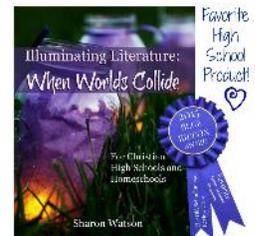
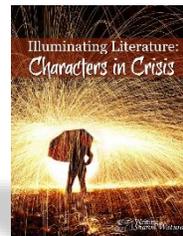
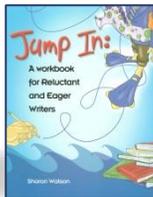
Meet the author Sharon Watson:



Sharon Watson is the author of *Jump In*, Apologia's easy-to-use middle school writing curriculum featured in Cathy Duffy's *102 Top Picks for Homeschool Curriculum*. She was forced to retire from homeschooling after 18 years when she ran out of her own children but enjoys bringing life to composition and literature courses. Her popular course *The Power in Your Hands: Writing Nonfiction in High School* is based on her sought-after writing classes and is the sequel to *Jump In*.

Let her **practical, easy-to-use textbooks** teach writing and literature for you:

- [*Jump In*](#), Apologia's popular middle school writing curriculum
- [*The Power in Your Hands: Writing Nonfiction in High School*](#)
- [*Writing Fiction \[in High School\]*](#)



- [*Their Blood Tinged*](#)
- [*Illuminating Literature: Characters in Crisis*](#)
- [*Illuminating Literature: When Worlds Collide*](#)

Find tutorials and prompts for middle school through high school at [Writing with Sharon Watson](#).

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Special thanks to Esther, Clara, Emma, and Christina for the use of their essays in this eBook.

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Note: This eBook is for teachers who want to give students practice in taking notes from **auditory sources** such as documentaries, co-op instruction, professors, speeches, online instructional videos, student meetings, and other auditory sources, and from **written sources**.

Included is a bonus lesson for students who want to learn how to take notes for reports or research papers.

This eBook **does not** cover how to cite sources. For information on that important information, go to [In-text Citations for Middle School](#), [In-text Citations for High School](#), easybib.com, or plagiarism.org.

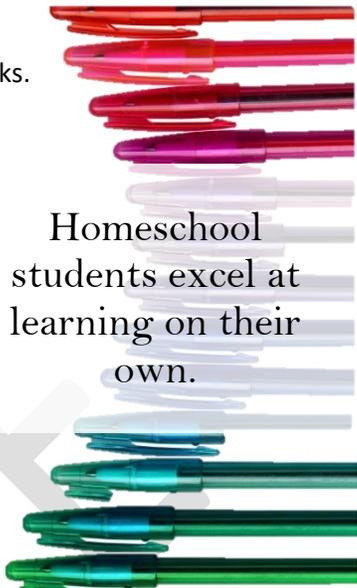
Why Am I Doing This?

Why teach your students to take notes from oral or written sources?

Homeschool students excel at learning on their own. They read their textbooks. They complete their assignments. In short, they've learned *how* to learn. According to Joyce Reed of Brown University, "[T]hey've learned to be self-directed."

What they most likely have not learned is how to take notes from **auditory sources** such as a teacher or professor in a classroom situation, a co-op teacher, videos and DVDs, podcasts, speeches, and so on. They might also need to brush up on taking notes from **written sources**.

So, why are you doing this? You are giving your students critical note-taking skills that will equip them for high school, dual enrollment classes, college, and for years to come.



Homeschool students excel at learning on their own.

And why teach them to take notes by hand? Isn't it easier for them to take notes on their computers, tablets, or mobile devices?

MRI brain scans show that writing by hand triggers "massive regions involved in thinking, language and working memory," [according to Virginia Berninger](#), a professor of educational psychology at the University of Washington. These areas were not activated when children used a keyboard.

In recent research, we've learned that "students learn better when they take notes by hand than when they type on a keyboard," according to a June 2, 2014, *New York Times* article by Maria Konnikova titled "[What's Lost as Handwriting Fades?](#)"

Taking notes by hand, it turns out, helps students understand concepts better than those who use their laptops to take notes, [according to a study](#) by Pam A. Mueller and Daniel M. Oppenheimer. In fact, Mueller and Oppenheimer state that taking notes by hand allows the student to process the information and reframe it. In other words, students will remember it better and be able to think through the material and draw conclusions about it.

"With handwriting, the very act of putting it down forces you to focus on what's important," reports Yale psychologist [Paul Bloom](#).

So, why teach your students to take notes by hand? You want them to learn better, understand the material, remember it longer, and reflect upon what they are hearing. It seems that taking notes by hand facilitates all of these important skills and will give your students a better chance for success.



"With handwriting, the very act of putting it down forces you to focus on what's important."

Course objectives and checklist of student exercises

Teaching how to take notes from auditory (oral) sources is planned out for you in weeks 1-7. Instructions for how to teach note-taking skills from written sources follow Week 7, along with a bonus lesson on how to take and organize notes for a research paper.

Overall objectives:

- To learn to take notes from oral presentations (auditory sources) such as classes, lectures, sermons, documentaries, speeches, podcasts, or online instructional videos, and from written sources.
- To recognize important concepts in and draw conclusions from oral and written sources.

Checklist of student exercises

Week 1

- Listen to a paragraph being read; answer questions.
- Listen to a paragraph being read, take notes, begin to develop your own system of abbreviations, and then answer questions.

Week 2

- Listen to three selections being read; identify each specific topic and develop auditory comprehension. Answer questions verbally.

Week 3

- Listen to a short article being read, identify the main topic, and write down at least three important facts from the article.

Week 4

- Listen to a set of paragraphs being read, write down important facts and concepts, and then write one paragraph based on your notes.

Week 5

- Listen to a personal profile being read, take notes, and identify the slant.

Week 6

- Listen to an essay, write down main and supporting points, and develop a casual outline from what you've written down.

Week 7

- Watch a portion of a documentary or a [TED](#) video; write down important facts.

Week 1

This week contains two short exercises. Feel free to do them on the same day or on separate days.

Objective for Exercises 1 and 2:

- To focus on a short passage so students can gather facts and draw conclusions based on what they've just heard.

Teacher preparation for Exercise 1 (about 2 minutes)

Please read the following two paragraphs to familiarize yourself with this student's personal narrative about her special collection:

I have sand from Michigan, Indiana Dunes, California, North Carolina, Florida, Jamaica, and even from the base of the pyramids in Egypt. I keep each sample in a corked glass bottle with a label tied around its neck. It has taken me about four or five years to get that many samples, many of them from friends who were going on vacation. Before they'd leave, I'd always ask them to get some sand or really dry, fine dirt for me.

I love to take up each bottle, turn it over in my hand, and remember who gave it to me or remember when I was there myself. And it's so cool to take up the sand from California and the sand from North Carolina and know that I'm holding pieces from both sides of the continent.



Exercise 1

Teacher, read the personal narrative about a sand collection to your students but do not reveal the topic beforehand. Students do not have to take notes, only listen and then discuss with you answers to the following questions. The answers are in italics.

Follow up with encouragement; find at least one thing each student did well and praise it.

1. What is the topic of these paragraphs? *Sand or a sand collection*
2. Name two places where her sand comes from. *Any two of these answers are correct: Michigan, Indiana, California, North Carolina, Florida, Jamaica, Egypt, from friends, from her travels.*
3. How does this student feel about her collection? *She enjoys it.*
4. How can you tell? *Any of these answers will do: (1) She loves to pick up the bottles. (2) She enjoys remembering who gave the sample to her. (3) She enjoys remembering the trip in which she collected her sand. (4) She is impressed with the idea that she can hold sand from opposite sides of the continent.*



Teacher preparation for Exercise 2 (about 2 minutes)

Please read the following to familiarize yourself with this paragraph that compares and contrasts two heroes from literature, Beowulf and Bilbo Baggins. Knowing about Beowulf and Bilbo ahead of time is not necessary to understanding the information and opinions in this paragraph.

Beowulf is a brave conqueror who wants glory and attention. He slays the monster Grendel, Grendel's angry mother, and a dragon, all in the name of duty, honor, glory, and country. He comes across as an "I wanna talk about me" kind of guy while Bilbo seems like an unassuming, practical, sensible, friendly, hospitable hobbit. Bilbo doesn't want glory or attention; this courageous hobbit only wants to be in his home by his fireside with the teakettle whistling. Even though Bilbo is not the one who kills the dragon in his story, he does help to put the rightful king on his throne, rids his land of dangerous villains, and saves his comrades' lives many times in the name of friendship and honor. Beowulf is certainly worthy of his rewards, but he has a lofty and arrogant tendency that is foreign to Bilbo. Both of these victorious conquerors show courage, but because Bilbo does it humbly, it makes him a more likeable hero.

Exercise 2

Explain to your students that you are going to read a paragraph comparing and contrasting the heroes Beowulf and Bilbo Baggins. Instruct them to take notes while you read the paragraph. **They may use the form provided on page 9 to take notes, if they wish.** Then ask them to answer the following questions orally based on what they remember and what they've written down. The answers are in italics.

Before you read, tell them these two important facts about taking notes:

- Notes do not have to be in complete sentences. Your students can use words or phrases.
- They might want to develop their own abbreviations to make taking notes easier. For instance, "between" can be /•/ (the dot is *between* the slashes) and "with" can be w/. In this case, "B" can stand for "Beowulf," and "BB" can be used for "Bilbo Baggins," if students like that idea.

Abbreviations created by students will be meaningful to them, and students will remember the material longer because they've created their own system that makes sense to them.

Follow up with encouragement; find at least one thing each student did well and praise it.

1. What are some of Beowulf's heroic accomplishments? *Kills the monster Grendel, Grendel's mother, and a dragon.*
2. What are some of Bilbo's heroic accomplishments? *Helps put the rightful king on his throne, rids the land of villains, and saves his comrades' lives.*

3. Which character does this writer prefer? *Bilbo*

4. How can you tell? *She highlights his more likeable traits, things like being unassuming, practical, sensible, friendly, hospitable, courageous, and—most important to her—humble. Also, Bilbo is the last one mentioned; in effective compare-and-contrast writing, this telegraphs that he is the more important of the two.*

5. If you are familiar with these two heroes, do you agree with this student? *Answers will vary.*

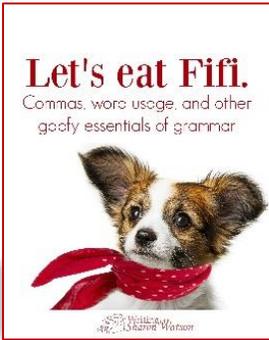
SAMPLE

BEOWULF versus **Bilbo Baggins**

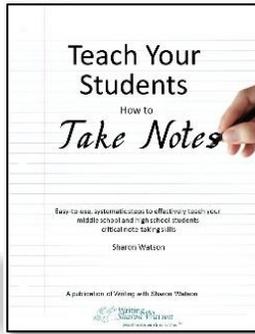
BEOWULF: FACTS AND IMPRESSIONS

Bilbo Baggins: Facts and Impressions

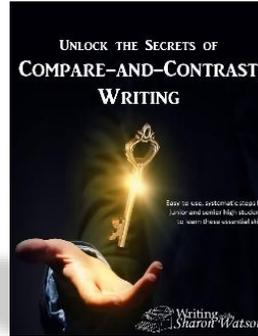
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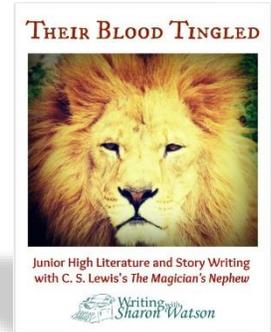
Quirky Grammar
7th-12th grade



Note Taking
7th-12th grade.

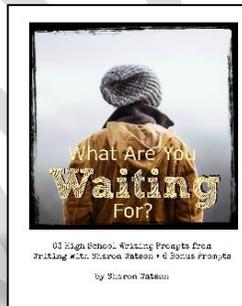
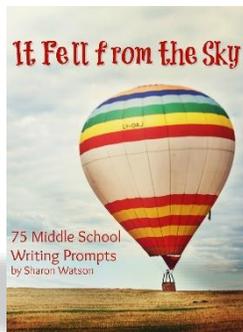


Compare and Contrast
9th-12th grade



Literature
7th-8th grade

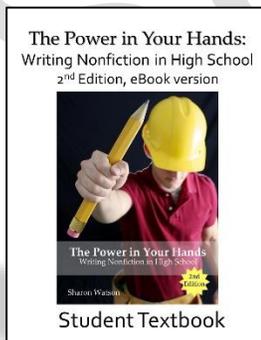
Energize and encourage your students' writing in as little as 10 minutes a day!



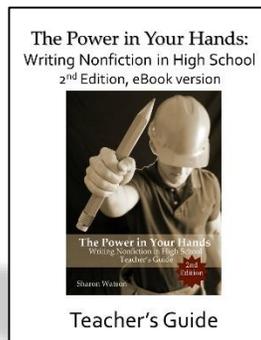
Fun Middle School Prompts and Tutorials

Engaging High School Prompts and Tutorials

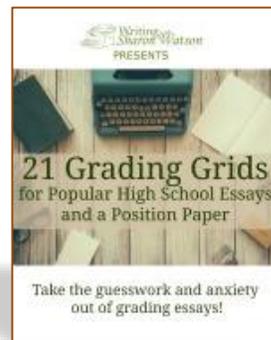
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