

LESSON PLAN FOR WORDSMITH APPRENTICE

Wordsmith Apprentice is not designed to be a complete language arts program, nor does it offer extensive writing practice. A grammar curriculum for teaching parts of speech, punctuation, capitalization, and basic sentence structure will probably be needed for extra practice.

Wordsmith Apprentice can be seen either as an introduction to those concepts, or as a supplement to them. As for extra writing practice, the amount of writing your children do at this age should complement their interest. If a child is eager and ready to write (and spends time scribbling stories in her spare time), WSA can be used to enhance her writing skills.

But many children are not ready for extensive writing before the age of 10 or 11. In my opinion, no useful purpose is served by making a fidgety boy or girl compose three-point essays or short stories when they hate it. Of course they must be taught to write, but there will be plenty of time for that later. At this age, encourage independent reading and reading aloud. The formal structure and word patterns lodged in their brains through extensive reading will do far more for their writing skills than workbook exercises and essays written under pressure.

The main purpose of WSA is to introduce elementary-age children to the variety and purpose of written language in a way that will engage and even intrigue them. This lesson plan covers a typical school year of 36 weeks, with some practice 3-4 days per week. As they progress in the book, more writing will be required. WSA is designed to be self-teaching, but the lesson plans are worded as though the teacher and student are going over the material together. Use your judgment about how much direct involvement is needed from you. The following plan suggests ways you can help your student by providing feedback and follow-through.

SUGGESTED WEEK-BY-WEEK PLAN

(Adapt to your own schedule and needs)

Fall Quarter: September – November

Week 1

Day 1: Spend some time looking at newspapers (purchase a small-town paper *and* a larger city paper, if you don't subscribe) and discuss what's in it. How are words used? What's the purpose of news articles, features, comics, ads?

Day 2: Cut out advertisements, classified ads, news articles, puzzles, editorials, and other newspaper features. Arrange them attractively on a sheet of poster board and glue down (glue dots or rubber cement work better on newsprint than white school glue). Add a title to the poster (such as *LOOK WHAT'S IN THE NEWSPAPER!*) and label each feature.

Day 3: Together, read the Student Introduction to *Wordsmith Apprentice* (pp.5-7) and have the student fill out the "Application" on pages 8-9.

Week 2

Day 1: Review nouns and proper nouns by reading pages 11-12.

Day 2: Assign the "Imagination Stretcher" exercise on page 10—make sure all blanks are filled with nouns.

Day 3: Exercise on page 13

Week 3

Day 1: Assign the "Listmania" exercise on pp. 13-15

Day 2: Assign the "Imagination Stretcher" exercise on page 15—make sure all blanks are filled with nouns.

3: “Specific Noun” exercise on pp. 15-16. This is an important principle of good writing: nouns and verbs are the basic building blocks of any language, and the more specific, concrete, and vivid they are, the better. Take some time this week and next to reinforce this concept verbally. One exercise that might be fun is to take turns gathering up objects around the house and discussing the most specific nouns to label them. (Examples: *toy* to *teddy bear*, *dish* to *plate* to *salad plate*, *utensil* to *ice teaspoon*, etc.)

Week 4

Day 1: Assign the classified ads on page 17, including three “Imagination Stretchers.”
Day 2: Assign one poem according to the directions on page 18. Write another poem according to the directions on the top half of page 19. This form of poetry is called cinquain because it’s always composed of five (cinque) lines according to a set pattern.
Day 3: Assign an “outside the window” poem according to the rules on the bottom half of page 19. By now the student should have written three poems on the same pattern. Work together, if necessary, on figuring out the rules for the poem at the top of page 20 (If you need help look on page A of the appendix).

Week 5

Day 1: Review verbs by reading together the Editor’s Desk on page 21 and “Verbs Vital” on page 22. Complete the exercise on the top of page 23—or, if it takes too long, complete the first five and finish the rest on Day 2.
Day 2: Assign the exercise on the bottom of page 23. Younger siblings might enjoy acting like each animal; maybe that will give the student some ideas.
Day 3: Assign the classified “Help Wanted” ads on pages 24-25.

Week 6

Day 1: Choosing strong verbs is one of the quickest (and even easiest) way for a writer to improve. Make sure the student understands this. Here’s an easy exercise: ask them to perform these actions, all variations on basic verbs:
Stand: slouch, pose, straighten, tower
Walk: strut, shuffle, pace, march
Sit: slump, perch, plop, sprawl
Assign the sports descriptions as instructed on page 26.
Day 2: Write another sports description—or two.
Day 3: If the concept of linking verbs seems a little hard to understand, refer back to the Editor’s Desk on page 21. Discuss how to write verb and noun descriptions on pp. 27-28 and brainstorm two additional target words for the exercises.

Week 7

Day 1: Language works through sentences, not words. Words are only labels and pieces, but if we know how to put them together we can communicate descriptions, instructions, feelings, ideas—almost anything! Children understand this instinctively, which is why most of them are able to speak fairly complex sentences by age 3 or 4. The exercise on page 30 demonstrates that there is a logical pattern to sentences, but children may need a little help understanding the subject (what or who the sentence is about) and predicate (what they are doing or being).
Day 2: Your supplementary grammar program will be useful for reinforcing what a pronoun is. In the “Sentence Forms” exercise on pp. 31-32, pronouns help show what a subject and an object are, because we use different pronoun forms for each of those.

Day 3: The second exercise on beginning at the bottom of page 31 (writing a paragraph using only nouns, pronouns and verbs) may be difficult to grasp. Give whatever help is needed, and if the concept still seems a little shaky, help the student write an additional paragraph.

Week 8

Day 1: The idea of compounding isn't that difficult, once a student has basic sentence structure in mind. If she doesn't, take some extra time to review pages 29-31 and any helpful material in your grammar program. If she seems confident, complete the exercise on pages 32-33. For extra practice, write your own examples of compound subjects, predicates, verbs, and objects, as well as compound sentences (i.e., two complete sentences joined by the conjunction *and*, *or*, or *but*.

Day 2: The concept of *declarative* sentences should be easy—it's just the word that's hard. *Interrogative* is another long word (why can't we just call them questions?) but a fairly easy concept. Your student may be intrigued by how we turn statements into questions by swapping the words. For kinetic (hands-on) learners, you might want to write the words of the sample sentences on notecards and ask him to swap them around to make questions. Then he can complete the Interrogative exercise on pp. 34-35.

Day 3: Imperative sentences are a little trickier because the subject is "understood," not stated. It's often shown this way: *(You) Pick up your pencils*. If the concept needs some reinforcement, you might want to write each word of the sample sentences on separate notecards, with one card *(You)* standing in for all the subjects. Assign the exercise at the top of pages 35-36.

Week 9

Day 1: Review declarative, interrogative, and imperative sentences, and ask the student to write at least one example of each. Exclamatory sentences should be easy to understand, so have the student read the subject material on page 36 and complete the exercise.

Day 2: The caption-writing exercise gives the student a chance to practice sentences as well as simple storytelling. Reluctant writers may find some discussion helpful before they try the exercises on page 37 and the top of page 38, but they should be able to caption at least one of the pictures on their own.

Day 3: Find some family snapshots and practice writing captions for them along the model presented in the exercise.

Week 10

Day 1: More sentence practice (it's hard to have too much at this stage). Discuss the invitation instructions on page 38 and complete the exercise.

Day 2: Assign one or two more invitations, choosing from the options on page 39.

Day 3: One more time: assign one or two invitations to an unusual event, choosing from the options in the Imagination Stretcher on page 39, or let the student make up his own event.

Week 11

Day 1: Read the letter-writing material on pp. 39-40 and help the student fill in the thought-box on page 40. It's best to write about actual gifts the child has received lately, but if she doesn't remember that many, she can complete the exercise with gifts she hopes or would like to receive.

Day 2: Assign an actual thank-you note, preferably as a rough draft first and then a fair copy. If the student doesn't have enough patience for that, a draft will do as long as it's readable.

Day 3: Assign an "Imagination Stretcher" letter as directed at the bottom of page 40.

Week 12

Day 1: Have your newspaper handy to look at headlines together. Go over the material about headlines on the top half of page 41; study the examples of titles vs. headlines and look up examples in the newspaper. Help the student draw subject/predicate division lines as directed for the exercise—and what's the missing verb in headline #4? Let the student find good headline examples in the newspaper and write them at the bottom of the page, then divide them as directed.

Day 2: The headline-writing exercise on pp. 42-43 may be challenging, so divide the work by doing the first five today.

Day 3: Finish headline-writing exercise on page 43. Complete p. 44.

Winter Quarter: December-February

Week 13

Day 1: Here's a handy way to summarize English syntax (sentence structure): the basic form of all sentences is either subject/verb or subject/verb/object. *Everything else* is a modifier of some kind: adjectives, adverbs, prepositional phrases, subordinate clauses—it can get pretty complicated, but they all describe or qualify the kernel sentence in some way. The easiest modifier to learn is the adjective, because an adjective has one function: to describe a noun. Read pages 45-47 and assign the exercise on page 47.

Day 2: Have fun with the exercises on pp. 48-49.

Day 3: Adverbs are a little more difficult to understand than adjectives, but the four-question formula is helpful. For the exercise at the top of page 50, *yesterday* and *now* answer the question **when?**, *there* answers **where?**, *well* and *badly* answer **how?**, and *often* and *very* answer **how much?** Assign the exercises on page 50.

Week 14

Day 1: For more practice with adjectives, assign the first two exercises on pages 51 and 52.

Day 2: The "Tom Swifty" exercise on page 52-53 is for extra practice with adverbs.

Day 3: The crossword puzzle (p. 53) may be challenging for some, great fun for others. Provide any help that's really needed but encourage the student to puzzle it out on his own.

Week 15

Day 1: Use your judgment on whether the student would enjoy creating a crossword puzzle. It's optional. (p. 54)

Day 2: Read page 55 and write a diamante poem about the weather today, according to the line instructions.

Day 3: Write another diamante poem about the perfect weather for a favorite outdoor activity, using instructions on page 56.

Week 16

Day 1: Prepositions may be a little difficult to understand. If the Editor's explanation (on page 57) isn't helpful, don't worry about it. There's no need to memorize the preposition list on page 58 either but review it enough times to recognize the most common prepositions. Make sure the student understands the information on that page and ask him to finish the exercise.

Day 2: Locate some photographs to use in the Family Photos exercise (pp. 59-60). They should be fairly recent, so the student can remember the events. Together, select three photos to write expanded sentences about. The student can write two today or go ahead and write all three.

Day 3: Have the student finish the photograph exercise, or if it's already finished, write two more expanded sentences about additional photographs.

Week 17

Day 1: Review the information on page 61 and note carefully how the prepositional phrases are underlined in the last paragraph. The arrows show what noun or verb each phrase modifies. Ask what each phrase “tells”—for instance, what does “on Brady Avenue” tell about the verb lives? (It tells where.) What word does “for Pack 387” describe? Is this a noun or a verb?

Day 2: Complete the paragraphs on page 62. In the first box, *of their daughter* modifies **engagement**, *of Spokane, Washington* modifies **Mr. Larry Ferguson** (yes, it tells where, but it doesn't tell where something happened, only where someone is from). *At First Community Church* and *on February 14* modify **wed** (they tell when and where something happens). *In Palm Springs* modifies **honeymoon** (usually a noun, here serving as a verb), and *in Cedar Lake* modifies **make**. Think you can figure out the phrases and modified words in the next box?

Day 3: Find some sentences in a book the student is reading (a novel, picture book, or magazine). Make sure they include at least one prepositional phrase, along with a recognizable subject and verb. Ask the student to copy them in a notebook, underline the prepositional phrases and draw arrows to the noun or verb they modify.

Week 18

Day 1-3: Review all the parts of speech we've learned and practice recognizing them (refer to page 63). I think it's very effective to locate sentences in the student's own reading because it helps her to see that what she's learning about syntax and parts of speech is not some abstract concept: it's how language *works*. Allow time this week for copying sentences from websites, books, magazines, etc. and identifying the parts of speech in each one. Make sure the sentences are fairly simple.

Week 19

Day 1: Assign the editing exercise on pp. 64-65. Be ready to help if the student needs it.

Day 2: Read page 66 and write descriptive adjectives for apples and bananas. Then continue to page 67 and write display ads. Be creative!

Day 3: Have the student study some display ads in your newspaper. Then create an ad on page 68.

Week 20

Day 1: Read page 69 and complete the first ad on page 70.

Day 2: Have the student write an ad for your favorite restaurant (page 70).

Day 3: Assign at least two real estate ads for selling two properties in the “Imagination Stretchers” list—or an imaginary property. (p. 71)

Note “Day 1” under next week—you may need to buy a newspaper this weekend.

Week 21

Day 1: Does your nearest big-city newspaper have a travel section? If so, it's likely to be in the Sunday paper, so make an effort to purchase one over the weekend. Otherwise, you may be able to find some travel reviews online. Read page 71 together and notice the difference between the two paragraphs about the Smith County Historical museum. Can the student express what that difference is? Ask him to write an advertisement for your back yard in the box on page 72, making it sound like an exciting attraction!

Day 2: Assign a travel review about the same place (page 72). If the student needs more room than the book allows, use his notebook. Remember to be critical—some things he likes, some he doesn't.

Day 3: Assign another travel piece (a review, not an advertisement) about your own “historic” home (page 73). Be sure to include all the information in the list at the top of the page.

Week 22

Day 1: Spend some time brainstorming with the student about the attraction he’s going to write up. Use his notebook to make notes according to the paragraph on page 74.

Day 2: Assign the travel piece on page 74.

Day 3: The idea of a book review may need some explaining. Most book reports written at this age just explain what the book or story is *about*. A review discusses the good and bad *qualities* of the book. Compare the two reviews on page 75 and discuss why one is interesting and one is not. What qualities of *Prince Caspian* did the both reviewers comment on? Decide on a book to review next week.

Week 23

Day 1: The book review assignment is divided into steps. A reluctant writer can take these steps on different days. For today, just review the difference between a report and a review and reread the two examples on page 75. Assign Step One on page 76.

Day 2: Assign steps two and three.

Day 3: Assign steps four and five and (today or tomorrow) ask the student to read the review out loud. Discuss if it could use a little more detail to make it more interesting or descriptive.

Week 24

Day 1-3: Repeat the book review assignment on the model of last week. Complete page 78.

Third Quarter: March - May

Week 25

Day 1: We’ve been working on sentences; today we begin work on paragraphs, a subject that some children find hard to grasp. It’s mostly a matter of logic: how sentences work together to lead the reader through the development of a thought. We’ll start slowly with the Editors desk and introduction, pp. 79-81. Work together on the first paragraph or two in the box, then see if the student can find the topic sentence in at least one more paragraph in the box. If necessary, help the student write three topic sentences in paragraphs #1-3 in the following exercise (p. 82)

Day 2: Discuss paragraph #1 under “Reporters Sharpen Skills” (p. 83): why does the underlined sentence not belong? Let the student try to find the unnecessary sentence in each of the following three paragraphs, and in the next exercise, help him determine *why* they don’t belong.

Day 3: Read the directions at the bottom of page 77 and help the student determine where to insert paragraph breaks in #1-3 on pages 84-85. For the next exercise, it’s a good idea to photocopy pp. 85-86 so the sentences can be cut apart and physically rearranged.

Week 26

Day 1: The recipe exercises help to develop logical sequencing. Read p. 87 and assign two recipes. The main cook of the household should be close at hand to provide advice!

Day 2: Assign the next three recipe cards on page 88-89. Then read the rest of pp. 89 and notice how the “how-to” paragraph arranges steps in a logical order. Assign a “household hint” on page 90.

Day 3: Assign two more household hints on pp. 91-92.

Week 27

Day 1: Synopsis writing is basically summarizing, where the writer must determine the most vital aspects of a story and communicate them in just a few sentences. It's a very valuable skill that many high-schoolers don't grasp. To get an idea what synopsis writing means, read and discuss pp. 92-93 and help the student find the best synopsis on page 85. Then assign *one* of the synopses on page 94 to write.

Day 2: Assign two synopses on page 94.

Day 3: The contest section is an exercise in organization and development. But it can still be fun! If it's practical, include a sibling or other family members and let their imaginations run wild as they finish pages 95-96.

Week 28

Day 1: We've been working with words, sentences, and paragraphs; from this point we'll be writing actual stories. The reporter's job is to get the facts and communicate them in a logical and engaging order. Read the Editor's desk page (p. 97) and page 98, then do some brainstorming about four possible "news stories to write." If the chart is too small, ask the student to write the information in a notebook. Look at paragraphs #1-3 on p. 99 and discuss which one you like best (none of them is more "right" than the other).

Day 2: Assign the news story. Student will use the chart she made on Day 1 and follow directions to write four short paragraphs, including all the information.

Day 3: Assign two "Imagination Stretcher" paragraphs according to directions on page 100.

Week 29

Day 1: We're building up to multi-paragraph stories with the practice of writing "news briefs." These are single paragraphs that answer all five "W" questions, plus the question *How?* Read page 100 and discuss the example on page 101. The first sentence answers the relevant W questions, while the additional sentences explain "How" the surprise unfolded. Discuss the situation described in the unfinished paragraph on 101, and have the student add two or three sentences to fill in the details.

Day 2: Assign the two News Briefs on page 102.

Day 3: Now the student will write his own News Briefs. Brainstorm at least one actual event that took place in your house or neighborhood recently and help him fill in the information needed in the first box on page 103. Then challenge him to fill out the next two boxes (pp. 103-104) himself.

Week 30

Day 1: Assign one coherent, single-paragraph News Brief according to the notes in the first box on page 103. You will need to check this work and make sure all sentences are complete and make logical sense together.

Day 2: Assign two more News Briefs from the notes in the boxes on pp.103-104.

Day 3: Our section on the comics pages will focus on the subject of writing dialogue. Read page 105 and if necessary help the student find three comic strips to glue into the spaces on pages 105 and 106. Ask her to add quotation marks in the speech balloons as directed.

Week 31

Day 1: Ask the student to read page 106 and study the example carefully. Then assign three synopses of the comic strips she stuck on pp. 105 and 106, according to the directions and the example.

Day 2: Assign dialogue for the strip at the bottom of page 107 and the top of page 108. If the student is behind on anything else, this would be a good day to catch up.

Day 3: We're getting ready to write a real story, for the sports page. Read through page 108 and discuss what sports activity the student would like to write about. Let her try to finish the work on page 108 by herself.

Week 32

Day 1: This week we learn that it's not enough to include all the relevant information, but it's also important to arrange the material in an interesting way. Read page 109, study the two sample paragraphs, and ask Which is more interesting? (He'd better say the second.) To reinforce the idea of "the hook," take turns reading the four opening sentences on the top of page 110. Be sure to emphasize that all of these are effective "hooks"—it's up to the writer to say which he likes best or wants to use. With that in mind, help the student rewrite the sports story begun last week, using an attention-getting opening sentence. He should be able to finish the story on his own.

Day 2: Assign another sports story, following steps One, Three, and Four on pages 110 (if a good opening hook is included, Step Two can be eliminated).

Day 3: Assign a fantasy "sports story" as suggested by the Imagination Stretcher on page 111.

Week 33

Day 1: Look over steps #1-7 at the bottom on page 111, then turn the page. If you have an eager writer, she can write stories for all three pictures on pp. 112-113, according to those instructions. If the student is still dragging her feet, allow her to choose just one and expand the assignment over two days.

Day 2: Assign a news story based on a photograph, page 114.

Day 3: The "investigative stories" should be fun. Read pp. 114-115 and discuss whom to ask about what. Sometime today or this weekend, the student should talk to the person and fill out the chart on pages 116-117.

Week 34

Day 1: Read the sample story on pages 117-118 and notice how all the information was included from the notes on page 116. Now it's the student's turn: challenge him to write up the story himself using the directions on pp. 118-119.

Day 2-3: Ask the student to read his story out loud. Does it sound good to him? Would he make any changes? Some small improvements are worth making, such as adding descriptive words or phrases or filling in a sentence where the action is unclear. But don't overdo it. We'll have time to address proofreading and revision more thoroughly in the next stage of the writer's progress (see *Wordsmith: a Creative Writing Course for Young People*). After talking it over, let the student take the rest of the week to complete another "investigative" story, using the same steps on pp. 114-119. Use pages 119-120 for notes.

Week 35

Day 1: Now that the student has completed two sourced stories, try the Imagination Stretcher exercise on page 120. Allow two or three days for this, with the student working on his own.

Day 2: Have the student read his story out loud—to more than one listener, if possible. Minimal constructive suggestions are okay, but don't tear the piece apart—remember the purpose of WSA is to build both enthusiasm and a certain degree of confidence. We can work on revision later.

Day 3: Read and discuss pages 121-123. Then brainstorm about a "problem" the student can write about and complete the chart at the top of page 124.

Week 36

Day 1: With the opinion piece assignment, we've stealthily worked up to essay writing! But nobody has to know that yet. Review Step One and Step Two on pp. 122-123 and ask the student to write the first and second paragraphs of an opinion piece, based on the problem determined last week on pp. 124-125.

Day 2: Review Step Three and Step Four on page 123 and write the last two paragraphs on page 125. Read the whole piece out loud and correct any major problems (don't worry about minor problems, unless it's punctuation or spelling errors). While we're still thinking about this subject, decide on a topic for another essay and complete the chart on p. 126.

Day 3: If necessary, review pp. 121-123 and allow a couple of days for the student to write all four paragraphs of the opinion piece. If you decide to send it to the local newspaper (see page 126), that can wait until next week . . . but don't forget!

Summertime!

Many homeschooling families like to continue with a little schooling through the summer so the kids don't forget everything. If that describes you, consider publishing a family summer newsletter once or twice per month (see page 127). To be honest, this takes some effort, and you may not feel like riding herd on everyone to complete their contribution. But I would like to encourage you to do so anyway. Our family published a monthly newspaper for several years (including field trip reports, school writing assignments, and history and science projects), and though it was often difficult to fit this in to our busy schedule, we now have several "volumes" that make a handy memento of our homeschooling years. But summertime project or not, I hope your students will have a more positive attitude about writing than they did before. Don't forget to follow up with *Wordsmith!*