



## Worksheet for Lesson 6

### You Only Have a Moment—How to Hook Your Reader

The Denim Beret  
writing and literature  
for teens

NAME:

DATE:

*If you are typing your answers, please use **blue**, **purple**, or **green**.*

#### PART 1: Reading and Journal Check

\_\_\_\_\_ I have read lesson 6 carefully and thoroughly.

\_\_\_\_\_ I have completed my lesson 6 warm-up.

#### PART 2: Editing Practice

For this editing exercise, you will tackle an older piece than what you have worked with so far: one of the most famous excerpts from *Walden*, an American classic about simple rural living (among other things), by Henry David Thoreau. Your challenge here is to analyze the archaic language and sentence structures and then determine what the true mistakes are. Your task is to find **eight** mistakes in the poem and fix them by making corrections in **red**. You may edit the paragraph directly; there is no need to retype it.

I went to the woods because I wish to live deliberately, to front only the essential facts of life, and see if I could not learn what it had to teach, and not, when I came to die, discover that I had not lived. I did not wish to live what was not life, living is so dear; nor did I wish to practice resignation, unless it was quite necessary. I wanted to live deep and suck out all the marrow life, to live so sturdily and spartanlike as to put to route all that was not life to cut a broad swath and shave close, to drive life into a corner and reduce it to its lowest terms, and, if it proved to be mean, why then get the whole and genuine meanness of it and publish its meanness to the world; or if it were sublime, to know it by experience and be able to give a true account of it in my next excursion

--from *Walden*, by Henry David Thoreau

## PART 3: Style Splash—Trimming the Fat, part 1

By this point in your education, you probably write grammatical sentences most of the time. Good writing, however, does not stop with grammar. Nor does it stop with proper punctuation, mechanics, and spelling. Good writing reaches beyond technical perfection to linguistic beauty and flair. This means that if your goal is to become an excellent writer, you must develop style.

The concept of style is a bit elusive, because we can use the word in both a personal way and a corporate way. In its personal way, "style" refers to one's personal manner of conveying ideas through language. In its corporate way, "style" means adhering to language conventions that are typically regarded as important to good, modern writing. These conventions can change over time as our culture changes. For example, in Victorian times ornate writing was clearly a common mark of good writing; today, we scorn it as "purple prose." This mini-lesson is the first in a series that will list some stylistic do's and don'ts that you will need to master. The three we will discuss in this lesson have to do with wordiness.

### 1) *Don't waste your words with padding.*

You know how when you pack a box for shipping, it's necessary to fill any empty spaces with packing peanuts or newspaper? Well, your sentence isn't going to be shipped. It needs no padding. Unless you want your writing to sound like casual conversation, get rid of useless filler words such as these:

- There is/are – There are some people who like liver and onions.
- It is/was/won't – It is a sad fact that slavery still exists in the world today.
- Here is/are – Here are some things to consider when planning your vacation.
- It takes – It takes three minutes to make my bed.
- It won't – It won't be long before my sister and her fiancé get married.

No, none of these sentences are "wrong." They are just lumpy with padding. Not only are the padding phrases non-essential, they don't really mean anything. What is "there" and "it" referring to, exactly? Where is "here"? If you can't answer those questions, then consider these sleeker alternatives:

- Some people don't like liver and onions.
- Sadly, slavery still exists in the world today.
- Consider these things when planning your vacation.
- Making my bed takes three minutes.

- My sister and her fiancé will soon be married.

## 2) *Trim the fat.*

Just like filler words, "fat" words are non-essential. They are not always easy to spot, but they tend to make sentences convoluted, awkward, redundant, or just wordier than necessary. Sometimes we include fat words without realizing it, because we are so used to including them in our casual, everyday speech. As you already know, writing is not simply oral speech on paper. Both are comprised of language organized into sentences, but they are shaped differently. One major difference is that written language needs to be smoother and more concise than oral speech does to be easily understood. Besides, modern readers want to process what they read quickly. Verbose writing is likely to be skimmed or tossed aside. Here are examples of fatty sentences:

1. Due to the fact that the plane is late, we do not have to rush to the airport. –
2. Good grades are absolutely essential for entrance into an Ivy-league university.
3. You're going to have to accept your bad grade, since you didn't study.
4. Every single time my friend eats chocolate, she complains that her stomach hurts.
5. But the truth is that I am afraid of heights.

My guess is that you have spotted the problems in these example sentences without me telling you what they are. Just in case you aren't sure, though, let's expose each one:

1. "Due to the fact" is awkward and three words too many. How about reducing the phrase to a simple "because"? -- Because the plane is late, we do not have to rush to the airport.
2. The phrase "absolutely essential" is redundant. If something is essential, then its necessity is naturally "absolute." We can simply say "Good grades are essential" and mean exactly the same thing.
3. Again, this sentence could be shortened by simply substituting a synonymous phrase. Instead of "you're going to have to accept," we can simply say "You'll have to accept" or perhaps "You must accept." This streamlines the sentence by 2-3 words.
4. Like the second sentence, this sentence has a redundancy issue. If my friend gets stomachaches "every single" time she eats chocolate, then she'll also get

stomachaches “every” time. Deleting “single” leaves us with a sentence with the same meaning and rids it of redundancy.

5. What function does “but” serve in this sentence? None, really. It sounds natural to us because modern, colloquial, spoken English frequently uses “but” as a filler word. Though it may sound natural enough in spoken English, it sticks out like a sore thumb in written English. Moral of the story—er, example? If “but” isn't a conjunction between two independent clauses or help to emphasize the idea, then it doesn't belong.

**Exercise:** Below is an excerpt from my memoir of the European vacation that I took with my mother, entitled *Wandering the Western Rainbow*. You may recognize it from exercises in level 1. This time, however, you will look for **eight** padding and fat words/phrases and **highlight** them. You do not need to improve them, only mark them. Because our focus is solely on “trimming the fat,” do not make any other kinds of editing or proofreading corrections.

*Note: Remember that the phrases in the padding section of the lesson are only padding if they don't carry a literal or essential meaning. For example, the phrase “there are” is only padding if it isn't referring to a specific place, as in “There are my sunglasses” or “There is my friend”.*

~Prologue~

June 15, 1992

Due to the fact that we had been flying all night, I opened my windowshade this morning to see the sun shining over a drowsy England. We were still in the sky above the clouds, but they were only wispy strands of mist; if I looked carefully, I could see the land beneath on the ground. Embraced by the romance of anticipation, I imagined myself as a traveler to another world. Each moment, as we drew closer, the mist blew softly away to reveal our fairyland in all its enchanted mystery.

But then, suddenly, the veil disappeared, and the colorful splendor of the British Isles was hidden no more. Blinking my eyes against the vivid summer palette, I gazed with wonder upon the hilly, rolling countryside that stretched as far as I could see. It was a great, living quilt of piecemeal green patches, sprinkled with cottages, animals, towns, and flowers. I was charmed.

Leaning across my lap to get a better look, mom smiled and said whimsically, “It looks like the farmers in Kansas got drunk.” I laughed and gazed down at the storybook land with delighted eyes. I loved the jumble of fields and meadows. In America, all of the farmland was designed symmetrically; England was enchantingly eccentric.

The plane was descending quickly, now. There were only a few minutes left of our flight. Resting my head on the edge of the window, I dreamily thought of all the British friends I had made in books and movies, immortal friends who colored the world with their stories--Lady Jane Grey, Bilbo, Alice, Jane Eyre, Sherlock Holmes, Mother Goose, King Arthur, Toady, Peter-Susan-Edmund-and-Lucy, and a whole host of others. I remembered the fanciful picture books I loved with their prints of romantic, turreted castles, little girls wearing dainty black shoes with crisscross straps, tree-filled woods filled with fairies and elves and animals that talked, and brooding mansions on windy moors. Here was where the queen lived with her host of toy soldiers; here was the land of dainty teas and shillings and backwards driving. Here was the land of my ancestors; now it would be my land, too.

## PART 4: Lesson Exercises

For each of the topics below, write a possible thesis statement. Then write two possible hooks. You may not repeat the types of hooks you use, which means you must use a total of four different types. Indicate which types you are using. Remember, hooks may be more than one sentence.

### **My perfect day**

Thesis statement:

Hook #1:

Type--

Hook #2:

Type--

### **Someone I admire**

Thesis statement:

Hook #1:

Type--

Hook #2:

Type—

Now choose a thesis statement from lesson 3, except for the one you used for the lesson 4 exercises. It should not be one for which you would need to do research, if you were to write the entire essay. Copy it below. If you prefer, you may write a new one on any topic.

Thesis statement:

Write a detailed formal or functional outline. This outline should cover all the key ideas, supporting ideas, and details that you would include in the essay. If you choose a formal outline, you must include a minimum of three levels (key ideas, supporting ideas, and first level of detail). Copy your final outline below, if you can modify auto-correct to achieve the correct format. Remember, this means proper line spacing and indentations. Alternatively, insert an image of your handwritten outline.

Outline:

Finally, craft two possible hooks for your thesis statement. Try to use different types from the ones you used above, if you can.

Hook #1:

Hook #2: