



*Before Papers Come Paragraphs*  
Introductory Unit:  
Page One—The Very Beginning

The Denim *Beret*:  
a writing school  
for teens

## LESSON 2

### Elbow Grease and Black Berets: The Dual Nature of Writing

Supplies: none

Goal: to lay the foundation for strong skills by understanding better what writing is.

Suggested time: 1 session

**Before you begin, complete the writing warm-up for lesson 2 in your writing notebook.**

## WARM-UP

### Before You Begin...A Note about Lesson Warm-up Exercises

In lesson 1 you completed the first warm-up of this course as your assignment. From this point forward, you will complete them at the *beginning* of each lesson through part 4. Warm-ups in unit 4 will be optional.

You may be tempted to skip the warm-ups, but please understand that not only will you receive a completion grade on them, they are also an integral part of the course. If you do anything different from what the course assigns, it should be to do more warm-ups.

Many writers do such exercises regularly, either as warm-ups to their writing or as stand-alone practice exercises. We will follow the example of professional writers as much as possible during this course, so warm-ups are important. But why? What is the purpose of warm-up exercises? Although I discussed it some in lesson 1, let's quickly review.

Such exercises have at least two purposes. First, they help to wake up your brain to prepare it for more challenging work with writing, in much the same way as warm-up drills do for math lessons. Second, they help you keep your voice natural and relaxed. As you study techniques and rules during this course—what I'll call the “craft” of writing—you may find yourself stiffening up as you write, because you want to do everything right. Your voice may become wooden and stilted as a result, so the warm-ups will help you remember what it means to relax and write naturally without fear of criticism and “doing things wrong.”

*STOP. Set your timer for 10-15 minutes, and complete your warm-up in the “Writing Exercises” section of your writing notebook. The warm-up is given in your workbook. When you are finished, do session 1 of the lesson. This should be your pattern for every lesson after this.*

## SESSION 1

### Introduction

As a kid, I both loved and despised writing. On one hand it was sheer joy...as long as I was left alone to follow my muse in my own way. In fact, I often preferred staying in the cafeteria to write during recess, while my classmates opted for the playground.

The joy I found in writing drained away in English class, though, the one place it should have been nurtured. In elementary school I enjoyed most of my assignments, because grades did not yet matter to me and the work was usually fun. In junior high, however, that began to change, as the assignments became more difficult, more strictly evaluated, and less interesting. By the time I was in college, I found writing to be as much of a chore as my peers did. While my teachers sometimes gave creative freedom, too, their focus was on teaching us how to write with clarity, logic, and thoroughness.

I responded to this straitjacket by becoming a little like Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde. Left to myself, I was free-spirited, whimsical, and confident on the page. In school, however, I became a slave to the rules of writing, always more focused on “doing it right” than on

remaining true to my creative spirit. Any power my writing might have had was lost. Worse, as time passed, my playful side began to dry up, too, and I didn't write as much for fun. It wasn't that I no longer wanted to. I *couldn't*. Regrettably, I was long out of college before I was able to overcome my writer's block and enjoy myself again.

## Lesson

Looking back on my own experience, it is my hope that academic writing will be different for you. That is why I chose to spend a whole lesson on the topic. Before you settle down to study any major subject, it is important to consider the path before you and prepare yourself. Writing, in particular, should be approached with care, because it is so rich in power and possibility. Have you ever heard the saying, "The pen is mightier than the sword?" It's true!

Those who wield the pen and know how to use it can change our world in ways the sword never can. While the sword can force change by placing the strong in positions of authority over the weak, the pen can move hearts and change minds. It can call people to action, lead souls to faith, educate the ignorant, fill minds with new ideas, and carry stories through time and space. In the hands of a masterful writer, the pen is a mighty tool.

So that you learn to make use of this tool yourself, it is important to understand that writing has two natures, and you need to be able to handle both well if you want to be a good writer. In the title to this lesson I mentioned "elbow grease" and "black berets." To me, these are symbolic of these two natures. On the one hand, elbow grease stands for the "craft" of writing...

**End of Sample**