


THE COMPLETE WRITER

Writing With Skill



A Plan for Writing Well
in the Middle Grades

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Peace Hill
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Overall Plan

Elementary grades (1-4): Writing with ease

Learning basic grammar and style, basic sentence structure, and paragraph structure.

Method: grammar, copying, and dictation.

Middle grades (5-8): Writing with skill

Learning how to organize sentences into arguments that prove specific points.

Method: diagramming, outlining, outlining and rewriting, narrative compositions

High school (9-12): Writing with style

Learning how to argue original points and ideas.

Method: modelling and the progymnasmata

The steps in writing:

INARTICULATE IDEA →
IDEA IN WORDS

IDEA IN WORDS →
WORDS ON PAPER

Requirements for middle-school writing:

Ability to write 2-3 sentences from dictation with minimal punctuation and spelling errors

Ability to sum up a reading of three or four pages in a paragraph of narrative and write that paragraph down with minimal help

The steps in writing:

*focus of
rhetoric
stage
writing:
invention*

Finding an idea worth writing about
INARTICULATE IDEA →
IDEA IN WORDS

figuring out what to say ABOUT that idea (finding the content)

*focus of
logic stage
writing:
skill*

taking everything he wants to say ABOUT the idea →
IDEA IN WORDS
WORDS ON PAPER

figuring out what order to put this information in

Middle Grade Students

Basic skills in spelling/
Basic skills in grammar/
Basic skills in writing

Middle Grade Spelling

Continue with spelling program

(Spelling Workout, Spelling Power, or other)

Begin list of frequently misspelled words

Help student transfer rules knowledge to written work by finding the rules that govern misspelled words

Troubleshooting

Change program

Ask student to write rule governing misspelled word in margin *(lack of understanding)*

Have student copy misspelled words 10x *(laziness)*

Middle Grade Grammar

Systematic grammar and punctuation

Goal: explicit knowledge of the rules that govern the conventions of sentence-writing

Additional goals: expertise in diagramming and outlining

Purposes of Diagramming

Understanding the logic of sentences

Developing a method of self-check

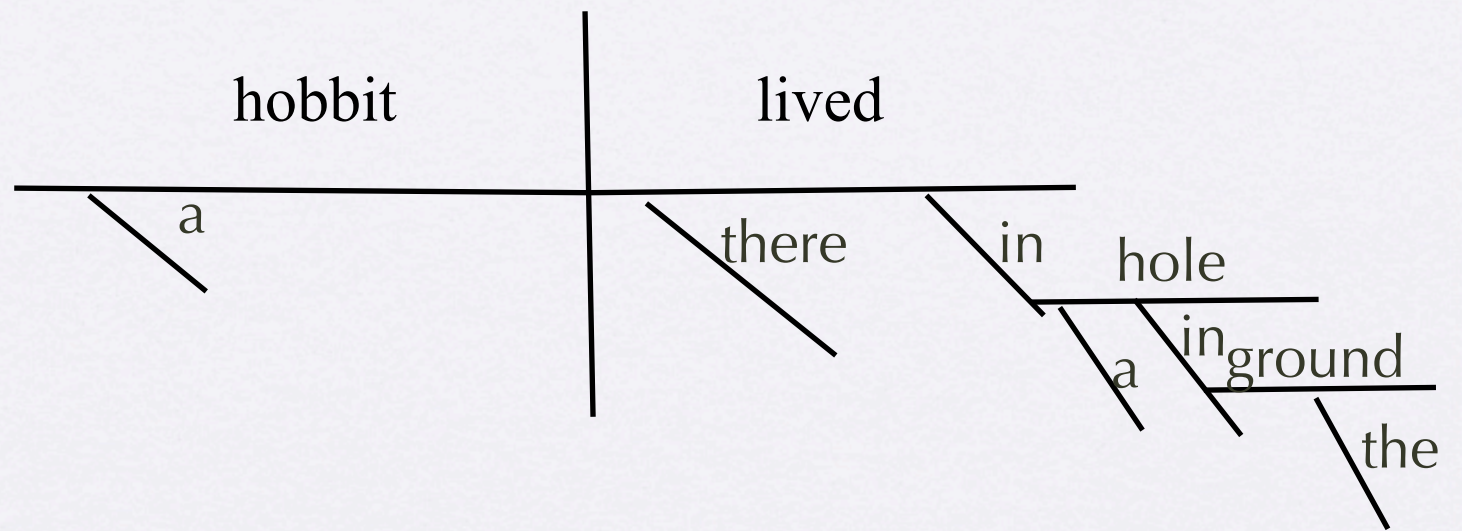
GOOD SENTENCE

In a hole in the ground there lived a hobbit.

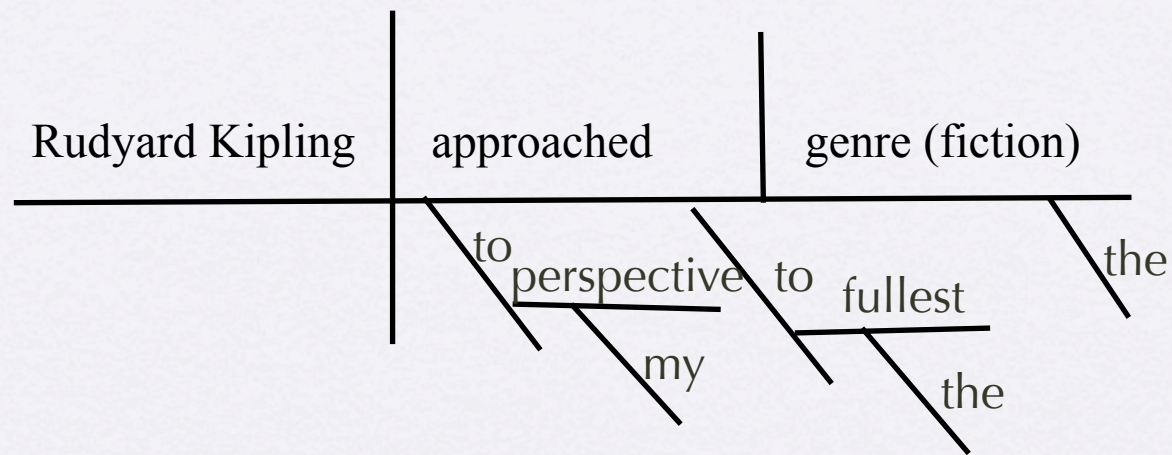
BAD SENTENCE

To my perspective Rudyard Kipling approached the genre fiction to its fullest.

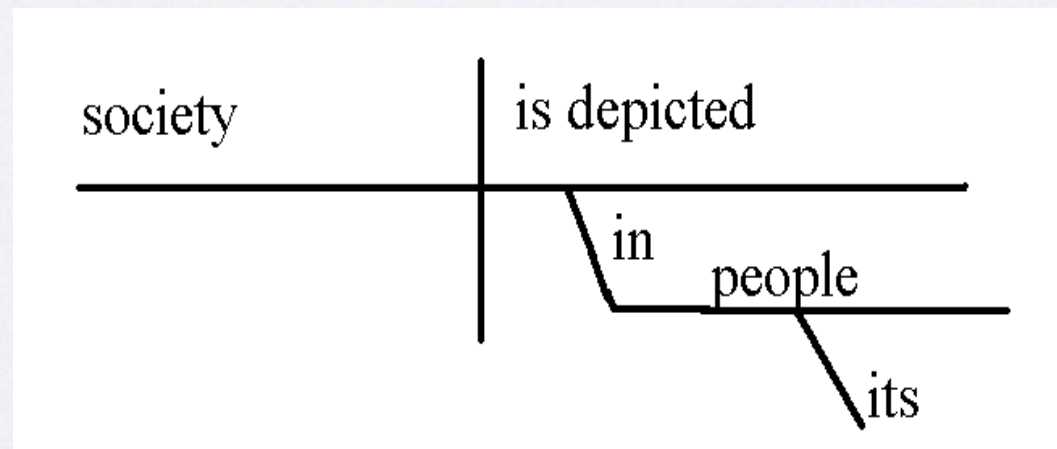
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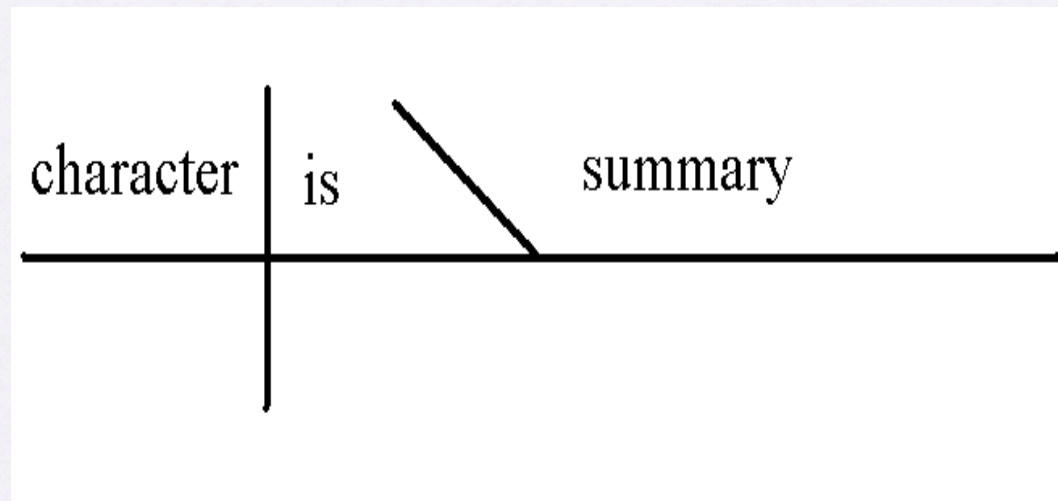
To my perspective Rudyard Kipling approached the genre fiction to the fullest.



In addition to the city, Theodore Dreiser's society is depicted in its people.



Therefore, the character of Irene is a summary of women of the time.



Resources:

Rod & Staff

Voyages in English

Shurley English

Skip writing elements

Shurley: add separate diagramming

The First Whole Book of Diagrams, Mary Daly
hedgeschool.homestead.com

Purposes of Outlining

Provide the student with a model for constructing logical narratives

I. MAIN POINT

A. First supporting point

1. Additional information about first supporting point

a. Detail about that additional information

B. Second supporting point

1. Additional information about second supporting point

2. More additional information about that second supporting point

II. NEXT MAIN POINT

Outlining Resources

Rod & Staff
A Beka
Voyages in English

Note Taking & Outlining
schoolspecialitypublishing.com

Grammar: 3x per week, 30-45 minutes

Spelling: 2x per week, 30 minutes

Writing?

Fifth Grade Writing

1. Write narrative summaries as learned in elementary grades, 2x per week (choose from history, literature, or science), not more than 1/2 page.
2. Do a one-level outline of 1-3 pages (depending on density) of nonfiction reading, 1-2x per week (outline itself should be 1/2-3/4 page)
3. Write one “literary” essay, 1x per week.

One-level outline

Goal: a sentence that identifies the passage's most central thought (NOT a sentence that contains most of the information in the paragraph.)

Useful questions:

1. What is the main thing or person that this paragraph is about?
2. Why is that thing or person important?

From *The Story of Canada*, Janet Lunn and Christopher Moore

The Blackfoot had always gone on foot, using dogs to help carry their goods, for there were no horses in North America until Spanish colonists brought them in the 1500s. Soon after that, plains people captured animals that had gone wild, or stole them in raids. They traded the horses northward and early in the 1700s, horses came to the northern plains. Suddenly the Blackfoot were a nation on horseback. How exciting it was, learning to ride a half-wild mustang and galloping off to the horizon!

What is the main thing the paragraph is about? Horses.

Why are horses important? The Blackfoot tribe learned to ride them in the 1700s.

I. The Blackfoot tribe learned to use horses in the 1700s.

The steps in writing:

Finding an idea worth writing about

INARTICULATE IDEA

IDEA IN WORDS

figuring out what to say ABOUT that idea (finding the content)

taking everything he wants to say ABOUT the idea

IDEA IN WORDS

WORDS ON PAPER

figuring out what order to put this information in

Fifth Grade Writing

1. Write narrative summaries as learned in elementary grades, 2x per week (choose from history, literature, or science), not more than 1/2 page.
2. Do a one-level outline of 1-3 pages (depending on density) of nonfiction reading, 2x per week (outline itself should be 1/2-3/4 page)
- 3. Write one “literary” essay, 1x per week.**

BEGINNING LITERARY ANALYSIS

FOR A NOVEL OR STORY:

Whom is this book about (central character)?

What does he/she/they want?

What keeps him/her/they from getting it?

How do they get what they want?

Do they have an enemy or enemies? Is there a villain?

What does the villain want?

What do you think is the most important event in the story?

What causes this event to happen?

How are the characters different after this event?

How many different stories does the writer tell?

What is the most important thing that happens to [pick a character].

How does it change that character?

EVALUATION QUESTIONS:

What was the most exciting part of the book?

What was the most boring part of the book?

Did you like the character[s]? Why or why not?

Did you hope that he/she would get what he/she wanted?

Did any part of the book seem particularly real? Did any part seem unlikely?

Did you hope that it would end in another way? If so, how?

Would you read this book again?

Which one of your friends would enjoy this book?

Teach the student to write short essays as answers to these questions:

One page or less to begin with (after conversation) answering one of the discussion questions.

Move towards answering two or more questions, including one of the evaluation questions.

Sixth Grade Writing

1. Write narrative summaries as learned in elementary grades, 1-2x per week (choose from history, literature, or science), not more than 1/2 page.
2. Do a **two-level outline** of 1-3 pages (depending on density) of nonfiction reading, 2x per week (outline itself should be 1/2-3/4 page)
3. Write one “literary” essay, 1x per week.

From *The Story of Canada*, Janet Lunn and Christopher Moore

The Blackfoot had always gone on foot, using dogs to help carry their goods, for there were no horses in North America until Spanish colonists brought them in the 1500s. Soon after that, plains people captured animals that had gone wild, or stole them in raids. They traded the horses northward and early in the 1700s, horses came to the northern plains. Suddenly the Blackfoot were a nation on horseback. How exciting it was, learning to ride a half-wild mustang and galloping off to the horizon!

What is the most important piece of supporting information for each major term in the main point?

- I. The Blackfoot tribe learned to use horses in the 1700s.**
 - A. They had always gone on foot before.
 - B. The horses were brought to North America by Spanish colonists.

Life in China under the Mongols was much like life in China under earlier alien rulers. Once order was restored, people did their best to get on with their lives. Some suffered real hardship. Many farmers had their lands expropriated; others were forced into slavery or serfdom, perhaps transported to a distant city, never to see their family again. Yet people still spoke Chinese, followed Chinese customary practices in arranging their children's marriages or dividing their family property, made offerings at local temples, celebrated New Year and other customary festivals....Teachers still taught students the classics; scholars continued to write books; and books continued to be printed.

Patricia Buckley Ebrey, Ann Walthall, and James B. Palais, *Pre-Modern Asia to 1800: A Cultural, Social, and Political History* (Houghton Mifflin, 2006), p. 198.

What is the main thing that this passage is about?

I. Life in China under the Mongols

Since this is a descriptive passage, this single phrase neatly sums up the main topic.

What is the most important information about each main term?

A. Difficulties caused by Mongol rule

B. Persistence of Chinese customs and traditions

Seventh and Eighth Grade Writing

1. Do a **three-level outline** of 1-3 pages (depending on density) of nonfiction reading, 2x per week (outline itself should be 1/2-3/4 page)
2. Rewriting from an outline, 1x or 2x per week
3. Write one “literary” essay, 1x per week.

From *The Story of Canada*, Janet Lunn and Christopher Moore

The Blackfoot had always gone on foot, using dogs to help carry their goods, for there were no horses in North America until Spanish colonists brought them in the 1500s. Soon after that, plains people captured animals that had gone wild, or stole them in raids. They traded the horses northward and early in the 1700s, horses came to the northern plains. Suddenly the Blackfoot were a nation on horseback. How exciting it was, learning to ride a half-wild mustang and galloping off to the horizon!

What other details are given?

I. The Blackfoot tribe learned to use horses in the 1700s.

- A. They had always gone on foot before.
 - 1. There were no horses in North America
 - 2. They used dogs to carry their goods
- B. The horses were brought to North America by Spanish colonists.
 - 1. The horses first came in the 1500s.
 - 2. Some of the horses escaped or were stolen.
 - 3. The horses came to the northern plains in the 1700s.

Life in China under the Mongols was much like life in China under earlier alien rulers. Once order was restored, people did their best to get on with their lives. Some suffered real hardship. Many farmers had their lands expropriated; others were forced into slavery or serfdom, perhaps transported to a distant city, never to see their family again. Yet people still spoke Chinese, followed Chinese customary practices in arranging their children's marriages or dividing their family property, made offerings at local temples, celebrated New Year and other customary festivals.... Teachers still taught students the classics; scholars continued to write books; and books continued to be printed.

What other details are given?

- I. Life in China under the Mongols
 - A. Difficulties caused by Mongol rule
 - 1. Lands expropriated
 - 2. Slavery and serfdom
 - 3. Transport to distant cities
 - B. Persistence of Chinese customs and traditions
 - 1. Chinese language spoken
 - 2. Chinese customs observed
 - 3. Festivals celebrated
 - 4. Students taught
 - 5. Books written, printed.

Rewriting from an outline

I. The Blackfoot tribe learned to use horses in the 1700s.

- A. They had always gone on foot before.
 - 1. There were no horses in North America
 - 2. They used dogs to carry their goods
- B. The horses were brought to North America by Spanish colonists.
 - 1. The horses first came in the 1500s.
 - 2. Some of the horses escaped or were stolen.
 - 3. The horses came to the northern plains in the 1700s.

The Blackfoot tribe learned to use horses in the 1700s. Before this, there had been no horses in North America. The Blackfoot people travelled everywhere on foot. They used dogs as pack ponies to carry their belongings. Horses came to North America for the first time in the 1500s, when Spanish colonists brought them over to the New World from Spain. Some of those horses were stolen, but others escaped and went wild. The escaped horses grew into herds and travelled north into the plains. By the 1700s, the horses had reached the plains where the Blackfoot lived. The Blackfoot captured them and tamed them. Now the Blackfoot could move much faster and take more stuff with them. They could gallop from place to place, and load their belongings on the backs of strong horses instead of using dogs.

Using the outlined text as a model

I. Life in China under the Mongols

A. Difficulties caused by Mongol rule

1. Lands expropriated
2. Slavery and serfdom
3. Transport to distant cities

B. Persistence of Chinese customs and traditions

1. Chinese language spoken
2. Chinese customs observed
3. Festivals celebrated
4. Students taught
5. Books written, printed.

Historical time frame

*The negative aspect
details*

*The positive aspect
details*

Life in Tudor England under Henry VIII

Topoi

Topoi: plural forum of the Greek word *topos* (lit. *place*)

English derivation: *topic*

Summary of Aristotle's *topoi*

- I. Narration: Relating events (two different ways)
 - A. Narrating events chronologically
 - B. Narrating events by significance
- II. Description
 - A. Spatial description
 - B. Descriptive sequence
 - C. Instructional sequence
- III. Explanation
 - A. Explanation by way of definition
 - 1. What is it? (essence, properties, accidents)
 - 2. Where does it belong? (genus, division)
 - 3. How does it work? (function)
 - B. Explanation by way of comparison
 - 1. What is it? (essence, properties, accidents)
 - 2. Where does it belong? (genus, division)
 - 3. How does it work? (function)
 - 4. How does it relate to itself at another point in time?
 - 5. What degree is it?
 - C. Explanation by examination of cause and effect

III.A. Explanation by way of definition

Three sets of questions to ask as you are writing a definition. What IS it? (Or, in Aristotelian terms, what are its essence, properties, and accidents?) Where does it BELONG? (What group or genus is it part of, and can it be divided into smaller groups?) And how does it WORK? (What's it for?)

History:

For things:

essence, properties, accidents

What are the exact dimensions, shape, extent? Of what is it made?

What is its structure like? What holds the structure together?

How do its parts work together? What brought it to its present form? Why?

genus (group), division (parts of the whole)

What features place it into a large group of things? What are those groups?

(e.g., when is a castle a castle and not a large house?)

How much variation is there between it and others of the same type?

Can it be broken apart into small units and examined?

(e.g., the towers or living quarters of a castle)

function

Can it be examined in terms of its utility, beauty, practicality, effectiveness, any other viewpoint?

Who makes use of it, and for what purpose? Does it effectively fulfill those purposes?

For countries:

essence, properties, accidents

What are its exact dimensions, shape, extent at a particular point in time?

What physical features are within it?

Can we examine it in terms of its physical existence, religion/politics, social structure, importance/unimportance in the larger world/relation with neighbors, finances/resources, language/customs?

What is its internal structure? What holds it together? What do its citizens share? What makes it survive?

How did it achieve its present form? Why?

genus (group), division (parts of the whole)

What other countries is this grouped with? What defines the group

(language, geography, political alliance, financial alliance)?

Does the country have subdivisions (provinces, districts)?

What is their relation to each other? What is their relation to the country as a whole?

function

Does it run efficiently? What are its internal conflicts? External conflicts?

Does it guard/prevent access to a geographical feature or resource?

What purpose does it serve in the larger political landscape? Financial? Religious?

What use do other countries make of it?

SUMMARY

Goals of middle grade writing:

Learn to construct outlines through modelling

Learn to write from outlines through modelling

Begin to write responses to literary works

"Your letter pleased me greatly"

Variations by Erasmus from *De copia*

Your letter mightily pleased me.
To a wonderful degree did your letter please me.
Me exceedingly did your letter please.
By your letter was I mightily pleased.
I was exceeding pleased by your letter.
Your epistle exhilarated me intensely.
I was intensely exhilarated by your epistle.
Your brief note refreshed my spirits in no small measure.
I was in no small measure refreshed in spirit by your grace's hand.
From your affectionate letter I received unbelievable pleasure.
Your affectionate letter brought me unbelievable pleasure.
Your pages engendered in me an unfamiliar delight.
I conceived a wonderful delight from your pages.
Your lines conveyed to me the greatest joy.
The greatest joy was brought to me by your lines.
We derived great delight from your excellency's letter.
From my dear Faustus' letter I derived much delight.
In these Faustine letters I found a wonderful kind of delectation.
At your words a delight of no ordinary kind came over me.
I was singularly delighted by your epistle.
To be sure your letter delighted my spirits!
Your brief missive flooded me with inexpressible Joy.
As a result of your letter, I was suffused by an unfamiliar gladness.
Your communication poured vials of joy on my head.
Your epistle afforded me no small delight.
The perusal of your letter charmed my mind with singular delight.
Your epistle was delightful to a degree.
Your letter affected me with extraordinary gladness.
As a result of your letter I was affected with singular gladness.
Your epistle was the great joy to me.
Your missive was to me a very great delight.
Your epistle was an incredible joy to me.
How exceedingly agreeable did we find your epistle!
You could scarce credit with relief I find your missive.
Your epistle was to us one of great delightfulness.
Your letter was very sweet to me.
Your letter was the source of singular gladness.
Your letter mad em positively jump for joy.
Your letter having arrived, I was transported with joy.
When your letter was delivered, I was filled with delight.
On receipt of your letter, an incredible delight seized my spirits.

Once I had read your affectionate letter, I was carried away with a strange happiness.
Your epistle poured the balm of happiness over me.
Your writing to me was the most delightful thing possible.
The fact that you had written to me was extremely pleasurable to me.
Your honoring me with a letter was the most agreeable of occurrences.
Your brief note mad me burst with joy.
How overjoyed I was by your letter!
I was both please and delighted that you communicated with me by letter.
When your letter arrived, you could have seen me jumping ro all the joy I felt.
That you paid your respect by letter was assuredly a satisfaction to me.
Nothing more wished for than your letter could have been growth me.
Your letter has reached us, and eagerly looked of rit was.
Nothing more desire than your letter could have ben brought us .
Not unpleasing was your epistle tome.
Your by no means displeasing letter has arrived.
your missive by no means failed of a welcome.
Your epistle was to me the sweetest of the sweet.
I read and reread your letter with great pleasure.
It was not without the greatest pleasure that I received your letter.
The man who delivered your letter conveyed a wealth of joy.
Wonderful to relate how your letter entranced me.
The pages I received from you sent a new light of joy stealing over my heart.
Your letter promptly expelled all sorrow from my mind.
I sensed a wonderful happiness in my spirits when your letter was handed me.
From your letter an unaccustomed happiness swept over my spirits.
Your letter cause me to rejoice to the full.
Because of your letter my whole self exulted with joy.
It is difficult to say how much happiness was occasioned in my by your letter.
I can hardly find word to express the extent of the joy to which your letter gave rise.
It is wonderful to tell what a ray of delight beamed forth from your letter.
Good God, what a mighty joy proceeded from your epistle!
Heavens, what causes for joy did id your letter provide!
Ye gods, what a power of joy did your missive supply!
The happiness occasioned by your communication is great than I can describe.
Your messenger brought me a deal of pleasure.
You could scarce credit he load of happiness your letter conveyed to my mind.
I cannot find word to tell the joys that your letter loaded on me.
Your letter heaped joy upon me.
I rejoiced greatly at your letter.
I found singular pleasure in your letter.
Your missive showered a wealth of gladness upon me.
At the sight of your letter the frown fled from my mind's brow.

<http://burton.byu.edu/Composition/CopiaGuide.pdf>

Dr. Gideon Burton
Brigham Young University

A Short Guide to Copia'			
Possible Changes		Example Sentence: "Your letter pleased me greatly"	
Original Form	Kinds of Variation	Original Content	Variation
Adjectives	to prepositional phrases	your letter	of yours, of your making
	added/intensified adjectives		your incomparable letter
Nouns	synonyms	pleased pleased me	epistle, note, memo, missive
	whole phrases		words from your pen
	whole clauses		the lines which you jotted
	metaphor		gem, pearls of wisdom
Verbs	synonyms	greatly	delighted, refreshed
	passive construction		I was pleased by
	metaphor		flooded me (with joy)
Adverbs	synonyms	Your letter pleased me greatly	intensely, wonderfully
	adverbial phrases		in a big way, as only few things do
	opposites/negatives (<i>litotes</i>)		in no small scale
	similes		like food does a glutton
Statements	questions	Your letter pleased me greatly	Didn't your letter just thrill me?
	negatives		Your letter did in no way displease me.

Text