



Teach Writing with the New York Times: Our 2023-24 Curriculum

Website	https://www.nytimes.com/2023/08/02/learning/teach-writing-with-the-new-york-times-our-2023-24-curriculum.html
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Reviewer	Mevlûde Çiçek Karadeniz Technical University

The Learning Network is an educational platform created by The New York Times that provides a plethora of resources and materials for teachers and students. It offers a wide range of free resources, including lesson plans, writing prompts, multimedia, quizzes, contests, and discussion forums for learners to stay informed about current events and actively engage in discussions. All the content is curated from The New York Times' extensive archive. One of the platform's key features is that resources enable educators to incorporate real-world content into their curriculum. Besides, The Learning Network is updated regularly, with new content published daily during the school year, ensuring educators and learners access fresh, relevant materials to enhance teaching and learning experiences. Unlike the magazine, the platform is free of charge and does not require a subscription. The homepage is fairly simple, with a user-friendly interface. On the Learning Network homepage, users can navigate among the sections. Each section, namely how to use this site, lesson plans, writing prompts, quizzes and vocabulary, photos, graphs and videos, and contents, is subdivided into resources and subjects.

'*Teach Writing with The New York Times: Our 2023-24 Curriculum*' is presented under the lesson plans section and provides a comprehensive approach to teaching writing using The New York Times as a primary resource. The curriculum offers multimedia resources, such as articles, videos, and interactive features from The New York Times, which enriches the learning experience and exposes students to diverse writing styles and formats. The content and materials available on the platform are suitable for middle school and high school students as well as for elementary school and college students. The teachers can include any of the materials in their curriculum to help students in various areas, such as documenting their lives, telling stories, expressing opinions, investigating ideas, interviewing fascinating people, or analysing culture. It is stated that the curriculum can be adapted to different grade levels and writing proficiencies. The platform does not specify suitability for proficiency levels. Even though the curriculum can be adapted to different grade levels and writing proficiencies, the English level seems challenging for low-level language learners. Another drawback is that even though it is free to use the platform and join the contests and projects, the units present links to some articles from the newspaper for related writing tasks, and readers can only read them with a subscription. This minor inconvenience can be overcome since the units also present other students' works, and they can be used as examples of the intended skills.

The current writing curriculum includes eight writing units, each accompanied by an easy-to-follow practical guide. These units are structured around real-world features such as reviews, photo essays, podcasts, narratives and other multimedia formats. The curriculum developers stress the importance of writing for a real audience. The news, features, articles, interviews, photos, videos, podcasts and graphics in The New York Times can be utilised by teachers to teach students to write for a real audience. Each unit highlights a different genre of writing that students might encounter in various authentic contexts. Through the platform, students can express and share their ideas using a wide range of choices, helping them reach a global audience and connect with a community of creators. Student voices are promoted through opportunities for publication integrated into each unit. Rather than just reading what others write, students can become creators.

Key components of each unit are writing prompts to practice the related skills in a risk-free environment, opportunities to write for a real audience, practice writing using exemplary texts as guides, and contests. Students practice different skills through daily writing prompts on the website's forums. Submissions are reviewed by Times editors before they are published and shared with a global audience of fellow students who may respond to them. Step-by-step guides help students learn writing techniques using mentor texts from Times journalists and contest winners. Students can participate in contests, with entries evaluated by experts, and they have a chance of being published in The New York Times.

Here are the names of the units and brief descriptions of each:

Unit 1: Documenting and Reflecting on Teenage Lives

The unit was first introduced to acknowledge the significant impact that the events of the COVID-19 pandemic had on teenagers. The unit encouraged students to express their experiences through various mediums such as words, images, video, or audio. The submissions were featured online and in a book. This year, the focus of the unit has shifted to documenting and reflecting on the school experience. High school students and educators are invited to contribute by sharing digital uploads that offer insights into what it is like to be in high school currently. The unit aims to showcase the diverse experiences within the high school community and encourages individuals to share their unique stories. Detailed exercises provided in a step-by-step guide help students and teachers navigate the process of expression. Hyperlinks to examples of work created before, a step-by-step guide and detailed information about the challenge and how to start creating are available. Clicking on the related phrase will send the readers to the page they need. High school students and teachers can join this contest.

Unit 2: The Personal Narrative

This unit invites students to write personal narratives covering various topics. The '525 Prompts for Narrative and Personal Writing' link can be used to explore and write their own stories. This unit includes a personal narrative contest, "tiny memoirs", of 100 words or less for students. The platform provides resources like "Teach Narrative Writing with The New York Times" and step-by-step directions, offering prompts, mentor texts, and lesson plans to support teachers in teaching narrative writing, which aims to cultivate students' storytelling skills.

Unit 3: The Critical Review

Rather than traditional critical reviews of books and literary works, this unit claims to encourage students to create reviews for arts in other genres. Students are expected to write argumentative essays by making claims and supporting them with evidence. Advice from the critics and student writings can be found in the step-by-step guide. As a project of the unit, students are

invited to critique books, movies, restaurants, albums, theatrical productions, video games, dance performances, TV shows, and art exhibitions.

Unit 4: Informational ‘How-To’ Writing

Informational writing, a predominant style found in publications, serves as the focus of this writing unit. The objective is to demonstrate to students that informational writing, despite preconceived notions, can be as engaging and compelling as other genres. The current unit invites students to inspect the 'Tip Column' of the magazine and produce a short description of how to do a task. Similar to other units of the curriculum, the unit provides useful links to the previous how-to writing contest, a lesson plan, the Tip column, the work of previous winning students, and articles on how to find topics for this contest are all available, and new material will be added.

Unit 5: The Photo Essay

The developers of the unit claim that making photo essays helps students learn various cross-curricular skills. Interviewing subjects helps students learn to ask effective probing questions to gather information. Through the art of photography, students improve their observational skills. During interviews, students engage in active listening to understand the perspectives, experiences, and feelings of the individuals in the community. They learn to capture key information and quotes during interviews, aiding in synthesising their photo essays. Students verify the information gathered to ensure accuracy and credibility in their photo essays. Engaging with community members fosters empathy, understanding, and connection, which is crucial for effective storytelling. Students blend photography and writing to convey their message with clarity, voice, and style, honing their communication skills.

The unit encourages students to investigate a chosen offline community, its history, and its dynamics for a contest. They are expected to craft narratives through pictures with related text and successfully communicate a specific message or theme. Students are free to choose any community that interests them. More resources related to the unit are being prepared. Students can currently benefit from the 2022 guides on photography and interviewing techniques through the related links.

Unit 6: Argumentative Writing

The Times Opinion section provides real-world examples of evidence-based argumentative writing, which is common in school assignments. In this unit, students are encouraged to make an argument and write open letters addressing specific individuals or groups who have the power to effect change. Drawing inspiration from historical examples like Martin Luther King Jr.'s Letter From Birmingham Jail, students are encouraged to craft arguments in 450 words, aiming to persuade their audience to care about the issue. The unit is supported with writing prompts, mentor texts, webinars, and resources from past Editorial Contest winners.

Unit 7: Podcasting

This unit and its accompanying contest invite students to explore podcasting as a format for creative expression. Students can discuss any topic in any style they prefer, whether it's personal narratives, opinion pieces, interviews, or investigative journalism. Through a step-by-step guide and examples from past winners, students are guided through the process of creating their own original podcasts. Additionally, resources are available to explain the technical aspects of podcasting, ensuring accessibility for all students with a smartphone or recording device. These resources are part of the Writing for Podcasts unit, which provides support for students.

Unit 8: Independent Reading & Writing

This unit encourages independent reading and writing through the one-pager challenge and the reading contest. Students choose any article, opinion essay, video, graph, photo collection, or podcast from The New York Times published in the current year and respond to it. For the one-pager challenge, students create a response combining writing and images, expressing their engagement with the chosen piece. Resources, including a step-by-step guide and examples of winning entries, are expected to guide students. The Reading Contest invites students to share what caught their attention in The Times and why, using richer multimedia in the comments section. Detailed instructions will be provided in the near future, but existing resources offer guidance for creating responses.

In conclusion, The Learning Network by The New York Times stands as an effective educational tool, combining the rich and varied content of the newspaper with the dynamic needs of modern education for learners and teachers of English. With its interactive curriculum designed to enhance writing skills across various genres, the platform not only equips students with the ability to express themselves for a real audience but also encourages them to engage critically with the world around them. Teachers can make use of the platform by assigning homework for writing classes or showing examples of different genres of writing. By offering resources that are both accessible and adaptable, The Learning Network empowers educators to craft lessons and make them more fruitful.

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