



Punch™
Software for teaching
writing and reading.

Essay Punch™

Skill levels 6 - adult

Complete program: 3 units
PERSUASION (Unit 1), INFORMATION (Unit 2), DESCRIPTION (Unit 3)

For details about each unit, see the Content section on page 4.

For Teaching Suggestions, see page 6.

Writing Assessment and Independent Writing Worksheets, attached.

Evaluation version: INFORMATION (Unit 2)
Tracks work for two students.

Windows 98/Me/NT/2000/2003/XP
5 MB RAM, 55 MB hard disk space
This program requires a minimum screen resolution of 800 by 600 pixels.

Essay Punch helps students learn to write short persuasive, informative, and descriptive essays. The program contains 9 writing topics and 1,080 help prompts to guide students through each step in the writing process.

This writing program helps students with reading levels of six and up write effective essays. It teaches three different ways to develop an essay: through persuasion, information, and description. A step-by-step approach emphasizes content and organization.

To use Essay Punch, students need to be able to write basic sentences on a word processor. The program guides students through each step in writing a complete essay. Help messages are provided throughout. Students are encouraged by the program's graphic and auditory rewards, as well as by seeing their work develop and progress. Students may transfer their finished essays to any word processing program. Teachers may write a comment to the student which will be saved until the student sees it.

Saving, Printing, and Exiting Before Completing Essay

When students exit, the program saves their work and allows them to return to it at another time. The program will quickly scroll the students' work and stop at the place they left off. After the students have completed Pre-Writing they will be able to print out their work in progress at frequent intervals. Students who return to Publishing can go back to the Editing sections.

Versions are available for stand-alone, network, or home use. The evaluation version of the program permits entry of only two student names. When a third name is entered, the first one will be deleted. The stand-alone version for one station contains record keeping for 42 students. Other School versions permit entry of as many names as disk space allows. When disk space is filled, the name that was entered first will be deleted.

Operating Overview

Students progress through the program by typing in input boxes and by clicking on buttons or typing keyboard shortcuts to select actions. Next, their entries are placed and edited in notepads.

PROGRAM DESCRIPTION

The program takes students step by step through the following sections to write an essay.

INTRODUCTION: Introduces a specific type of essay - one that presents reasons, explanations, or details to support the subject.

SUBJECT: Students are given several subjects and are asked to choose one as the focus of their essay.

PRE-WRITING: Students brainstorm their ideas in the Pre-Writing section. Using words or phrases, students write their ideas about the topic they have chosen. The program provides a series of prompt questions and help messages to help stimulate students' thoughts. Students write about many aspects of the topic, using words or phrases. Students do not have to use all their ideas in their essay.

THESIS: Students formulate a thesis, or main idea, statement that tells what the essay will be about. The program provides a sample thesis statement, plus an incomplete statement for students to finish as an exercise. Students then write a thesis statement of their own.

BUILDING an OUTLINE: Students look at their pre-writing list for related ideas and group them as subtopics under a heading. The program helps students to write possible headings. Students must write at least two headings, with at least two subtopics under each, in order to advance. Various options allow students to make corrections. The program supplies Roman numerals - I, II, etc. - for the headings. It uses capital letters - A, B, etc. - for the subtopics.

WRITING - INTRODUCTORY PARAGRAPH: Students are prompted to use their thesis statement as written or rephrase it to introduce their essay. The program then provides a sample sentence that could follow the opening sentence. Students must write at least one follow-up sentence of their own for their introductory paragraph. From this point on, students may print their work. The printout will show the section of the program from which the work was printed. After seeing their work, students are encouraged to add transitional words here to help the sentences flow smoothly from one thought to the next.

WRITING - BODY: Here, students use the outline as their plan for writing the body paragraphs of their essay. The program guides students step by step to expand each heading and its subtopics into sentences that form paragraphs. Students are prompted to write at least three sentences for each paragraph. Students are encouraged to write complete sentences. The sentence must begin with a capital letter, have appropriate end punctuation, and include at least two words.

ORGANIZING: Students see all the paragraphs they have written for the body of the essay. They have a chance here to review and make any changes in the order of the paragraphs so that the essay is organized in the most logical and effective way. Student may also add or delete entire paragraphs in this section.

COHERENCE: The program provides examples of connecting words or phrases that improve the transition between thoughts. Students are encouraged to add transitional words for a smooth flow from one paragraph to the next.

WRITING - CONCLUSION: The program guides the student to write a concluding paragraph that restates their introductory paragraph and sums up what their essay is about.

REVIEWING - THE FIRST DRAFT: In this section, the Essay Notepad presents the essay as a whole unit for the first time. The program asks students to check their work, paragraph by paragraph, using the Essay Notepad buttons: Add, Remove, Move, or Edit.

REVISING - CONTENT: In Revising - Content, the Essay Draft appears for review of the essay as a whole unit. The computer asks the students to check their work and guides them in the use of the Add, Change text, Remove, or Move buttons.

OPTIONS MENU: The Options Menu contains four subsections: STYLE, SENTENCE STRUCTURE, GRAMMAR AND PROOFREADING. Each subsection contains lessons designed to help students improve their writing. (The record-keeping program notifies the teacher which subsections the student has looked at.)

--**STYLE:** Students are encouraged to review their choice of nouns, verbs and sentence variety. Examples show how changes can make the essay more interesting to read.

--**SENTENCE STRUCTURE:** The program reminds students about common sentence structure problems, such as incomplete sentences, comma faults and parallel structure.

--**GRAMMAR:** Common grammatical errors, such as lack of agreement between subject and verb and misplaced modifiers, are called to the students' attention.

--**PROOFREADING:** This is the students' last chance to revisit what they have written and check and their spelling. Spell checking is available here as review tool. Students are reminded to reread their work after doing a spell check to make sure it makes sense.

PUBLISHING: When students arrive at the Publishing section they are given three choices:

Review: Review the revising section again.

Spell checking: This is an opportunity to review spelling.

Save: This creates a document with the name of the student, program unit, and a unique code so the file will not overwrite existing documents.

After the students' essays are saved, students are presented with these options:

Print: Name and date appear at the beginning of the printout.

Word Processor: Moves the essay to the word processor that was selected in the Teacher Program Manager (TPM).

New Subject: Allows students to start a new subject without exiting the program.

TEACHER PROGRAM MANAGER

All Merit Software applications utilize a centralized student record keeping/management system utility program called Teacher Program Manager (TPM). To learn about these advanced functions, see the Teacher Program Manager manual. It can be printed out from the Software Documentation section of the Merit Software Installation CD or from this link on the Internet:
http://meritsoftware.com/Teacher_Program_Manager.pdf.

LOGGING ON AND CLASS MANAGEMENT

There are two options for adding student names to the record database.

- Teacher controlled – appropriate for most schools. Names added with the Teacher Program Manager Set Up Student Names functions.
- Student controlled – for home users and for mature students. Names added at the Logon Screen.

For more information about class management and adding student names to the database, see the Teacher Program Manager manual.

The program opens to a Log on screen with all previously entered class codes and student names. Students must select their class code in order to see the list of students in their class. They then click on their name to begin the program. If the program is in student controlled mode and students are logging on for the first time, they select their class code, click the New Student icon, and fill in their name on the form that appears on the screen.

The evaluation version of the program permits entry of only two student names. When a third name is entered, the first one will be deleted. The stand-alone version for one station contains record keeping for 42 students. Other School versions permit entry of as many names as disk space allows. When disk space is filled, the name that was entered first will be deleted.

TRACKING STUDENTS' WORK

In addition to student printouts of their work in progress, teachers may view students' work in the Teacher Program Manager (TPM).

CONTENT OF ESSAY PUNCH

Each unit concentrates on a specific type of essay - based on persuasion, information, or description. Here are the subjects within each type:

Unit 1: Persuasion

Subject: Community service - Some members of the school board in your community have recommended that all students be required to do community service each semester. Students are invited to express their opinions, in writing, for or against required community service.

Tip: This subject will give you a chance to write about why required community service for all students is a good idea or a poor idea.

Subject: A standard dress code - The principal of a local school wants to ban jewelry, hats, and leather jackets in school and set up a standard dress code for all students. Write an essay that argues for -- or against -- the idea of a school's having a standard dress code.

Tip: This subject will give you a chance to write about why a standard dress code for all students is a good idea or a poor idea.

Subject: The effects of TV - A teacher, a student, and a member of the town council appear on a local TV talk show and debate whether television does more good than harm, or the reverse. The program's host invites his home audience to write in their views.

Tip: This subject will give you a chance to write about the negative -- or positive -- effects of television.

Unit 2: Information

Subject: An area of interest - One of your friends knows all about dolphins. Another can sing all the songs the Beatles ever wrote. Almost everyone has an interest, talent, or hobby that makes him or her an 'expert' in some area. Describe an activity or area about which you are especially knowledgeable.

Tip: This topic will give you a chance to describe or explain something you know well.

Subject: A modern discovery or invention - Have you ever wondered what a visitor from an earlier time would make of our world today? Imagine that you have such a visitor. Describe a discovery or invention made in the last one hundred years or so, and show how modern society depends on it.

Tip: This topic will give you a chance to tell about something discovered in nature or created entirely new within the past hundred years.

Subject: A character from a different background - You have a new neighbor, a recent arrival in your community. Some of your friends already know something about his culture from a movie they saw. Movies and books allow us to meet people whose lives are different from our own. Here is your chance to

tell about a movie or book that increased your knowledge of people from another land, or from another part of America, or from a different background.

Tip: This topic will give you a chance to describe a movie or book about people from a different place or culture.

Unit 3: Description

Subject: A memorable experience - One of your friends always seems to have an interesting experience to relate. Sometimes it is a quiet experience, drawn from everyday life. Sometimes it is a vivid memory of a past event. Now it is your turn to describe an experience or event in your own life that you remember well because of how it made you feel or what you learned from it.

Tip: This topic will give you a chance to write about something that happened to you and how it influenced or affected you.

Subject: A significant place - Particular places often have a special meaning, interest, or importance. For example, a child you know loves to describe the exciting sights and sounds of a local amusement park. An elderly neighbor remembers in detail her overcrowded home in a far-distant town nearly seventy years ago. Now it is your turn to tell about a place, past or present, that is significant to you.

Tip: This topic will give you a chance to describe a particular place and tell what it means to you.

Subject: Someone who has affected your life positively - You have learned about people whose lives were touched in some significant way by another person. Now you have a chance to write about someone who has affected your own life positively in some way.

Tip: This topic will give you a chance to write about a particular person and how he or she touched your life.

CLASSROOM PRINTOUTS FOR USE WITH THIS PROGRAM (Attached)

1. Writing Assessment

Merit Software supplies a possible rubric for assessing students' writing. The rubric resembles the scoring guidelines found on many tests and formal writing assessments. In general, a rubric is valuable for teachers in determining each students' overall writing quality and also the specific strengths and weaknesses of a student's writing. A rubric can be equally important for students. They need to know what components differentiate excellent writing from poor writing. This rubric will help students understand what they need to do to produce good writing. The teacher should actively review the rubric with students, or the teacher will need to adapt it to the students' language level.

2. Independent Writing Worksheet

One goal of Essay Punch is to develop students' ability to write independently. The Independent Writing worksheet assists students in making this transition. The Independent Writing worksheet is a guide for essay writing that follows the process presented in Essay Punch. It helps students recall the writing steps followed in the program. Using the Independent Writing worksheet, students can work as active learners.

Essay Punch includes an Independent Writing Worksheets for persuasive writing (unit 1) and a worksheet for expository or descriptive writing (unit 2 and 3). Also included is an Essay Outline worksheet.

ADDITIONAL SUGGESTIONS FOR USING THIS PROGRAM

Ask students what kinds of writing they do for social studies, science, and language arts classes. Do they feel like writing? Why or why not? When is writing easy? When is it difficult? What kinds of writing do they most like to read? Least like to read?

Ask students what kinds of writing they do outside of school. Do they keep a journal? Write letters or email? Create stories or comic strips?

Have students use the program, going through *Pre-Writing* and inputting sentences for *Writing-Body*. Ask them to break into pairs in order to share sentences with each other.

Have students continue with their Merit writing program till they reach *Revising*. Ask them to work in pairs, helping each other as they edit.

Help students transfer their completed writing to their own disks, or to a word-processing, email, or HTML program. Have them “publish” their work by printing it.

Follow up by asking students to break into small groups and share their printed writing. What do they like about each other’s writing? Do group members have any suggestions for each other?

Follow up each session by asking students what they found easiest when using their Merit writing program. What was already familiar to them? What new things did they learn about writing?

Review any problem areas for writing in the classroom. Ask students what they found most difficult about starting, writing, or editing their writing.

If students are using *Essay Writing* or *Business Letter Punch*, remove paragraph breaks or scramble paragraph order from a short text based on material they are reading for social studies or language arts. Give them this text and prompt them to observe that this text is either missing paragraph breaks, or has paragraphs in the wrong order. Have them edit by inserting paragraph breaks or fixing paragraph order.

Remove punctuation from a short text based on material they are reading. Give them the text and prompt them to observe that this text is missing punctuation, such as sentence breaks, capitals and commas. Have them edit by inserting punctuation.

Ask students to try doing pre-writing for their language arts or social studies classes.

Have students work in pairs to come up with a list of adjectives to describe people, places, and things. Ask the pairs to come up with a list of verbs to describe action, then a list of adverbs for describing actions.

Request that students try editing their writing for language arts, social studies, and science classes.

Put together a class publication of work done with this program.

Merit Writing Assessment

Scores from 5 to 1 reflect the range of skills demonstrated in response to each writing assignment.

SCORE OF 5

A 5 writing assignment is **EXCELLENT**. It demonstrates proficiency in response to the assignment. It contains only a few minor errors. A writing assignment with a score of 5:

- is very well organized and developed
- very clearly explains a key idea
- displays syntactic variety, including use of sentence structure
- displays facility in the use of language, including use of vocabulary
- is nearly free of errors in mechanics, usage, and sentence structure

SCORE OF 4

A 4 writing assignment is **GOOD**. It demonstrates proficiency in response to the assignment. It may contain a number of minor errors. A writing assignment with a score of 4:

- is well organized and developed
- clearly explains a key idea
- displays some syntactic variety, including use of sentence structure
- displays some facility in the use of language and vocabulary
- is generally free of errors in mechanics, usage, and sentence structure

SCORE OF 3

A 3 writing assignment is **COMPETENT**. While it demonstrates some proficiency in response to the assignment, it also needs some improvement. It contains a number of minor errors. A writing assignment with a score of 3:

- is adequately organized and developed
- explains a key idea
- does not display much syntactic variety
- displays adequate facility in the use of language
- displays a number of minor errors in mechanics, usage, and sentence structure

SCORE OF 2

A 2 writing assignment is **LIMITED**. It demonstrates limited proficiency in response to the assignment. It clearly needs improvement. It contains both major and minor errors. A writing assignment with a score of 2:

- is weakly organized and developed
- does not adequately explain a key idea
- does not display syntactic variety
- displays limited understanding of sentence structure
- displays limited or inappropriate use of language, including limited use of vocabulary
- displays major and minor errors in mechanics and usage

SCORE OF 1

A 1 writing assignment is **PROBLEMATIC**. It demonstrates fundamental deficiencies in response to the assignment. It demonstrates that the student is struggling to write. It contains major errors that need to be dealt with before the minor errors. A writing assignment with a score of 1:

- is not organized and developed
- does not explain a key idea, or goes off-topic
- displays little or no relevant detail
- displays little understanding of sentence structure
- displays inappropriate use of language
- displays many major and minor errors in mechanics, usage, and sentence structure

Independent Writing Worksheet Essay Punch

Persuasion

Use this checklist to guide you through the persuasive essay writing process. As you begin each writing step, think about what you did in the Essay Punch program. You should do your pre-writing and essay writing on a word processor or in your writer's notebook.

WRITING SUBJECT \ QUESTION (fill in):

Check the box after you have finished each step.

Pre-Writing

BRAINSTORMING

Brainstorm by writing ideas related to your topic. Write only words or phrases. Brainstorm ideas both for (pro) and against (con) the argument.

WRITING--THESIS

Choose the point of view from which you would like to write. Develop a single, arguable statement that expresses your opinion.

OUTLINE

Use your pre-writing ideas to build an outline for your essay. Use only words and phrases. Create headings for the bigger ideas and subtopics for the supporting arguments.

Essay Writing

WRITING--INTRODUCTORY PARAGRAPH

Introduce your subject and thesis with an introductory paragraph.

WRITING--BODY

Use your outline to write at least two body paragraphs.

ORGANIZING

Arrange the paragraphs of your essay. Place the strongest arguments last. Use transition words and phrases to help your paragraphs flow smoothly.

WRITING--CLOSING PARAGRAPH

Write your closing paragraph to summarize your essay and your argument.

Editing

□ REVISING

□ CONTENT

Check that you stick to the subject and point of view stated in your introduction.
Check that your argument is logical and convincing.

□ STYLE

Check that your word choice is appropriate for a persuasive essay.
Check that you use varied sentence types and lengths.

□ SENTENCE STRUCTURE

Check that you use complete sentences.
Check that you avoid run-on sentences.
Check that you use parallel structure.

□ GRAMMAR

Check that you use commas correctly.
Check your punctuation.

□ PROOFREADING

Read your essay aloud for fluency.
Correct capitalization and spelling.
Re-read your essay for any final changes.

□ PUBLISHING

Name _____ Date _____

Independent Writing Worksheet Essay Punch

Circle One: Information Description

Use this checklist to guide you through the essay writing process. As you begin each writing step, think about what you did in the Essay Punch program. You should do your pre-writing and essay writing on a word processor or in your writer's notebook.

WRITING SUBJECT \ QUESTION (fill in):

Check the box after you have finished each step.

Pre-Writing

- BRAINSTORMING
Brainstorm by writing ideas related to your topic. Write only words or phrases.
- WRITING--THESIS
Your thesis should explain what the reader will learn or what you will describe.
- OUTLINE
Use your pre-writing ideas to build an outline for your essay.
Use only words or phrases.
Create headings for the bigger ideas and subtopics for the supporting arguments.

Essay Writing

- WRITING--INTRODUCTORY PARAGRAPH
Introduce your subject and thesis with an introductory paragraph.
- WRITING--BODY
Use your outline to write at least three body paragraphs.
- ORGANIZING
Arrange the paragraphs of your essay in a logical and effective way.
Use transition words and phrases to help your paragraphs flow smoothly.
- WRITING--CLOSING PARAGRAPH
Write your closing paragraph to summarize your essay.

Editing

❑ REVISING

❑ CONTENT

Check that your writing sticks to the chosen subject stated in your introduction.
Check that your information or descriptions are easily understood.

❑ STYLE

Check that you use descriptive and informative words appropriate for an essay.
Check that you use varied sentence types and lengths.

❑ SENTENCE STRUCTURE

Check that you use complete sentences.
Check that you avoid run-on sentences.
Check that you use parallel structure.

❑ GRAMMAR

Check that you use commas correctly.
Check your punctuation.

❑ PROOFREADING

Read your essay aloud for fluency.
Correct capitalization and spelling.
Re-read your essay for any final changes.

❑ PUBLISHING

Essay Outline - Body Paragraphs

You should always outline the body of your essay before you begin writing. Use only words or phrases. This sample outline can help you organize your thoughts for your essay.

I. Heading 1: _____

A. Subtopic 1: _____

1. _____

2. _____

B. Subtopic 2: _____

1. _____

2. _____

II. Heading 2: _____

A. Subtopic 1: _____

1. _____

2. _____

B. Subtopic 2: _____

1. _____

2. _____

III. Heading 3: _____

A. Subtopic 1: _____

1. _____

2. _____

B. Subtopic 2: _____

1. _____

2. _____