



Lesson 1.1

Think, See, Draw!

Writers do a lot of things to warm up, or *prewrite*. Some discuss their ideas with friends—who may raise important questions or come up with details that the writer didn’t think of. Many writers make lists or webs to help them see the connections between the smaller parts of a big idea. And others draw.

Now, you may or may not think of yourself as an artist, but either way, drawing can help you extend your thinking. That’s because the very *act* of drawing helps pull out details you didn’t even know were in your head. What’s more, a sketch records your idea in a physical way, giving you something to look at as you write. Drawing is a way of coaching yourself.

First Thoughts

Prewriting can help you take an oversized topic and make it both smaller and—even more important—personal to *you*. Let’s try an example. Consider this big topic: “Fun in the Great Outdoors.” What pops into your head when you think of this topic?

Write down some first thoughts here—just key words or phrases—as quickly as they come to you:

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____
4. _____



A Question

Do you think everyone in your class is thinking and writing the same things?

- Yes, absolutely.
- No, that's pretty unlikely.

Another Question

Look carefully at this list of outdoor activities:

- Boating
- Hiking
- Rafting
- Fishing
- Rock climbing
- Skateboarding
- Camping

On a scale of 1 (low) to 10 (high), how helpful is this list in making you feel ready to write?

1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
Not one bit helpful!								Really helpful!	

Do you feel ready to write about this topic without any further thought?

- Yes, I'm ready! Somebody get me a pencil—quick!!
- No, but I could do it with effort.
- No! I don't have one clue what I would say first.

If you said yes, good for you! If you said no, we're going to show you a strategy that may help when first thoughts (or suggestions) are not enough.



Picture It—Then, Draw It

Look back at your answer to the question, *What pops into your head when you think of the topic “Fun in the Great Outdoors”*? Maybe your first thoughts were connected to an outdoor activity on our list—or maybe not. Use scratch paper to draw a quick and simple sketch of what “fun in the great outdoors” means to you. Spend about 5–6 minutes sketching. (Don’t worry about your artistic skills—this drawing is for you to use *as a writer*. It’s not going to hang in the Guggenheim Museum.)

Review and Reflect

Take a minute to reflect on your sketch by asking yourself these questions:

- Are you in the picture? Is anyone else?
- What, specifically, are you doing?
- Why did you focus on *this* particular moment or event?
- Does this picture help you recall good memories?
- Which details are *most important*? (Did you forget anything?)
- What just happened—or is about to happen?

Give your picture a title that reflects the main idea—or reflects what is most important to you. Examples:

- *First Fish*
- *Central Park in Winter*
- *Camping Memories*
- *Championship Game*

Title of my sketch: _____

What have you done so far? Let’s see . . . you’ve:

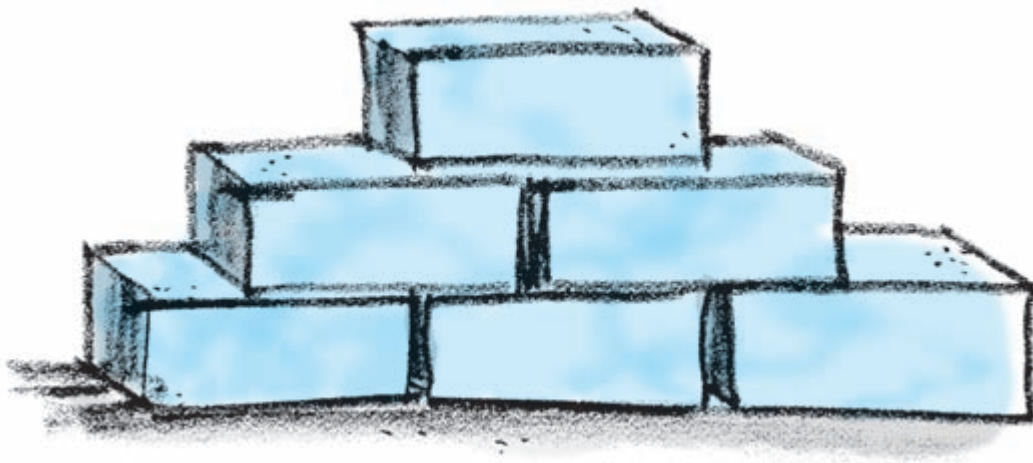
- drawn a sketch to 1) make a topic personal and 2) help you recall details.
- reflected on your drawing to recall even more.
- given your drawing a title that sums up the big idea.



You're *almost* ready to write. Here's one more important step—thinking about supporting details. For this, we'll use a connected, but slightly different, prewriting strategy.

Brick by Brick

Think of details as the *bricks* you need to build a solid idea for readers. Inside each brick, include one detail that tells something important about your main idea. Look back at your sketch to help you come up with the details you need. Try to fill all six bricks—and add more if you need them.



Build It for Your Readers

Now it's time to use those detail bricks to build a piece of writing. Think like a reader for a moment: Which brick holds the most *interesting* or *important* detail? That brick might be the best place to start.

On a separate sheet of paper, turn the words in your brick details into sentences that help create images, or pictures in your readers' minds. Write for 10 minutes or more.

Remember that you can

- look back at your sketch for more ideas.
- add new details as you think of them.
- change your mind and leave out details you do not need.



Share and Compare

Share your prewriting and writing with a partner. Listen carefully for specific details. Share your response to your partner’s writing:

My partner’s topic was completely different from mine. Yes No

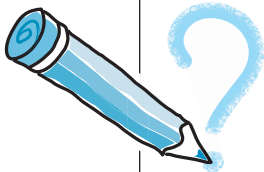
The details in my partner’s writing made a picture in my mind. Yes No

The picture in my mind was like the sketch my partner drew. Yes No

If not, how was it different? _____

As my partner was reading, I thought of more questions I hoped the writing would answer. Yes No

If so, share those questions.



A Writer’s Question

Sketching helps a lot of writers get started—even if they’re not very artistic. Why is the *act of drawing* more important than creating a work of art?



Putting It to the Test

Let’s say you are taking a writing test and you only have 30 minutes to write on a topic you have not seen before. Could it be a good use of your time to take 5 of those minutes to draw a quick sketch? Why or why not?