

“What should good student writing at this grade level look like?”

The answer lies in the writing itself.

The **Writing Standards *in Action* Project** uses high quality student writing samples to illustrate what performance to grade level standards looks like—in action.

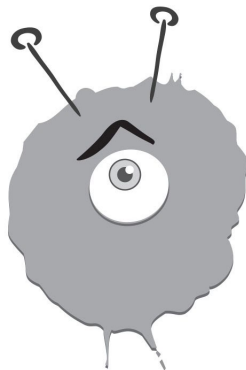
Writing Standards *in Action*

Grade 8 English Language Arts

Narrate

Science Fiction Narrative

Lab Rat



Background Information

GRADE
8

FRAMEWORK / CONTENT STANDARDS ADDRESSED:

Massachusetts Curriculum Framework
for ELA and Literacy (2017)

Writing Sample Title:	Lab Rat
Text Type and Purpose:	Narrate
Grade level/Content area:	Grade 8 English Language Arts
Type of Assignment:	Narrative–Topic and Genre of Student’s Choice
Standards Addressed:	(W.8.3), (W.8.4), (L.8.1), (L.8.3), (L.8.6) <i>See descriptions of these standards in the right column of the next page.</i>

Highlights:

This sample of student work exceeds grade level standards. It demonstrates the following attributes of effective writing.

The sample:

- Uses a well-structured event sequence and effective internal monologue to develop the point of view of the first-person narrator
- Presents a vivid setting that shapes the plot and the narrator’s experiences
- Employs appropriate pacing that keeps the narrative moving and lends urgency to the narrator’s predicament
- Establishes a clear conflict
- Displays organization appropriate to the task and to the writer’s purpose
- Incorporates a purposeful variety of sentence types, lengths, and beginnings
- Includes grade-appropriate general academic and domain-specific words and phrases that provide precision and subtlety of expression

CONTINUED ►



STANDARDS-BASED COMMENTARY

The student writing sample that follows includes standards-based commentary. The commentary found in this column describes how the writing meets the standards in the *Massachusetts Curriculum Framework for English Language Arts and Literacy (2017)* and other content frameworks when applicable.

Understanding the Standards-Based Commentary

1. Grade-specific standards addressed are:

- Listed in the column to the right of student work by strand, grade, and number (or number and letter, where applicable)
- Marked by a colored block with a letter code, also in the column to the right of student work

EXAMPLE: **A**

2. Colored arrow blocks beneath each standard in the right column:

- Are of the same color and letter code as the block that marks the standard being addressed
- Mark standards-based commentary related to the standard being addressed
- Appear in alphabetical order

EXAMPLE: **A1**

3. Corresponding colored arrow blocks within the text:

- Set off sections of student work to which commentary applies
- Do not necessarily appear in alphabetical order—but where evidence of a particular standard exists

EXAMPLE: (begin) **A1** section **A1** (end)

Instructional Practices:

The teacher used the following practices:

- Writer’s Workshop
- Instruction on and practice with the following:
 - Story structure
 - Effective leads and properly elaborated climaxes
 - Focus
 - Dialogue and internal monologue/thoughts
 - Figurative and sensory language
 - Sentence variety

Assignment Description:

Students engaged in a writing workshop to develop an engaging narrative on a topic and in a genre of their choice

Intended Audience:

Teacher and classmates

Time:

2 weeks

Writing Process:

Alone; in class; as homework; drafting; revising; self-editing; peer-editing/peer response; teacher feedback; teacher-student conference

Materials:

Models of elements of effective writing; practice exercises on purposeful use of a variety of sentence types; writer’s reflection sheet; feedback sheet

Writing Standards:**Grade 8, Standard 3 (W.8.3)**

Write narratives to develop experiences or events using effective literary techniques, relevant descriptive details, and well-structured sequences.

EXAMPLE: **A B C D E F**

Writing Standards:**Grade 8, Standard 4 (W.8.4)**

Produce clear and coherent writing in which the development, organization, and style are appropriate to task, purpose, and audience.

EXAMPLE: **E**

Language Standards:**Grade 8, Standard 1 (L.8.1)**

Demonstrate command of the conventions of standard English grammar and usage when writing or speaking; retain and further develop language skills learned in previous grades.

EXAMPLE: **G**

Language Standards:**Grade 8, Standard 3 (L.8.3)**

Use knowledge of language and its conventions when writing, speaking, reading, or listening.

EXAMPLE: **F**

Language Standards:**Grade 8, Standard 6 (L.8.6)**

Acquire and use accurately grade-appropriate general academic and domain-specific words and phrases; independently research words and gather vocabulary knowledge.

EXAMPLE: **D**

Please note:

The samples may contain inaccuracies in wording and content or shortcomings in the use of standard English conventions.

END OF BACKGROUND ■



Narrate

GRADE
8

FRAMEWORK / CONTENT STANDARDS ADDRESSED:

Massachusetts Curriculum Framework
for ELA and Literacy (2017)

STANDARDS-BASED COMMENTARY

In this sample...

The writer organizes and develops this narrative in a manner appropriate to a single chapter of a longer story. Skillfully conceived internal monologue, strategically selected details, and well-paced action combine to build suspense, to reveal the voice of the narrator, and to hold the attention of the reader. Mostly precise word choice, carefully crafted sentences, and varied transitional elements contribute to the narrative's mostly effective style, lending clarity and coherence to the flow of events. The suspenseful ending focuses attention on the plight of the narrator and invites the reader to continue to the next chapter.

Lab Rat

Chapter #2

B2 Just as I was starting to doze off, a flash of light filled my room. I opened my eyes and looked at my floor, only to find it covered with glowing green slime. I blinked and rubbed my eyes to make sure what I was seeing was real. **B2** When I opened my eyes, the slime was still there, glowing even brighter than before. **B3** I knew I had to get out of there **B3**, so I opened the window next to

begin section **end**

WRITING SAMPLE CONTINUES ►



Understanding the Standards-Based Commentary

The student writing sample that begins on this page includes in this column standards-based commentary describing how the writing meets the standards in the *Massachusetts Curriculum Framework for English Language Arts and Literacy (2017)* and other content frameworks, when applicable. Where they apply, sub-standards marked by letters are included.

Evidence for the commentary is noted in the text of the student writing using color-coded, numbered 'begin' and 'end' arrows.

For example:

A1 marks the beginning and **A1** marks the end of the relevant section in the text.

Please note that the labeled arrows in the text do not necessarily appear in alphabetical order.

Writing. Grade 8, Standard 3

A W.8.3.a

Engage and orient the reader by establishing a context and point of view and introducing a narrator and/or characters; organize an appropriate narrative sequence.

A1 A1 Examples: 1 • 2

The writer begins the event sequence by trapping the first-person narrator in a mysterious room (*Another flash of light filled my room. I was soon hurled into a tornado that was quickly filling it... The next thing I knew, I was laying face-down on a cold floor in a small metal room...*).

A2 A2 Examples: 1

The writer introduces the machines essential to the unfolding of the plot (*There were millions of machines covering the walls of a large, dome-shaped room. Each machine had a small, metal chair sitting in front of it. Lights were blinking everywhere...*).

STANDARDS-BASED COMMENTARY

my bed and began to climb out. I stopped short when I saw the endless blackness that replaced the lush, green lawn my father had cared so much about.

A1 Another flash of light filled my room. **G** I was soon

D hurled **D** into a tornado **G** that was quickly filling it. **A1**

Furniture flew everywhere. I was spinning around and around at what felt like a very high velocity. **C** I started to feel dizzy and soon blacked out.

A1 The next thing I knew, I was laying face-down **C** on a cold floor in a small metal room, **A1** about the size of my room.

F1 Wondering where all my stuff was, **F1** I slowly rose to my feet and made sure I wasn't hurt. Then, I walked over to one of the walls and began banging my fists against it, yelling as loud as I could.

begin section **end**

WRITING SAMPLE CONTINUES ►

**Writing. Grade 8, Standard 3**

(continued)

A3 A3 Examples: 1 · 2 · 3 · 4

The writer continues the natural unfolding of the event sequence and in the process develops the point of view of the narrator (*I turned around to face the machine. A screen had risen from the top of it, counting down from ten... There was my head, blown-up on the screen. Next to it were my "stats". Stuff like my age, birthday, favorite color... Just then, a blinking blue button caught my eye. Wondering what it would do, I pressed it. The image on the screen changed to show a list of the major events of my life. Things like my first day of school, my first boyfriend, and the day my parents got divorced... Each event on the list brought back lots of emotions. I sat there for a moment, looking at the list and reminiscing about each event. I found the off button and pressed it. The screen sank back into the machine, and I sat there, suddenly feeling very lonely. I began to miss my family, my home, my life. Everything I'd every known was gone, and I had no idea why.*)

B W.8.3.b

Use narrative techniques, such as dialogue, pacing, description, and reflection, to develop experiences, events, and/or character.

B1 B1 Examples: 1 · 2

Through effective use of internal monologue, the writer develops sardonic (*"That really helped," I thought sarcastically...*) and self-deprecating (*"It was a stupid idea, anyway," I thought as I walked away.*) elements of the narrator's personality.

STANDARDS-BASED COMMENTARY

“Help! Is anybody out there? Hello?!”

I yelled for several minutes, with no reply. Just as I was about to give up hope, I heard a **D** muffled **D** voice coming from the other side of the wall.

“Subject 1609174 has regained consciousness. Prepare to drop walls.”

B2 I stepped away from the walls as they slowly started to **D** descend. **D** Little by little, I began to see more of what lay on the other side. **C** What I saw **D** astounded **D** me. **B2** **A2** There were millions of machines covering the walls **C** of

a large, dome-shaped room. Each machine had a small, metal chair sitting in front of it. Lights were blinking everywhere. **A2** One wall was covered with TV screens, each with a kid on it just like me. They

Writing. Grade 8, Standard 3

(continued)

B2 B2 Examples: 1 · 2 · 3 · 4 · 5

The writer keeps the narrative moving by pacing it around significant moments in time that disclose what the narrator sees, hears, and feels (*Just as I was starting to doze off, a flash of light filled my room. I opened my eyes and looked at my floor, only to find it covered with glowing green slime. I blinked and rubbed my eyes to make sure what I was seeing was real... I stepped away from the walls as they slowly started to descend. Little by little, I began to see more of what lay on the other side. What I saw astounded me... Then, he began to stare hard at a chair sitting in front of a transparent, square machine. I looked at him, then the chair. Nothing happened for several seconds. Then, suddenly, the chair began floating toward me, and landed right at my feet... “Wow”, I thought as I scanned through the list. “I remember that day. And that one. Ha!”... That’s when I lost it.*).

B3 B3 Examples: 1 · 2 · 3 · 4

The narrator reflects on the range of emotions triggered by the alarming situation the writer has created (*I knew I had to get out of there... I was frozen in fear... Each event on the list brought back lots of emotions. I sat there for a moment, looking at the list and reminiscing about each event... I was confused, scared, and alone.*).

B4 B4 Examples: 1

With strategically placed rhetorical questions, the writer accentuates the narrator’s exasperation and desperation and creates a conflict to be resolved in a later chapter (*“Why me? What did I do?”*).

begin section end

WRITING SAMPLE CONTINUES ▶



STANDARDS-BASED COMMENTARY

were just living their lives, **D** oblivious **D** to any TV cameras around. As I looked closer, I began see familiar faces. Kids I'd seen in dreams and such. It sent chills down my spine.

As I was taking all this in, I sensed movement out of the corner of my eye. I turned around to face a dark corner of the room, where I saw a strange figure coming towards me. **F2** It didn't have a very definite shape; it was just a blob. A moving blob. I wanted to run, but my legs wouldn't move. **B3** I was frozen in fear. **B3** **F2** As it got closer, I could see two antenna coming out of the top of it, and one large eye in the middle of its body. It stopped about three feet from me and began to speak in broken English.

“Hello. Me Zornox. You box be fixed soon. You wait here.”

Writing. Grade 8, Standard 3
(continued)**C W.8.3.c**

Use a variety of transition words, phrases, and clauses to convey sequence, signal shifts from one time frame or setting to another, and show the relationships among experiences and events.

C C Examples: 1 • 2 • 3 • 4

By alluding to key words or phrases from the previous paragraph in the next, the writer creates connections among experiences and events that are smooth, varied, and not formulaic (*I started to feel dizzy and soon blacked out... The next thing I knew, I was laying face-down... What I saw astounded me... There were millions of machines covering the walls... wondering what I should do to pass the time... After a couple pointless games of “I spy” and “rock, paper, scissors, I started wandering around... Things like my first day of school, my first boyfriend, and the day my parents got divorced... “Wow”, I thought as I scanned through the list. “I remember that day...”*).

begin section end

WRITING SAMPLE CONTINUES ►



STANDARDS-BASED COMMENTARY

I stared at him in fear and pure confusion. His glowing green body scared me, but his cold, black eye really freaked me out. He began to turn around to go back from whence he came.

“Wait,” I cried, my fear **F1** overrun by my curiosity. **F1**

“Where am I? What are you? Why am I here?”

The blob known as Zornox turned around and looked me in the eye. “You no know much, but me tell some. This control room,” he said as he turned to face the many computers lining the walls. “This where we control. You box have problem. Control room no control box. Must fix. You wait here.”

B2 Then, he began to stare hard at a chair sitting in front of a transparent, square machine. I looked at him, then the chair. Nothing

Writing. Grade 8, Standard 3 AND Language. Grade 8, Standard 6

D W.8.3.d AND D L.8.6

W.8.3.d

Use precise words and phrases and relevant descriptive details to convey a tone (the writer’s attitude toward the subject: e.g., humorous, serious, or ironic) and to convey experiences or events.

L.8.6

Acquire and use accurately grade-appropriate general academic and domain-specific words and phrases; independently research words and gather vocabulary knowledge.

D D Examples: 1 • 2 • 3 • 4 • 5 • 6 • 7

The writer adds subtlety to the narrative with precise words that capture the action and convey the narrator’s experiences (*hurled... muffled... descend... astounded... oblivious... debating... reminiscing...*).

begin section **end**

WRITING SAMPLE CONTINUES ►



STANDARDS-BASED COMMENTARY

happened for several seconds. Then, suddenly, the chair began floating toward me, and landed right at my feet. **B2**

“You sit,” were the last words Zornox said to me as he slowly slugged away, leaving a trail of glowing green slime as he went.

B1 “That really helped,” I thought sarcastically **B1** as I stared at the chair, **D** debating **D** whether to sit in it or not. I decided against it, not knowing what other blobs had sat in it before me, and I began pacing around, **C** wondering what I should do to pass the time.

After a couple pointless games of “I spy” and “rock, paper, scissors”, I started wandering around **C** and looking at all the weird machines.

Most of the buttons had characters on them I couldn’t understand,

Writing. Grade 8, Standard 3 AND Writing. Grade 8, Standard 4

E W.8.3.e AND E W.8.4

W.8.3.e

Provide a conclusion that follows from and reflects on the narrated experiences or events.

W.8.4

Produce clear and coherent writing in which the development, organization, and style are appropriate to task, purpose, and audience.

E E Examples: 1

The writer brings the sample to an emotional and uncertain climax that focuses attention on the narrator’s predicament and leaves the reader to wonder what might happen in the next chapter of the narrative (*I began to cry, bawling my eyes out until I couldn’t take it any more. It wasn’t fair. What did I do to deserve this? I wanted to go home, back where I knew where I was and everything had an explanation. I was confused, scared, and alone. I don’t really know how long I cried. It seemed like forever until I could stand up straight and shout to no one in particular, “Why me? What did I do? I want some answers, people, and I want them sooner rather than later!”*).

begin section **end**

WRITING SAMPLE CONTINUES 



STANDARDS-BASED COMMENTARY

but one had a keypad with numbers zero through nine on it. Curious what it would do, I began to slowly punch in my favorite number, 1609174. I finished punching the number into the keypad and waited. Nothing happened.

B1 “It was a stupid idea, anyway,” I thought as I walked

away. **B1** I took three steps when I heard from behind me,

“Transmission will begin in ten seconds.”

A3 I turned around to face the machine. A screen had risen

from the top of it, counting down from ten. **A3** I quickly sat down

in the chair sitting in front of it and looked up at the screen, staring in awe at what was on it.

A3 There was my head, blown-up on the screen. Next to it

were my “stats”. Stuff like my age, birthday, favorite color, **A3** even

Language. Grade 8, Standard 3 AND Writing. Grade 8, Standard 3

F L.8.3.a AND F W.8.3.d

L.8.3.a

Maintain appropriate consistency in style and tone while varying sentence patterns for meaning and audience interest.

W.8.3.d

Use precise words and phrases and relevant descriptive details to convey a tone (the writer’s attitude toward the subject: e.g., humorous, serious, or ironic) and to convey experiences or events.

F1 F1 Examples: 1 · 2 · 3 · 4

The writer contributes to the mostly effective style of the narrative by using verbals to add variety to sentences and to express ideas concisely (*...wondering where all my stuff was... overrun by my curiosity... looking at the list and reminiscing about each event... bawling my eyes out...*).

F2 F2 Examples: 1

The writer uses a series of brief clauses and a purposeful fragment to underscore the narrator’s terror (*It didn’t have a very definite shape; it was just a blob. A moving blob. I wanted to run, but my legs wouldn’t move. I was frozen in fear.*).

begin section **end**

WRITING SAMPLE CONTINUES ►



STANDARDS-BASED COMMENTARY

what I had for dinner last night. Why would a whole bunch of alien blobs have, or want for that matter, any of this information?

A3 Just then, a blinking blue button caught my eye. Wondering what it would do, I pressed it. The image on the screen changed to show a list of the major events of my life. **C** Things like my first day of school, my first boyfriend, and the day my parents got divorced. **A3**

B2 “Wow”, I thought as I scanned through the list. “I remember that day. **C** And that one. Ha! **B2** That was funny. Kimberly never knew what hit her. Oh, gosh. That one sucked. I couldn’t sleep for a week after that.” **B3** **A3** Each event on the list brought back lots of emotions. I sat there for a moment, **F1** looking at the list and **D** reminiscing **D** about each event. **B3** **F1** I found the off

begin section **end**

WRITING SAMPLE CONTINUES ►

**Language. Grade 8, Standard 1****G L.8.1.b**

Form and use verbs in the active and passive voices and the indicative, imperative, interrogative, conditional, and subjunctive moods to communicate a particular meaning.

G G Examples: 1

The writer’s sparing use of passive voice gives emphasis to an important turning point in the action (*I was soon hurled into a tornado...*).

button and pressed it. The screen sank back into the machine, and I sat there, suddenly feeling very lonely. I began to miss my family, my home, my life. Everything I'd ever known was gone, and I had no idea why. **A3** **B2** That's when I lost it. **B2**

E I began to cry, **F1** bawling my eyes out **F1** until I couldn't take it any more. It wasn't fair. What did I do to deserve this? I wanted to go home, back where I knew where I was and everything had an explanation. **B3** I was confused, scared, and alone. **B3**

I don't really know how long I cried. It seemed like forever until I could stand up straight and shout to no one in particular, **B4** "Why me? What did I do?" **B4** I want some answers, people, and I want them sooner rather than later!" **E**

begin section **end**

END OF WRITING SAMPLE ■

