

Year One, Weeks 1–3

The student begins with very brief copywork sentences of four to eight words, practicing capitalization and end punctuation marks. The beginning narration exercises allow the student to practice recollection and speaking in complete sentences; these exercises are short as well, around two paragraphs.

Week 1 spells out these developments; Weeks 2 and 3 are modeled on the Week 1 pattern.

WEEK 1

DAY ONE: The First Copywork Exercise

When the student first begins copywork, be sure to sit with him as he copies. Although it seems natural to you to reproduce the capitalization and punctuation in the model, the student hasn't yet learned to notice the proper form of written language. If he begins to write the first letter as a small letter, stop him before he finishes the letter and remind him of the rule: "What does a sentence begin with? A capital letter." If he forgets to leave a space between words, remind him to use his finger as a spacer; if he ignores the punctuation at the end of the sentence, say, "What does a sentence end with? A punctuation mark. What kind of punctuation mark is that?" Never allow the student to write incorrectly; the whole purpose of the exercise is to accustom him to the look of *correct* written language. And since the physical act of writing is so difficult for young students, always allow him to erase and correct; never require him to recopy.

Copy out one of the following sentences on first-grade lined paper, in neat print handwriting, for the student to copy. Choose whichever length is appropriate to the student's handwriting ability.

Explain to the student that these sentences are from the first chapter of *Little House in the Big Woods*, by Laura Ingalls Wilder. *Little House* is about a family that lives in Wisconsin in the 1860s, in a deep forest where few others live.

There were no roads.

The deer and the rabbits would be shy and swift.

Ask the student to copy the sentence in pencil on the line below the model. Point out to the student that this is a complete sentence; it begins with a capital letter and ends with a period.

DAY TWO: The First Narration Exercise

When doing the first narration exercise, remember that the goal is to teach the student to express herself in complete sentences. If she answers you in fragments, repeat the answer back to her in a complete sentence, and then have her repeat that sentence after you. If the student can't answer the question, read the part of the passage that contains the answer and then ask the question again.

When all of the questions have been answered, ask the student, "What is one thing that you remember about the passage?" If the student cannot answer you, ask one of the questions again, and take the answer as the narration.

If she answers in several sentences, ask her which of those sentences is the most important. Distinguishing between central facts and details is a skill which will be fully developed in the second phase of writing (Years 5–8, roughly corresponding to middle school and junior high). But it is important for the student to begin now to learn how to pick important facts out of a passage, rather than simply repeating all of the information.

Read the following passage to the student:

Once upon a time, sixty years ago, a little girl lived in the Big Woods of Wisconsin, in a little gray house made of logs.

The great, dark trees of the Big Woods stood all around the house, and beyond them were other trees and beyond them were more trees. As far as a man could go to the north in a day, or a week, or a whole month, there was nothing but woods. There were no houses. There were no roads. There were no people. There were only trees and the wild animals who had their homes among them.

—From *Little House in the Big Woods*
by Laura Ingalls Wilder

Ask the following questions:

Instructor: How many years ago does this story happen?

Student: *This story happens sixty years ago.*

(If necessary, you can explain to the student that this book was written in the 1920s. When Laura Ingalls Wilder was writing this first chapter, her childhood in the 1860s was sixty years ago. Now, we would say that the story happened almost 150 years ago!)

Instructor: Where did the little girl live?

Student: *She lived in Wisconsin OR in the big woods of Wisconsin.*

Instructor: If a man went north for a whole month, what would he find?

Student: *He would find more woods.*

Instructor: There were no roads in the Big Woods. Can you remember two other things that the Big Woods did not have?

Student: *There were no houses. There were no people.*

Instructor: Who *did* live among the trees?

Student: *Wild animals lived among the trees.*

Ask, “What is one thing you remember about the passage?” Write the student’s answer down on first-grade lined paper as he watches. This answer can be the same as one of the answers above.

DAY THREE: Copywork

Copy out one of the following sentences on first-grade lined paper, in neat print handwriting, for the student to copy. Choose whichever length is appropriate to the student’s handwriting ability. Both of these sentences are also from *Little House in the Big Woods*.

Pa owned a pig.

There was plenty of fresh meat to last for a long time.

Ask the student to copy the sentence in pencil on the line below the model. Point out to the student that this is a complete sentence; it begins with a capital letter and ends with a period.

DAY FOUR: Narration Exercise

Read the following passage to the student. Explain that the Ingalls family needed the pig so that they would have meat to eat in the winter; since there were no grocery stores, Pa had to raise the pig for food.

Once in the middle of the night Laura woke up and heard the pig squealing. Pa jumped out of bed, snatched his gun from the wall, and ran outdoors. Then Laura heard the gun go off once, twice.

When Pa came back, he told what had happened. He had seen a big black bear standing beside the pigpen. The bear was reaching into the pen to grab the pig, and the pig was running and squealing. Pa saw this in the starlight and he fired quickly. But the light was dim and in his haste he missed the bear. The bear ran away into the woods, not hurt at all.

—From *Little House in the Big Woods*
by Laura Ingalls Wilder

Ask the following questions:

Instructor: What did Laura hear when she woke up?

Student: *She heard the pig squealing.*

Instructor: What did Pa do when he heard the pig squeal?

Student: *He got his gun and went outside.*

Instructor: How many times did the gun go off?

Student: *It went off twice.*

Instructor: What did Pa see when he went outside?

Student: *He saw a black bear standing beside the pigpen.*

Instructor: What was the bear trying to do?

Student: *It was trying to grab the pig.*

Instructor: When Pa shot at the bear, he missed because he was in a hurry. What is the other reason that he missed the bear?

Student: *The light was dim.*

Ask, “What is one thing you remember about the passage?” Write the student’s answer down on first-grade lined paper as he watches.

WEEKS 2–3

Follow the same weekly pattern as above:

DAY ONE: Copywork

DAY TWO: Narration Exercise

DAY THREE: Copywork

DAY FOUR: Narration Exercise

Choose sentences of five to eight words and narrations of around two paragraphs from the student’s history, science, and literature books.

Over these two weeks, look for copywork sentences that contain the first names of particular people. Explain to the student that these are called “proper names” and should begin with a capital letter. Make sure that the student copies the proper names correctly. If the student randomly capitalizes other words, remind her to capitalize only the proper names as well as the first word in the sentence.