



Changing life stories

Football writing exercises

Written by Tom Palmer

ONE: FOOTBALL ARGUMENTS

There are lots of arguments in football. Watch Match of the Day and you'll see players shouting at each other on the pitch, as well as managers disagreeing in the post-match interviews. Sport is great for that. Was the ball over the line? Should the referee have sent that player off?

This exercise is to work with a friend to invent a conversation between players or managers, or whoever you would like.

Dialogue (or conversation) is a really important part of a story. And it can be one of the most fun things to write. Especially if you do the writing in pairs.

Get together with one of your classmates. One of you needs to be one football person. The other needs to be another. Choose someone you like – or someone you... like less! Then have an argument.

You can either write it down, maybe passing the piece of paper between you – in silence – so it is like a real conversation. Or you could record your argument live, then write it down afterwards.

Once you have written it, try and edit out things that don't work – and maybe add some more bits.

Then, when it is finished, you can perform it to the rest of the class.

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TWO: WRITE A FOOTBALL LIMERICK

Football and poems don't normally go together (although Paul Cookson writes a good one). This exercise is about using one of the most fun kinds of poetry.

Limericks.

It's a good chance to write nice things about a player or team you like – or mock a player or team that you don't like.

For instance:

*There was once a player called Wayne
Who some thought was slightly insane
But it just wasn't true
He is like me and you
And he certainly can entertain.*

There are two main rules to writing a limerick.

The first rule is that you need to use the right number of syllables on each line. Here is a plan for how you should do it.

One two three four five six seven eight

One two three four five six seven eight

One two three four five

One two three four five

One two three four five six seven eight

If you can't make it work exactly it doesn't really matter. It is more important for your limerick to make sense than for it to sound exactly perfect.

The second rule is that the ends of line **one, two and five** rhyme and that **three and four** rhyme.

Then, why not have a limerick writing reading once you've written it? Read them out in class and let everyone vote on which is their favourite.

THREE: WRITE A FOOTBALL MATCH REPORT

This exercise is to write a football match report.

First choose a game coming up and watch it. Or persuade your teacher to let you watch the highlights of a recent match.

Then, look at some match reports in newspapers and on the internet. Talk together about how matches are reported.

Look out for facts first. Facts you need to describe the game. Make a list of them as you watch it. Such as:

- Who played?
- Who scored?
- Was anyone booked or sent off?
- Were there substitutions?
- Were there any other incidents like disallowed goals or penalties – or did the keeper make a disastrous mistake?

Once you have your facts, you can write your report. These key pointers might help:

- start with an introduction, maybe saying how the game ended, whether it was good or bad
- write a short paragraph about each goal scored
- add a made-up quote from the manager or a player – or a real one you have found online
- end with a summary, looking forward to the next game

FOUR: FOOTBALL ANAGRAMS

Are you good at anagrams? How many words can you make out of the letters in your favourite team's name?

This exercise is a competition. You can work in teams or on your own. Take the name of your favourite football team and try to make as many words as you can from the letters.

If you want to work in teams, go ahead. Manchester United fans could take on all the Tottenham Hotspur fans. Get together with other fans of your team in the class.

Bear in mind you have a better chance if you support Brighton and Hove Albion than if you support Arsenal, as you'll have more letters to choose from.

You can decide, as a class, to add the full names of football clubs, many of which are called AFC, standing for Association Football Club. That will give you loads more letters to work with.

Good luck.

Oh – and no swear words!

FIVE: ENGLAND MANAGER JOB DESCRIPTION

There is always a lot of speculation about England managers in the newspapers. Will he resign? Will he be sacked?

If a manager does leave the job, the FA needs to find a new manager. And you can help.

This exercise is to write a job description for the England manager role, a list of ten things he should be good at.

For instance, being brave enough to drop a player who is not trying. Or knowing more about football than anyone else.

Think about people you know who make important decisions. One of your parents or carers? Your head teacher? The coach of the sports team, dance school or scout hut you go to? They are sort of managers. What do you think they are good at? How do they make sure people do what they want?

Think of great football managers like Alex Ferguson at Man U or Simon Grayson at Leeds. What are the best things about them?

Maybe you could work together as a class and come up with a list of ten things that an England manager should be good at.

SIX: RESEARCH A SETTING

When I write novels I often set them in places I have never been to before. But I always go if I can. I have travelled to Italy, Ghana and Moscow to research the Foul Play series.

I do that so that I can get my settings right. If you go to a place and just sit there you see, smell, hear and feel a lot of things you might not have been able to make up if you'd not gone.

As well as going to exciting cities hundreds of miles away, I also visit nearby settings. When I needed to write a story set next to a football stadium at night I went to a football stadium at night.

This exercise is a challenge to you. Find somewhere you have never been before.

At home it could be to sit on the other side of the street from your house and watch your house. Obviously make sure that your family knows where you are and that you do it at a sensible time!

In school it could be in a room you have never been before. Maybe the teachers will let you sit in the staffroom at break or dinner? Or you could sit somewhere in the school grounds you've not sat before. Or at the shops near your house.

Once you have a place you want to go to, take a pen and notebook. Make notes.

What do you see? What do you hear? Look at a person. What are they doing? What are they talking about? Is anyone laughing? Is anyone angry?

Take lots of notes. And, afterwards, look at your notes. Choose the best five things you noted down. Then put them together in a description of this place.

SEVEN: MEET A CHARACTER FROM A BOOK

In my five-part classroom read story, one of the characters comes to life and tries to kill me. I have always wondered what it would be like to meet one of the people I make up in my books and it was fun to do it in that story.

Is there a character from a book that you would like to meet? Maybe Tracy Beaker or Horrid Henry? Maybe someone more frightening, like a villain or a ghost.

This exercise is for you to imagine meeting a character. If you can't think of a good one from a book, how about one from a film.

Now write about what would happen if you met this character.

Before you start, ask yourself some questions.

What would you say to them? What would they say to you?

Maybe they would need your help. What sort of help would they need?

Maybe (if they were bad) they are coming to get you. What would they want from you? How could you stop them?

Once you have a character in mind and you know what they want from you, you have the makings of a short story.

Now all you need is a first sentence. If you need a hand with that, how about:

As I came round the corner I saw [the character]. I couldn't believe it. The real [character], from my favourite book. Then he/she asked for my help. He/she said....

OR

I started to run as soon as I saw [character]. I didn't need to think twice. I knew what he/she might do....

EIGHT: WRITE TO A FOOTBALLER

Who is your favourite footballer?

If he or she walked into your classroom now, what would you say to him or her?

Wouldn't it be good if we could tell our favourite player what we thought of them?

Maybe you'd like to congratulate them on the goal they scored last week?

Maybe they've been injured for months and you'd like to send them a message to say you hope they're doing okay?

This is your chance to do that. This exercise is to write a letter to a footballer – then to send it.

It might be good to start by thinking of what you will say to them. Use the ideas above.

Or think of some more.

Maybe you could do a bit of research on them – in books, newspapers and on the internet – to find out what they have achieved as a footballer. You could write to thank them for what they have done for the team they play for, to remind them what a great footballer they are.

Or maybe you could send them your favourite joke. Or write them a poem.

Once you've written the letter, look up the address of the football club they play for on the internet.

Then post it. Include your school address and see if they write back.

NINE: WRITE TO A FOOTBALL AUTHOR

Is there a football book you love? A story? A fact book? A history? Anything? Or do you read the local newspaper about your team and enjoy reading what the football journalist writes?

Have you thought of writing to them?

Most authors and journalists don't get many letters. They'd love to hear from you.

You could ask them a question.

You could tell them what you like about what they have written.

You could even say what you would like them to write next.

You could tell them what else you like to read.

Try making a list of three things you'd like to say to them before you start the letter.

When you have written the letter, you will need to find their address. It is easy to find the address of a newspaper on the internet or in the front of the paper. If you are writing to an author, find out who their publisher is, then look in the front of any of their books and the address will be listed there.

Writers are much more likely to reply to you than footballers. Wait to see which author writes back to your class first.

TEN: WRITE A NON-FICTION BOOK

Not all the best books are fiction or stories. Loads of books are about facts. People love facts.

This exercise is a challenge to your class to write a football fact book. Each pupil in your class could write a page – or more.

First you need to think what sort of fact book you want to write. Do you want to create a book that has facts about great sports people that you admire? Or would you rather write about sports teams?

Have a look at some sports fact books in your school or public library. Is there one you would like to model your book on?

Once you have decided as a class, each of you needs to choose a subject. A player or a team.

Next you need to research facts about your player or team. How many goals have they scored? How many cups have they won? Also, you'll need to find a good photo of them to illustrate your page. Can you find an interview with the player that has a useful quote on it that you could include?

Once you have lots of facts try and lay them out on a page so that they look good.

Perhaps the class would like to choose one or two people to edit the book. An editor looks at what everyone is writing and makes sure it all looks and sounds good. It could be your teacher – or some of the more confident children in your class.