

In Common: Effective Writing for All Students Collection of All Student Work Samples, K-12

By The Vermont Writing Collaborative, with Student Achievement Partners and CCSSO

Ninth and Tenth Grade
Range of Writing Informative / Explanatory
Writing Samples

File Name: I9-10R Secret Communication of Wolves

Informative/Explanatory

Grade 9-10

Range of Writing

The Secret Communication of Wolves

A long piercing howl shatters the quiet night of a northern forest. The howl grows into a chorus of yelps and barks, and the valley echoes to the chilling sound. The leader of the pack starts the noise, while other pack members, as well as other wolf packs, join in (O'Toole 22).

Among wolves, communication is a very highly developed skill.

For instance, the howl of the pack leader has many different meanings. Most of the time a lone howl is a warning for other packs. It tells them to stay away, for there are many young to be protected and food to be guarded (O'Toole 23). A howl can also be a way of marking their territory. Many wolves howl when they feel another pack is too close. Some wolves howl when they are lost or trying to find another member of the pack. Most wolves use this howl at least once a day to locate missing pups or other pack members (Primate).

To wolves, the territory that they occupy (the territory of some packs may cover 20-120 square miles) is like a house to a human being. They feel that they must protect it all times, and, other packs must not trespass. Neighboring packs may share up to a mile of territory, but rarely will they share more than that (Primate). All wolves know that if they run through another pack's territory, they run the risk of being killed (Primate). In addition, wolves mark their territory by scent (mostly urine). This helps all wolves know where their territory begins.

Introduces the topic: The writer gives context that sets the stage for the essay; includes **topic / focus** of the piece, which previews what is to follow (the ways and

Uses precise language and domain-specific vocabulary to manage the complexity of the topic

Uses appropriate, varied transitions to clarify relationships among ideas and concepts and create cohesion

Like humans, the wolf has three main avenues of communication,

postural (body language);
vocal (the howl or snarl);

and olfactory (scent) (Wolfhaven). The scent is the most commonly used, and probably the most important. Besides marking territory, it helps show food ownership, as well as acting as a road map for themselves. Wolves also have scent glands between their toes, which leaves their scent wherever they go (Primate).

Moreover, much communication is done through body language. Many postures have been evolved

to reduce conflict and aggression among pack members. Facial expressions are the most obvious. Generally, bared teeth with ears erect and pointed back can indicate a threat by a dominant male (Wolfhaven). In contrast, a closed mouth, slitlike eyes, and ears pulled forward (and close to their head) will most likely indicate subordinate behavior (Wolfhaven). Wolves also use their tail position to communicate emotion. Threatening wolves hold their tails high, almost perpendicular, while more submissive wolves lower themselves before dominant pack members. These lower class members often have their tails tucked between their legs (Primate). A wolf that has been defeated in a fight can avoid being attacked by its victorious companion by taking a posture similar to that of a pup begging for food (University of Oklahoma Press 91).

Organizes complex ideas, concepts, and information to make important connections, the various factors in the communication of wolves

Develops topic with well-chosen, relevant, sufficient, accurate facts and concrete details

Wolves must communicate at all times when they are hunting. They have to work together to catch most of their food (due to the size of the food that they hunt). The concept that wolves use is called the “Pincer Attack” (Baily 91). When using the pincer attack, the pack splits in two groups and surround the prey (mostly deer, sheep, and other medium-sized mammals). One of the groups causes a diversion, while the other half ambushes the helpless prey. Wolves can move quickly and quietly. Many of them operate on stamina rather than on sudden bursts of speed (Baily 85). Because of the cooperation of the group, when it comes to hunting, the pack usually ends up victorious, and they have enough food for a couple of days. If they pack gets a big kill,

Establishes and maintains a formal style and objective tone while attending to norms and conventions of

Develops topic with well-chosen, relevant, sufficient, accurate facts and concrete details

then the leader will have the next strongest male guard the kill during the night to keep off other animals.

Like other animals, wolves communicate with a social ladder. They have one dominant male (usually the leader of the pack) (Primate). This wolf has many responsibilities. He has to make sure that all the other wolves don't get out of line, and makes sure that there is harmony among the group. The pack leader does this by barking at the other wolves and fighting with the other males. Normally, the pack leader will not fight with the females of the pack unless it is necessary (Timberwolf). With the leader comes a dominant female. Together they are known as the breeding pair. These two are in charge of the pack, raising the young, selecting denning areas and rendezvous sites, capturing food, and maintaining the pack's territory (Primate). These two wolves are also responsible for the offspring. Not many of the other wolves mate for offspring because that is the dominant pair's job. Every year the dominant pair will produce one litter of pups. These pups take the place of the older wolves that are too old to hunt. Because the pack is so close and they communicate all the time, many of the other female wolves help the dominant female with taking care of the young (Wolfhaven). The dominant female will assign each pup to an older female. This helps the other females learn how to be a mother, and it helps the dominant female so she can hunt and not have to worry about taking care of her young.

Analyzes ideas, concepts, and information to make important connections

If only humans could communicate as well as wolves, today's society would be wonderful. Wolves' methods of communication are simple and usually resolve conflicts without violence. Wolves have been living together for many, many years so they must be doing something right. Maybe we can learn something from the wolves instead of trying to make them extinct.

Provides a conclusion that follows from and supports the information presented by articulating

In this assignment, students were asked to research a topic of their choice (here, wolves), and establish a focus within that topic (how/why wolves communicate). This writer provides some context about wolves' communication in the introduction and then states his main point that among wolves, communication is a highly developed skill.

The writer organizes ideas, concepts, and information clearly by category, using aspects of communication to develop the main point. The writer uses appropriate and varied transitions to clarify relationships and create cohesion ("*Like humans, the wolf has three main avenues of communication...*"). Within each chunk of the essay, the writer uses precise language and domain-specific vocabulary to manage the complexity of the topic (explaining the aspects of wolf communication), which he cites. While this subject does not call for much analysis, the writer occasionally analyzes evidence so that the reader grasps the complexity of the topic.

The essay has an appropriately formal style and objective tone. The conclusion follows from and supports the information presented.

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File Name: I11-12R McValues

Informative/Explanatory

Grade 12

Range of Writing

McValues

Looking at this ad, who would guess that those golden arches bring home approximately fourteen billion dollars a year customers worldwide? Who would guess that McDonald's is the world's leading food organization and employs over 28,000 workers in 120 different countries? The ad is, in fact, an image of a completely different nature. It is a calm, nostalgic looking ad; nothing in the peaceful summer scene hints that McDonald's has or ever will represent anything other than quality family living.

The characters in the ad are strategically positioned to inspire within the viewer, feelings of fun and familiarity. The picture located at the center of the page, depicts an older woman with a little girl—perhaps her granddaughter—beside her. The two are lying on their stomachs, propped up by elbows in the sand. Neither looks up as the camera clicks, catching them at play. The little girl giggles as her tiger toy leaps over the walls of her castle made of sand. Her grandmother looks on with a knowing smile, perhaps remembering the days when she used to play such innocent games. The sun shines down on their backs and speckles the older woman's face through her woven sunhat. Behind, their legs are crossed at the ankles in carefree swing—the girl in imitation of her clearly admirable grandmother.

Introduces the topic: The writer provides background information describing the McDonald's ad that he will analyze, and then states the main point.

States the focus / **topic** of the piece

Develops topic thoroughly with accurate evidence—concrete details, most significant and relevant facts for analysis of the images in the ad

Uses appropriate language, transitions, and vocabulary, and techniques such as repetition, parallelism, and imagery to organize the text so that each new chunk builds from one which precedes it to create a unified whole