Making Space for Moral Reasoning
in Economics Classrooms:
An Active Learning Approach

Writing-to-learn strategies help students engage more deeply with economics, especially when they prompt moral reflection. Through writing, peer feedback, and guided AI use, instructors can invite students to examine moral questions raised by economic tradeoffs in everyday life. This approach provides a model for strengthening writing-to-learn while helping students reflect on moral questions, including how they use AI in their work. The activity can be adapted for formats like policy memos or op-eds. To conclude, the paper offers a classroom example that asks: Should some things be for sale?

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1. Introduction

Economics instructors face a trade-off. How can they bring moral reasoning into the classroom without stepping outside traditional economics? Emphasizing positive over normative claims is important, but it may lead instructors to overlook the moral questions embedded in many course topics. Writing-to-learn activities grounded in real-world problems provide a way to integrate moral inquiry into the classroom while staying rooted in established teaching practices.

The approach responds to renewed calls for mainstream economics to engage with the moral questions it often outsources (Sandel, 2012a; Sandel, 2013; Satz, 2010). Sandel argues that the distinction between economic and moral reasoning is often drawn too sharply: "Deciding which social practices should be governed by market mechanisms requires a form of economic reasoning that is bound up with moral reasoning" (Sandel, 2013, emphasis added). In other words, economic reasoning cannot be meaningfully separated from moral judgment. This concern also appears in economic instruction. Jonathan Wight (2017) notes that most principles textbooks treat efficiency as a matter of science rather than a matter of values. Wight's analysis raises a tough question: Are instructors missing a chance to help students connect economic reasoning with moral judgment?

Helping students consider such questions begins with how we structure classroom activities. The following section outlines two approaches that support this goal: context-rich problems and writing-to-learn. These techniques use low-stakes writing and peer review to support student learning. Guided student AI prompting and revisions can be assessed through scaffolding and reflective writing, with support from the university writing center's best practices. The paper concludes with an example that instructors may wish to adapt or modify using generative AI. Instructors can tailor it with different questions or writing formats beyond a policy memo.

2. Strategies that Encourage Moral Inquiry: Context-Rich Problems and Writing-to-Learn

Instructors looking to integrate moral inquiry into their economics teaching will find two adaptable, hands-on strategies here. First, use a context-rich problem (Bangs, 2012) that places students in a realistic situation where they can write to engage with and learn from their peers and community. An example from Depro (2022) compares traditional and context-rich problems using this example from environmental economics:

> *A factory emits toxic pollution into the air while making widgets. People living near the factory breathe the dirty air when they go outside. Is this an example of a negative or positive externality?*

The example becomes more engaging and vivid when written this way:

> *During the summer, your family has received several local air quality alerts on their mobile phones. You have also read news reports about water quality issues affecting your community's water supply. Over dinner, your family discusses these events and wonders if there are any other environmental quality problems in your local area. You also wonder if these problems are worse in other neighborhoods. Does the problem warrant community awareness efforts? How might you advocate for your preferred policy with your representative in Congress?*

In sum, an assignment should be grounded in a realistic setting where students must apply

their economic thinking to the right audience and purpose. For example, a student may write an editorial to a local media outlet about the pros and cons of higher on-campus parking permit prices, rather than the traditional end-of-semester paper for the instructor.

With the context-rich problem in place, the literature suggests that a second strategy to support students' critical thinking is to incorporate low-stakes, structured writing and rewriting. Four papers guided the design of writing-to-learn activities. First, Cohen & Williams's (2019) suggestion to scaffold an op-ed writing assignment is a persuasive approach to semester-long writing activities that emphasize less formal writing and rewriting. Scaffolding and rewriting requirements are also often suggested to help reduce incentives to misuse AI for writing assessments.[1]

Ayadi and Onodipe (2023) highlight the literature on the benefits of writing-to-learn activities, providing instructors with an effective way to explain to students why they will be writing extensively in an economics course. In their words, "Rather than seeing writing as an end-product, writing [writing to learn] can be viewed as an opportunity for students to engage in critical thinking and learning. Writing solely for high-stakes assignments misses opportunities for low-stakes writing activities that could be powerful tools for learning. (Ayadi & Onodipe, 2023)." Adopting such a perspective gives students more and better opportunities to succeed in their learning about economic and moral reasoning.

Lastly, two papers offer additional ways to help students listen, think, and talk by evaluating shorter readings (e.g., paragraphs) and identifying someone else's big idea. Schmeiser (2017) shares examples for shorter writing to spark curiosity as well as the benefits of time-saving suggestions for peer review and assessment. Caviglia-Harris (2020) encourages "real-time" process approaches, which emphasize short writing activities that guide in-class peer review feedback and help students make clear and concise arguments. These papers set the stage for the example that follows: a step-by-step walkthrough for a one-page policy memo.

3. A Step-by-Step Example for Instructors

This section outlines an example step-by-step assignment that combines context-rich problems with writing-to-learn strategies to promote moral inquiry and economic reasoning. Since the assignment spans multiple weeks, consider introducing it early in the semester after the add/drop registration period has ended. By waiting, students share a common starting point and the same opportunity to hear questions and answers about it when it is introduced. The benefits of waiting are high, and students still have time to complete the scaffolding elements during the semester.

Students are more likely to stay engaged when instructors introduce the assignment as a sequence of writing steps that build toward the completed version of their work. The finished piece can be brief, often just one to three pages, but it is supported by writing-to-learn activities completed every one to two weeks throughout the term (see Table 1). The approach prioritizes the quality of writing over the quantity of words, allowing for more thoughtful consideration, practice, and revision. The structure discourages last-minute submissions by spacing writing tasks throughout the semester. Consider scheduling the final version of their work due three weeks before the end of the semester. The timing helps students stay focused without the added pressure of finals week.

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[1] Elon University, Center of Writing Excellence. If AI Detectors are flawed, what is the alternative? https://www.elon.edu/u/academics/writing-excellence/cwe-ai-detector-statement/

Step #1: Identify Question and Develop Context-Rich Problem

Instructors should begin by posing a question that encourages students to reflect on something important in the course. Normative questions that ask what ought to happen often work well. This paper's example uses the question: "Should some things be for sale?" The question draws on Michael Sandel's work on the moral limits of markets; however, each instructor should select a question that suits their course.

Next, collect short background readings to support the question. A few short and accessible texts can provide context. For example, to support the question in this paper ("Should some things be for sale?"), The *Boston Review* has published a forum on Sandel's book, *What Money Can't Buy: The Moral Limits of Markets*, featuring nine different responses from scholars, including Debra Satz (Sandel, 2012b). McCloskey (2013) also offers a lively and critical review. Lastly, the appendix includes a lesson plan using Sandel's (2012c) *Atlantic* article. These readings worked well in the classroom. Students especially appreciate the shorter *Atlantic* piece, but they have found all of them easy to understand and rich in perspective.

After collecting the readings, create the context-rich problem for the question. Generative AI prompts can help design the problem using a growing number of university writing center best practices[2] as a guide. For example, our writing center offers two guided prompts for brainstorming questions that are useful for developing context-rich problems:

- Overcoming writer's block: ask for an opening normative question related to [topic] and moral inquiry. Give me five examples.

- Customize the question: Give the AI a "persona" (resistant, supportive), a specific demographic (age, geographic location), or a specific expertise (lawyer, scientist), then submit prompts that mimic having a "conversation." Use critical thinking and disciplinary knowledge to compose prompts in response to the output.

Both guided prompts can also be used to help create a context-rich problem and reduce the cost of developing a new problem from scratch each semester.[3] Here is an example of the context-rich problem developed with the help of generative AI guidelines from our Center for Teaching and Learning and our Center for Writing Excellence:

> *During the fall, your community is currently debating whether an item should be for sale. Imagine a local community member has asked you to read an opinion article that considers whether the item should be for sale and asks for your view. In response to the request, you will provide a short one-page memo to the local community member summarizing the opinion article's primary argument for or against selling the item. Using economic thinking, you will then provide your response (agree or disagree) to the argument.*

Sharing examples of how the instructor uses generative AI during class also provides benefits for students, as it offers a concrete example of what the instructor considers acceptable AI use. In other words, it can help establish acceptable AI rules of the game while reducing the burden of creating context-rich problems.

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[2] Elon University, Center for Writing Excellence. Teaching Writing with Generative AI: https://www.elon.edu/u/academics/writing-excellence/suggestions-for-teaching-writing-with-generative-ai/

[3] Elon University, Center for Teaching and Learning. Creating Course Materials (i.e., How can AI help you?) https://www.elon.edu/u/academics/catl/tlresources/artificial-intelligence-and-your-teaching/

Step #2: Defining the audience

Next, have the students focus on defining their audience. For example, they might write a letter to a city council debating rent control or advise a friend about whether to buy a used car. This kind of exercise achieves two goals. First, it asks them to tackle real-world decisions that demand economic reasoning (Bangs, 2012). Second, it challenges them to grapple with real-world issues that involve competing perspectives, which Carrithers, Ling, and Bean (2008) describe as "messy" situations that "require thinkers to propose a 'best solution' and justify it with reasons and evidence." Their solutions should draw on both economic and moral reasoning and use relevant examples.

To do this well, students must ask focused questions: Who are they trying to persuade? Is that person likely to agree, disagree, or feel indifferent? Although the memo header and introduction may seem like minor steps, they are worth taking the time to do right. Naming a specific local audience in the "TO:" line helps students shift their attention away from the instructor and toward the intended audience. Carrithers, Ling, and Bean (2008) note that students often write for the teacher, not the audience they intend to address. As a result, they rely on jargon that confuses or excludes non-expert readers. Because they worry that short memos will not seem adequate, students often include more detail than the task requires (Carrithers, Ling, & Bean, 2008). Even when the prompt asks for local recipients, students often write to unrealistic figures, such as the U.S. President or heads of global organizations, rather than to family, friends, or others in their actual community. An unrealistic audience choice undermines the learning goal. Instead of practicing persuasion, students fall back on writing what they think the instructor wants. Defining the audience early helps students move from performing for the teacher to communicating with a real person.

The subject line should signal what is at stake and make the audience want to keep reading. The main benefit of the memo header and introduction is that it helps students clarify their position and tailor it to a non-expert audience. Additionally, provide students with guidelines on writing an effective introductory paragraph. It should include three elements: the context of the problem, the specific task the memo addresses, and the main point or purpose of the message. Figure 1 shows an example introduction that combines a student draft with editing suggestions from GPT.

Providing examples can sometimes lead students to write more formulaic introductions compared to when they receive only general guidelines. Rather than relying solely on examples, students can experiment with support tools after drafting their introduction. Generative AI, for example, can help them revise for tone, clarity, and rhetorical alignment and move beyond formulaic patterns. For example, Elon University recently released a privacy-enhanced generative AI toolbox for students, faculty, and staff. It includes tools like "writing review using writing-to-learn pedagogy" and "prompt polishers."[4] This example demonstrates how students and instructors use the polishing workflow to develop effective subject lines:

My original prompt:

Act as if you are the writer and oppose or support [item for sale]. You will make a great headline. The headline should be persuasive, concise, specific, and conversational in tone. The headline could be easily understood by non-experts and used for a NY Times, The Economist, or Wall Street Journal opinion article. Construct five examples I can review and edit with my creative voice.

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[4] Elon University Generative AI Toolbox . https://elonopenapps.azurewebsites.net/AItoolbox/toolbox.html

Prompt Polisher Response:

> ***Act as an opinion columnist for a major publication like The New York Times, The Economist, or The Wall Street Journal.*** *Take a clear stance—either supporting or opposing the sale of [insert item for sale].*
>
> *Write f**ive persuasive, concise, and conversational headlines*** *that could top an opinion article. Each headline should:*
>
> - *Reflect your position clearly (pro or con)*
> - *Be specific, not vague or generic*
> - *Feel punchy and intelligent, but easy for a general audience to grasp*
> - *Sound like something you'd actually read in a top-tier news outlet*
>
> *Your goal is to provide a mix of tone and style—some bold, some ironic, some straightforward—so I can review and adapt them in my own voice.*

Suggested Headlines:

- "Bribing Kids to Read Teaches the Wrong Lesson"
- "Will Read for Cash: How We're Undermining a Love of Books"
- "Reading Shouldn't Come with a Price Tag"
- "We're Not Raising Readers—We're Raising Contractors"
- "Paying Kids to Read Might Kill Their Curiosity"

When students reflect on and revise AI-generated subject lines, they see concrete examples and reflect on what makes a subject line engaging. Our writing center encourages students to reflect briefly on how they used generative AI and what they learned from the process. For example, ask students to give examples of what they found surprising, interesting, or troubling while using generative AI as part of their learning process. When doing this, require students to provide specific examples of changes. Do not just ask: "What surprised you?" Instead, ask: " What surprised you about the AI's response? Did you keep any part of it? If so, why? If not, what did you change?

Step #3: Selecting an opinion article

Once the students review the context-rich problem, they should select an opinion article related to it. Although instructors might be reluctant to schedule class time to visit the library to find opinion articles, the approach has significant benefits. After adopting the practice, most students picked a relevant opinion article on the first try. Previously, selecting an opinion article required multiple iterations because students conducted simple internet searches and identified news articles on their topic, rather than an opinion article. If the instructor chooses to visit the library, coordinate with the librarian well in advance to ensure that all parties—students, the librarian, and the instructor—benefit from the visit.

For this paper's example question, students are less familiar with the question of whether an item should be for sale or not. In similar situations where students are unfamiliar with the question, consider providing a small list of topics. For example, this paper's example

assignment provides a list of items discussed in Sandel's (2012a) book for students to choose from, as it has been a good starting point for students because it is clear from the item list that the question of whether the item should be bought or sold is likely to be contested (Figure 2). In the appendix, an example lesson plan and an article with topics ranging from body billboards to carbon offsets are provided. Giving a list helps them understand the nature of the exchanges they will consider and debate, and gives them a gentle nudge toward a topic. Some instructors may object that providing a list limits student creativity. That is a fair criticism, so instructors should consider offering students an opportunity to choose other topics based on their interests.

Step #4: They Say: What Position Does the Opinion Writer Take and Why?

Initially, students often lead with their own opinions instead of engaging with others' views. To encourage students to consider the opinions of others first, they should paraphrase or quote opinion articles using the strategies presented by Graff and Birkenstein (2024), with a focus on Chapters 2 and 3. One common challenge students face when doing this is losing focus on the main point and only summarizing everything in the article. Graff and Birkenstein (2024) identify this as a "list summary." They provide this classic example:

> "The author says many different things about his subject. First, he says . . . Then he makes the point that . . . In addition, he says . . . And then he writes . . . Also, he shows that . . . And then he says . . ." (p. 38).

As a result, students using only a list summary often struggle to compare their views with those expressed by the author. In other words, it fails to help students focus on the article's central claim, its supporting reasons, and the evidence provided. Identifying the key claim the student wants to respond to, combined with Graff and Birkenstein's paraphrase or quote strategies, helps students move from simply remembering the author's words to analyzing the claim and its justification.

Step #5: I Say and Conclusion: How Will the Student Respond?

To complete the assignment, students must decide how to respond to an argument they have read and understood. Following Graff and Birkenstein's approach, students use writing to take a position in response to an argument. Students begin their response by agreeing or disagreeing with the author's claim.

When students agree with an author, they should provide new reasons or examples that support the author's claim. The agreement should be supported by the relevant economic principles discussed in class. The most common weakness in agreement responses is that the student repeats the author's reasons or examples without adding any new insights. Another common weakness is the failure to apply a relevant economic principle from class.

Students who disagree must explain their position and support it with examples or evidence. This response should also apply relevant economic principles from class. Disagreeing may seem more manageable, but it often demands stronger reasoning and clearer evidence.

Controversial topics often lead students to ask which side they should choose. Students must make their own choice of position, especially when topics are open to debate. Students should understand that grades are based on reasoning and evidence, not agreement with the instructor. Trying out an unfamiliar position can sharpen a student's argument and lead to stronger writing.

Step #6: Final Stage

In the final stage, students begin shaping their work into a complete version of the assignment, whether written, spoken, visual, or another format. As they bring their work together, students start to see how early planning and step-by-step support help them stay on track. Students typically reach this stage about three weeks before the end of the semester. For fall courses, this stage typically occurs just before the Thanksgiving break. When the assignment comes this early, students tend to produce stronger work because it does not compete with final exams or shift the focus away from a high-stakes pressure assignment. The appendix includes a complete student example from Econ 101 that met course goals.

4. Conclusion

In conclusion, this paper responds to claims that economists often outsource or ignore moral inquiry by offering a new classroom teaching strategy. The approach combines two active learning techniques: writing-to-learn and context-rich problems. As student use of generative AI continues to grow, the approach includes a few examples of generative AI prompting rules, links to best practices, and a generative AI toolbox from one university. The instructor actively sets the AI rules of the game by modeling hands-on practices in the classroom with an emphasis on scaffolding and the use of written student reflections about their use of AI as monitoring tools.

The example outlined here is the result of extensive trial and error over several years. When first starting the activity, set reasonable expectations about planning and outcomes. Also, be prepared for both wins and setbacks on the first attempts. Classes tend to develop unique group traits, resulting in variation in student responses to the assignment. It is not unusual for one or more steps to go well for one class and not another.

For a principles course, the experiences were especially bumpy, even after subsequent adjustments and student feedback. Unsurprisingly, students' uncertainty about the medium of a policy memo contributed to the challenges they faced. A policy memo was more effective with students who were more experienced in upper-level classes. As a result, consider alternative writing formats for Econ 101 students, such as letters to the editor, social media posts, or narratives, instead of a policy memo. These all seem amenable to the scaffolding structure provided here.

One of the most significant barriers to adoption will continue to be the costs associated with grading, mainly when it includes real-time feedback. Consider using an online LMS Peer Review System for one or more activities to ease grading costs. The appendix includes a lesson plan using Moodle's "Workshop" activity, where students submit assignments, participate in online peer review, and receive feedback at each step of the process. Peer-review scores as a starting point for an instructor evaluation. In most cases, the initial scores and feedback provided using the peer review workshop are on target, with 10-15 percent of submissions requiring minor updates or changes. Since adopting the online peer review approach, the costs of grading the memo have decreased, while the quality of student work has improved.

Lastly, consider adding a culminating low-stakes experience during the last week of class. For example, add a friendly competition that complements the final stage activities. For example, students can create a single presentation visual (such as an infographic, slide, or poster) that creatively summarizes their semester-long work. During the last week of class, students bring it to class and post it on the wall. Students can roam the room, explore other students' work, and then submit a ballot for the best visual. Votes can be tallied to award gold, silver, and bronze medals, and these three students earn a small bonus of points for the final

exam. The culminating experience reinforces the assignment's goals and provides a fun and low-stakes way for students to practice thinking, writing, and giving feedback about economic and moral reasoning. The activity gives students ownership of their learning and shows how students can use economic and moral reasoning together.

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Appendix I: Example Lesson Plan Introduction to Writing Assignment

Duration: 15-30 minutes (During Class)

Learning Goals:

By the end of the lesson, students should be able to:

- Outline the situation, audience, purpose, and scope of the semester-long assignment

- Explain two reasons that Professor Sandel uses to support his claim that some items should not be for sale.

- Explore the list of items and assess which one they may choose.

Student Handout

Situation: In conversations about what makes a good society, a contested issue has been whether we should limit the use of markets. On the one hand, some argue that markets create wealth and prosperity. From this perspective, you might be wary of limiting the use of markets. On the other hand, others argue that you must come to grips with the expanding use of markets in everyday life.

The community is currently debating whether an item should be for sale. To encourage creativity, you can choose one of the twelve items listed in an article by philosopher Michael Sandel. Imagine a local community leader has asked you to read an opinion article that considers whether the item should be for sale and asks for your opinion.

In response to the request, you will provide a one-page memo to the local member of your community summarizing the opinion article's primary argument for or against selling the item. You will use Graff and Birkenstein's (2024) advice to listen closely and summarize the argument in a way that will be recognized by the person making the argument. You will then provide your response (agree or disagree) to the argument using one or more of the four core principles of economics.

Assume you have recently completed your Elon Core Curriculum Society Requirement, Principles of Economics (ECO 1000). You should support your response using the reasoning and examples you have learned in this course.

Audience: Your reader is interested only in a summary of your findings, conclusions, and recommendations. Examples include a community member, a civic leader, or a member of the media. In addition, the reader is new to the field of economics and doubts that the field has much to contribute to such questions. As a result, you will need to create a concise one-page policy memo that is understandable to non-experts, making your ideas stick. Also, follow the advice of Deirdre McCloskey (2019, 39): "Speak to an audience of human beings."

Purpose: You will practice writing for civic engagement. You will write to increase awareness, educate, persuade, or bring about change.

Scope: The writing assignment is semester-long and will include interactive in-class workshop activities (brainstorming, drafts, editing for conciseness, use of AI tools, and peer reviews).

Critical Thinking Questions

1. List the most important question   about the assignment that the instructor can answer to help you complete the semester project.

2. Sandel (2012c) asks, "Why worry about moving toward a society in which everything is up for sale?" and then provides two reasons. Briefly explain the two reasons and evaluate which is more persuasive.

3. Choose one item from Sandel's (2012c) list that you are curious about and consider to be the focus of your semester project. In your own words, briefly describe what the item is.

Assigned Reading

Sandel, M. J. (2012c, April). What isn't for sale? *The Atlantic*.

https://www.theatlantic.com/magazine/archive/2012/04/what-isnt-for-sale/308902/

Optional Readings (includes Critiques)

McCloskey, D. N. (2013). The poverty of communitarianism. *Claremont Review of Books*, 13(2), 37–40.

Sandel, M. J. (2012b, May/June). How markets crowd out morals. **Boston Review**, 37(3), 17–19.

Appendix II: Example Peer Review Checklist and Feedback Guide for "They Say"

Duration:

- 30 minutes for review of peer memos

- 10 minutes for review of peer feedback for own memo

Learning Goals:

By the end of the peer review workshop, students should be able to:

- Evaluate 3-4 peer submissions using the yes/no criteria provided

- Provide short, concise feedback for each question.

- Review peer feedback and submit an exit ticket with the interpretation of the most important revision they will focus on in the upcoming week.

Peer-Review Checklist and Feedback Guide

1. Does the student cite the author in an in-text citation? Yes/No; Feedback: List the author's name and year of publication.

2. Can you determine whether the author of the opinion article agrees or disagrees with buying or selling the item? Yes/No; Feedback: List agree, disagree, uncertain.

3. Does the student listen to the author and provide a correct, thoughtful, fair summary? Yes/No. Feedback: Briefly explain why or why not.

4. Does the student choose to summarize by paraphrasing or directly quoting the author? Yes/No. Feedback: List paraphrase or direct quote.

5. Paraphrase: When introducing the paraphrase or quote, does the student use a bland formula like "She says" or "he discusses?" Yes/No. Feedback: Suggest a more vivid or precise signal verb when introducing a paraphrase.

6. Does the student use the correct in-text reference? Pay attention to the punctuation. Yes, No. Feedback: If not, supply the correct in-text reference.

7. Does the student use a correct reference list? Yes/No. Feedback: If not, supply the correct reference.

The grade will be the number of yes responses out of seven. For example, if the peer reviewer answers yes to 6 questions, the score would be 6/7.

Deliver AI Reflection and Exit Ticket

AI Reflection

Write a short reflection on how you used AI in this assignment. Use the S.I.T. method and prompts to assist with brainstorming. Provide specific examples from your writing for each of the three elements below.

- What did you find Surprising, Interesting, or Troubling about using AI while writing?

- Did AI help spark ideas, clarify tone, or organize your thoughts?

- How might this shape how you approach writing in other classes or jobs?

Don't just ask: "What surprised you?" Instead, ask: "What surprised you about the AI's response? Did you keep any part of it? If so, why? If not, what did you change?

Exit Ticket

At the end of class, students will identify and submit the most important revision they will focus on in the upcoming week. There are many ways to use the exit ticket. I have found that www.socrative.com offers a subscription-free interactive web system for this activity. https://help.socrative.com/en/articles/2155304-deliver-an-exit-ticket

The Socrative Exit ticket format includes three questions:

- How well did you understand today's material?

- What did you learn in today's class?

- Please answer the teacher's question. The teacher's question prompts the student to answer a question about the lesson: **What is the most important revision I need to focus on in the upcoming week?** You can write the question on the board, project it on a screen, or verbally share it. Writing or projecting the question has been my most effective method.

Appendix III: Example Final Student Memo

TO:
FROM:
DATE: May 3, 2021
SUBJECT: Say No to Bribing Kids to Read

Introduction

Some adults believe that paying kids to read is an easy way to get kids to learn how to read. However, many others argue that bribing children to read does not yield long-term results. You asked me to review KJ Dell'Antonia's article about the alternatives to monetary incentives for promoting reading and offer my argument against traditional bribery. I encourage you to look at the key arguments I made for other ways to reward children to benefit their developing reading skills without monetary means.

Paying Kids to Read is Not Sustainable

In the article, "The Right Way to Bribe Kids," KJ Dell'Antonia criticizes parents using money as an incentive to bribe their kids to read because once their rewards stop, they will stop reading altogether. A professor of psychology at the University of Rochester, Edward Deci, insists, "Rewards encourage children to think of reading as something you have to be paid to do, not something that brings pleasure in itself" (Dell'Antonia 2016). The author asserts that young learners benefit from external motivation to enjoy reading. Still, the best methods include conveying intrinsic values. Dell'Antonia emphasizes that non-monetary rewards given by parents such as taking time out of their day by having "special time reading together or discussing a book" displays reading is something valuable to parents as well, which enables support in children developing reading skills (Dell'Antonia 2016). Monetization is not as sustainable as kids enjoying reading for themselves in the long run.

Best Way to Learn

I agree with KJ Dell'Antonia's claim that rewarding children with money will not benefit developing reading skills. Once the rewards stop, the children will not continue to hone their skills, and they will not foster an enjoyment of reading. Reading is essential for academic life. As young readers begin to understand the text and become fluent readers, it is vital to practice reading to make academic subjects more accessible. I believe that parents should encourage their children to read through non-monetary practices such as reading together as a family because it promotes a long-standing positive interaction since children derive pleasure by bonding over reading. Additionally, it is essential for consistent repetition with reading since many kids find it to be difficult. Therefore, by spending time and setting goals with books, this external motivation is key to long-term success. Children see the value of reading instead of just reading numerous books for the monetary incentive. Putting in time and effort adds intrinsic value to reading which incentivizes children to practice reading for the rest of their lives, without monetary benefit.

Conclusion

Overall, bribing kids with money to foster academic skills such as reading will not benefit their education in the long run because they will stop reading once the incentive stops. I urge you to consider the alternatives such as using "external motivations to read accompanied by powerful

messages about the internal joy of reading" (Dell'Antonia 2016). It is far more beneficial to spend time reading as a family, going to the library together, or having book discussions than pulling a dollar out of your wallet.

Bibliography

Dell'Antonia, KJ. 2016. "The Right Way to Bribe Kids to Read: [Op-Ed]." New York Times, Late Edition (East Coast), July 24, 2016, sec. SR.

Table 1: Example Assignment Sequence for the Semester Writing-to-Learn Project

Memo Element	Start Date for Element	Due Date for Element	In-Class Time	Example Activity
Introduction to Writing Assignment (Beginning)	Monday 9/2	NA	15-30 minutes	A Lesson Plan is included in Appendix I
Identify Question and Develop Context-Rich Problem **(Step #1)**	Monday 9/9	Sunday 9/22 11:59 PM	50 to 60 minutes	A generative AI Activity is discussed in the text.
Defining the Audience and Finding and Opinion Article (Steps #2 & #3)	Monday 9/23	Sunday 9/29 11:59 PM	15 minutes for review and AI activity.	Library Visit with Reference Librarian
They Say: What Position Does the Opinion Writer Take and Why? ***(Step #4)***	Monday 9/30	Sunday 10/6 11:59 PM	30 minutes for review of peer memos 10 minutes for review of peer feedback for own memo	LMS peer review workshop An example checklist is included in Appendix II
I Say and Conclusion: How Will the Student Respond? ***(Step #5)***	Monday 10/7	Sunday 10/20 11:59 PM	30 minutes for review of peer memos 10 minutes for review of peer feedback for own memo	LMS peer review workshop
Final Stage (Step #6)	Monday 10/21	Friday 11/17	10 minutes to review prompt	An example final memo is included in Appendix III
Infographic/Slide/Poster Competition (Conclusion)	Last Week of Class		30 to 45 minutes	Student voting using polling software

Note: The semester project spans the entire semester. There are seven designated days where in-class time is reserved—one for each memo element. "In-Class time" includes the approximate time reserved on the start date that allows me to meet my other course objectives. Students are expected to do the bulk of the writing for each memo element outside of class. The scaffolding approach has eliminated the tendency of students to create one-and-done efforts that produce an end-product at the end of the semester, the night before it is due.

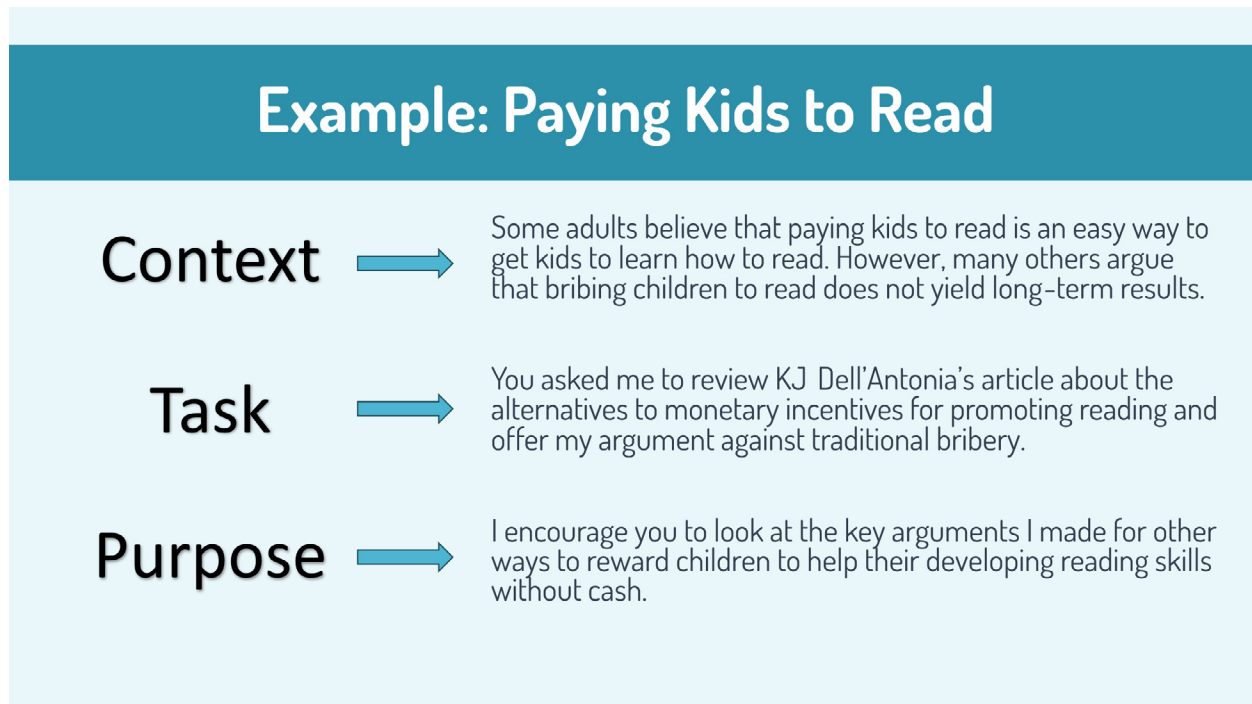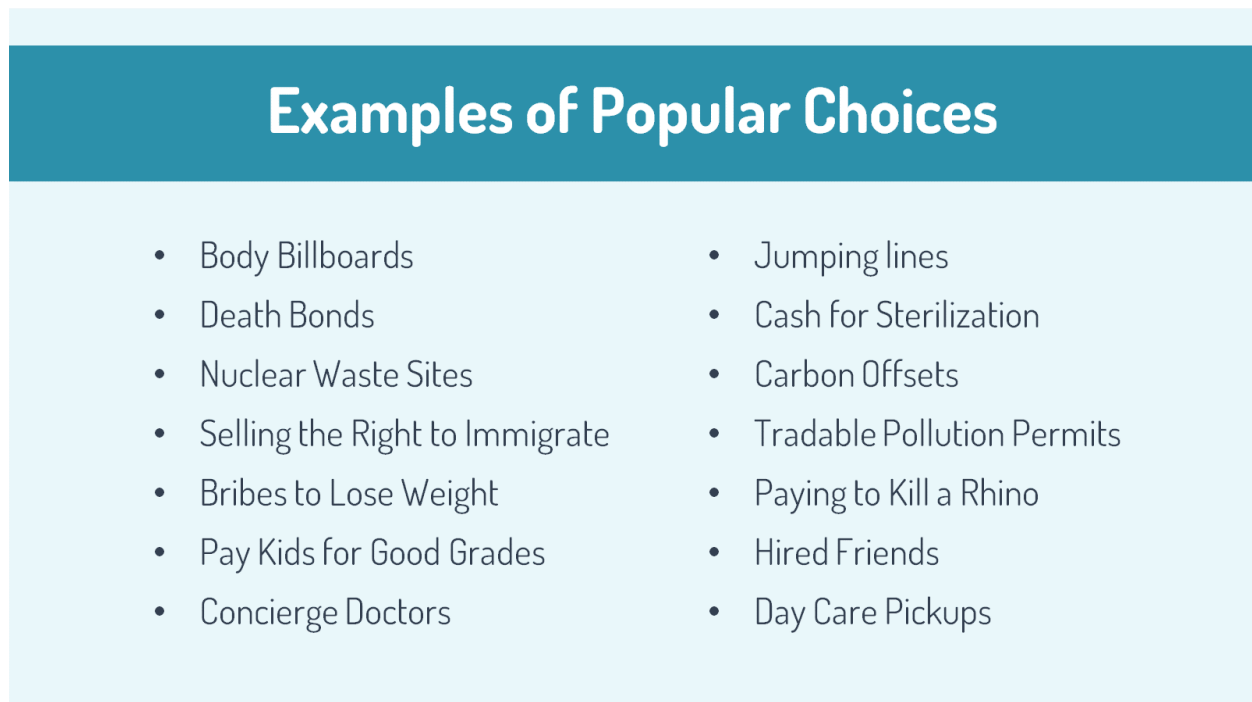Figure 1: Example of a Memo Introduction with Context, Task, and Purpose

Example: Paying Kids to Read

Context ➡ Some adults believe that paying kids to read is an easy way to get kids to learn how to read. However, many others argue that bribing children to read does not yield long-term results.

Task ➡ You asked me to review KJ Dell'Antonia's article about the alternatives to monetary incentives for promoting reading and offer my argument against traditional bribery.

Purpose ➡ I encourage you to look at the key arguments I made for other ways to reward children to help their developing reading skills without cash.

Figure 2: It is a Good Idea to Provide Students with Possible Topic Choices

Examples of Popular Choices

- Body Billboards
- Death Bonds
- Nuclear Waste Sites
- Selling the Right to Immigrate
- Bribes to Lose Weight
- Pay Kids for Good Grades
- Concierge Doctors

- Jumping lines
- Cash for Sterilization
- Carbon Offsets
- Tradable Pollution Permits
- Paying to Kill a Rhino
- Hired Friends
- Day Care Pickups

Note: Figure 2 provides an example of popular topics selected from Sandel (2012a).