

Reading and Writing Center
Kingsborough Community College

Writing About a Reading for the CATW “Be Lucky--It’s an Easy Skill to Learn!”

Reading and Writing about a Text in One Session!

The CATW will use relatively short readings as the basis of your writing topic for the test. The brevity of the reading is to allow you more time for writing. However, the best way to strengthen your reading and writing abilities is by using longer readings which give you more to think about. Often your teacher and tutor will use readings that are longer than the 250-300 word samples used in the CATW.

Let’s practice! Below is a reading written by a psychologist who has studied “luck.” Read it and then answer the study questions that follow. As you read, ask yourself, What really makes someone lucky? Can luck be learned?

Be Lucky--It’s an Easy Skill to Learn by Richard Wiseman, *The Telegraph*,
January 9, 2003

1. A decade ago, I set out to investigate luck. I wanted to examine the impact on people's lives of chance opportunities, lucky breaks and being in the right place at the right time. After many experiments, I believe that I now understand why some people are luckier than others and that it is possible to become luckier.
2. To launch my study, I placed advertisements in national newspapers and magazines, asking for people who felt consistently lucky or unlucky to contact me. Over the years, 400 extraordinary men and women volunteered for my research from all walks of life: the youngest is an 18-year-old student, the oldest an 84-year-old retired accountant.
3. Jessica, a 42-year-old forensic scientist, is typical of the lucky group. As she explained: "I have my dream job, two wonderful children and a great guy whom I love very much. It's amazing; when I look back at my life, I realize I have been lucky in just about every area."
4. In contrast, Carolyn, a 34-year-old care assistant, is typical of the unlucky group. She is accident-prone. In one week, she twisted her ankle in a pothole, injured her back in another fall and reversed her car into a tree during a driving lesson. She was also unlucky in love and felt she was always in the wrong place at the wrong time.
5. Over the years, I interviewed these volunteers, asked them to complete diaries, questionnaires and intelligence tests, and invited them to participate in experiments. The findings have revealed that although unlucky people have almost no insight into the real causes of their good and bad luck, their thoughts and behavior are responsible for much of their fortune.
6. Take the case of chance opportunities. Lucky people consistently encounter such opportunities, whereas unlucky people do not. I carried out a simple experiment to discover whether this was due to differences in their ability to spot such opportunities.

7. I gave both lucky and unlucky people a newspaper, and asked them to look through it and tell me how many photographs were inside. On average, the unlucky people took about two minutes to count the photographs, whereas the lucky people took just seconds. Why? Because the second page of the newspaper contained the message: "Stop counting. There are 43 photographs in this newspaper." This message took up half of the page and was written in type that was more than 2 inches high. It was staring everyone straight in the face, but the unlucky people tended to miss it and the lucky people tended to spot it.

8. For fun, I placed a second large message halfway through the newspaper: "Stop counting. Tell the experimenter you have seen this and win £250." Again, the unlucky people missed the opportunity because they were still too busy looking for photographs.

Relax and Open Yourself to Luck

9. Personality tests revealed that unlucky people are generally much more tense than lucky people, and research has shown that anxiety disrupts people's ability to notice the unexpected. In one experiment, people were asked to watch a moving dot in the center of a computer screen. Without warning, large dots would occasionally be flashed at the edges of the screen. Nearly all participants noticed these large dots.

10. The experiment was then repeated with a second group of people, who were offered a large financial reward for accurately watching the center dot, creating more anxiety. They became focused on the center dot and more than a third of them missed the large dots when they appeared on the screen. The harder they looked, the less they saw.

11. And so it is with luck - unlucky people miss chance opportunities because they are too focused on looking for something else. They go to parties intent on finding their perfect partner and so miss opportunities to make good friends. They look through newspapers determined to find certain types of job advertisements and as a result miss other types of jobs. Lucky people are more relaxed and open, and therefore see what is there rather than just what they are looking for.

12. My research revealed that lucky people generate good fortune via four basic principles. They are skilled at creating and noticing chance opportunities, make lucky decisions by listening to their intuition, create self-fulfilling prophesies via positive expectations, and adopt a resilient attitude that transforms bad luck into good.

13. I wondered whether these four principles could be used to increase the amount of good luck that people encounter in their lives. To find out, I created a "luck school" - a simple experiment that examined whether people's luck can be enhanced by getting them to think and behave like a lucky person.

14. I asked a group of lucky and unlucky volunteers to spend a month carrying out exercises designed to help them think and behave like a lucky person. These exercises helped them spot chance opportunities, listen to their intuition, expect to be lucky, and be more resilient to bad luck.

15. One month later, the volunteers returned and described what had happened. The results were dramatic: 80 per cent of people were now happier, more satisfied with their lives and,

3. Summarize the section: **3 Ways to Become a Luckier Person**. Try not to use more than five or six sentences (but cover the whole section).

4. One of the important tasks of the CATW is to pick up on an idea that you could relate to and discuss. Yes, you need to show you understand the reading as a whole, but you also have to focus on idea that has a special connection to you, whether because you have seen how it “applies” to life, society, your other reading or experience, or because you want to “dialogue” with the idea even to disagree with it a bit.

What is one idea from either question #2 or #3 above that you can relate to, and could probably expand on? Circle this idea and write it below:

I relate to, and could expand on, the idea that . . .

5. Think of the overall topic, as you stated it in question #1: Now what else do you have to say about it (anything that comes to mind that relates!)

