How To: Write Context/Background Information



**The context gives your reader background about the text and summarizes the story so that they know what they are reading about.**

**IMPORTANT: Always assume that your reader has not read the book you are writing about. Because of that, you need to make sure that you thoroughly summarize the book.**

1. **Think about the purpose of your context.**
   1. It introduces the title, author, and genre (novel, biography, essay, etc) of your text. This is also called the TAG (if this has not already been addressed in the topic sentence).
   2. It summarizes the main ideas of the text or the scene that you are focusing on.
   3. It gives your reader important background information about the text and its characters.
2. **The context has a few rules and regulations.** 
   1. It should always be written in present tense.
   2. It should be at least 2 sentences, if not more, to adequately describe the background of the text.
   3. It should sound like a summary that you might read online - academic and well-written.
   4. It should list all important information about the text (title, author, genre).
3. **Guidelines for writing context.** 
   1. Think about the idea that if someone asked you, “tell me what the book is about in 3 sentences,” what would you say?
   2. Include only the most important details and characters - don’t overtell.
4. **Examples of strong context/TAGs:**
   1. For an essay on *Black Boy*: In this scene in Black Boy the author describes his childhood coming of age in the segregated South. He discusses the violence and hunger which he was subjected to on a daily basis and how that influenced his transition from childhood to adulthood.
   2. For an essay on *Lord of the Flies*: In 1954, William Golding’s novel, *Lord of the Flies,* was published. Golding writes the disturbing story of a group of schoolboys who begin as civilized children, yet, as time goes on, and their social order crumbles, a lethal power struggle ensues for control of the island. What emerges throughout the tale is the epic battle for control between two characters. Jack is a power-hungry, manipulative boy whose constant promotion of destruction corrupts the boys. Ralph on the other hand, is a cautious and a natural leader who’s controlling manner causes the boys to react against him.
   3. For an essay on *Drown:* Junot Diaz’s autobiographically-based novel, *Drown*, tells the story of a young boy, Yunior, growing up in the Dominican Republic. In his early years, Yunior experiences the pain and suffering of deep poverty and struggles to face his life without the presence of his father. The story follows Yunior’s immigration to the United States, his subsequent downfall into drugs, and the trials of a life dedicated to a search for the American Dream.