

# Ba-Da-Bing! A Sentence-Imitating Exercise

Developed by Gretchen Bernabei from *Reviving the Essay*

When a reader gets “lost” in the writing, it almost feels like they’ve slipped “into the skin” of the writer. This is a goal of good writing, to engage the reader so much that they can imagine living the experience they’re reading about. So how do writers do this? As C.S. Lewis said, “Don’t say it was ‘delightful’; make us say ‘delightful’ when we’ve read the description.”

The Ba-Da-Bing sentence is one way to make the reader experience. The construction is easy and has only three parts: where the speaker was physically; what they saw; and what they thought. This works because sometimes writers need help making their moments translate to the same kinds of moments for their readers. This sentence-imitating exercise is easy for all ages and can produce rich results for the reader.

## TEACHING IT:

Draw three icons—feet, eye, thought bubble—on a chalkboard or overhead transparency. Find an important moment in your memory piece, and you will see a trick. Write a sentence with these three parts:



Where your feet went



what you saw



and what you thought.

Here’s an example: When I went (point to the feet) into the kitchen, I saw (point to the eye) my mom at the stove, stirring a pot. Mmmmmm, I thought (point to the head). Chili!

## Debriefing questions:

Was that difficult? Why or Why not?

How many of these would you want in your piece?

Is there only one way to punctuate this?

## Spin-offs:

- Find a “moment” in your piece and underline the sentence. Write a ba-da-bing and tuck it in. Repeat two more times. Share.
- Post ba-da-bings on sentence strips and compare sentence structure, tone...
- Change the “eye” part to other senses.
- Celebrate when students use more vivid verbs than “walked” and “saw” and “thought.”
- Write “Who Am I” sentences from literature and let students identify the speaker.