First Grade Writers

Units of Study to Help Children Plan, Organize, and Structure Their Ideas

Foreword by Katie Wood Ray

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Contents

Foreword by Katie Wood Ray........................................................................................................ix
Acknowledgments..................................................................................................................xiii

Introduction .............................................................................................................................1
Chapter 1: Building a Community of Writers .................................................................13
Chapter 2: Pattern Books.................................................................................................32
Chapter 3: Nonfiction Question-and-Answer Books.....................................................56
Chapter 4: Personal Narrative .........................................................................................76
Chapter 5: Fiction ..............................................................................................................100
Conclusion .............................................................................................................................121

Appendix A: Suggested Mentor Texts ...........................................................................123
Appendix B: Types of Paper .............................................................................................127
Pattern Books

Pattern book is not a technical or literary term, but it’s a helpful way to talk about the earliest books that children read conventionally. (By conventional reading, I mean reading and understanding the print, as opposed to the approximated reading that children do with fairy tales, folktales, and similar stories.) A pattern book has a predictable structure and repetitive language. Pattern books span a wide range of reading levels and may vary in how they adhere to or break away from a pattern. Most pattern books work like lists rather than stories. It makes sense to teach this unit early in the year because most first graders are reading books that contain patterns and because we want to begin our work on planning and organizing ideas with a simple text structure, one that is accessible to the full range of students.

Overview

This pattern book unit is about four weeks long, or twenty lessons. In the first few lessons, children are introduced to the idea of reading like writers, which Katie Wood Ray describes in beautiful detail in her book *Wondrous Words*. After that, children write their own pattern books, trying out some of the things they noticed in the published texts they read in the first few lessons. When they have finished at least one simple pattern book, children are ready to investigate more complex structures within the form. Throughout the unit, they learn to consider their readers by maintaining a consistent structure and topic. In preparation for
publication, the teacher introduces them to new revision and editing techniques. When the unit is finished and the children have celebrated their work, the teacher encourages them to reflect on what they have learned.

Goals

You must set reasonable goals for yourself and for your students based on what you observed in the last unit. The overall goals for the year have to do with writing quality, writing habits, community, and writing conventions. Knowing what you want children to be able to do by the end of the year, you can use your prior assessments to help you determine what you can expect by the end of this month.

One of the main qualities addressed in this unit is focus. You want students to be able to write whole pieces on one topic, pieces in which all the pages belong together. Working with a simple structure helps children achieve focus, which will help them later as they work with more complex structures. Also continue to work on habits of independence in spelling, choosing topics, and getting to work. When these are in place, children are able to develop more grown-up habits, such as learning from mentor authors or writing about a topic in a number of different genres. Your community is still pretty new, so your goals here may still have to do with keeping a respectful writing environment. You can also begin to teach children how writers discuss their work with one another.

Your goals for writing conventions should correspond to what you know about writing development in young children. If your students are using random strings of letters, you cannot yet expect them to use the spelling patterns of words they know on sight (like *make*) to help them spell new words (like *cake*). Rather, your goal should be for them to represent words with the beginning and ending sounds and sometimes the middle sounds. The following goals are based on my best guess of what most first graders need this month, but your students’ needs may be different.

Writing Quality

Children will:

- Focus all the pages of one piece of writing on a single topic.
- Make conscious decisions about text structure.
- Use a simple text structure consistently through a whole piece of writing.
**Writing Habits**

Children will:

- Begin each workshop by looking over what is in their folders.
- Choose sometimes to begin a new piece of writing and sometimes to revisit a piece of writing started on a previous day.
- Choose topics that they know and care a great deal about.
- Read and reread everything they write.
- Revise their work, with support and encouragement.
- Name simple writing moves and try them in their own writing. (For some children, this may mean matching the words to the picture, writing from left to right, or making the text follow a pattern. Other children may write vignettes, chapters of a nonfiction book, or steps in a process.)

**Community**

Children will:

- Be aware of which topics many of their peers have chosen.
- Offer help to classmates who need it.
- Share books with classmates.
- Share observations about books with classmates.
- Ask questions about and compliment classmates’ work.

**Writing Conventions**

Children will:

- Put spaces between their words. (Some may still use dashes.)
- Represent most consonant sounds with the correct letter or letters.
- Spell correctly any words that are on the word wall.

With these goals in mind, it is appropriate to expect two published pattern books in four weeks—a simple one and a more challenging one. Some children...
will write many more than that while others will struggle to produce just two. The emphasis in writing the second book should be on challenging themselves; how they do this will be based on individual preference and readiness.

■ Getting Ready to Teach

Writing workshop is most effective when we respond to and incorporate what children bring to it rather than adhere stringently to our plans. We give our students the best of our teaching and provide them with materials and a community of writers, and every now and then they clue us in to some great lessons we haven’t thought of. The true purpose for lots of preparation, then, is to be able to use children’s idiosyncrasies productively, not to avoid them. The better we gather and study our materials and the better we anticipate our children’s needs, the better we can use whatever happens in the classroom to help our students continue to grow.

Considering the Students

First graders exhibit a wide spectrum of ability levels and attitudes toward writing. Looking at the first unit’s assessment notes, you’ll probably notice that many children rank differently in different areas of your rubric. One child might have a terrific sense of community but struggle to come up with ideas for writing; another might write with tight focus but have trouble getting started. All your students will benefit from all your lessons, but you need to adjust to their individual needs.

The needs of children who have difficulty developing a sense of community are the most difficult to address, since their inclination is to alienate themselves from others, including their teachers. Children who disrupt the community often do so because they don’t feel part of the group and want to damage it. Excluding them further only confirms their feelings and makes the problem worse. You need to help them feel valued and loved. When possible, build their confidence in their own academic and social abilities. Validate all their positive interactions. Have individual conferences about how to respond to other children in the class and how to support the community. Some possible conference topics include the following:

- Saying “That’s so easy” can hurt the feelings of children for whom something is not easy.
• When something is easy for you and difficult for a classmate, you can help
her learn to do it better.

• Help classmates by reminding them of drawing, writing, or spelling strate-
gies; don’t do the work for them.

• One way to listen to a classmate’s writing is to listen for things you like so
that you can give him a compliment.

• When you share your work with other students, they get to know you better.

• When something is frustrating or hard for you, it is a good idea to ask for
help.

Children who are having trouble developing good writing habits probably
need help building their stamina for working. This will happen slowly and
incrementally. Catching them in the act of working productively and compli-
menting them can keep them going for a few extra minutes. You also need to
teach children a variety of ways to work during writing workshop: There are
other ways to use this time besides writing. In individual conferences, remind
children of the following:

• When you leave the meeting area, go right to your writing spot, open your
folder, and read the last thing you were working on.

• Sometimes it’s a good idea to look back through everything that’s in your
folder. You might find something you want to work on.

• If someone wants to talk to you and you are working, gently tell him to wait
until later.

• The teacher’s job in a conference is to teach something. Your job in a confer-
ence is to try what has been taught.

• The word wall offers some of the best spelling help in the classroom.

• Making a list of four or five things you know and care about most in this
world will help you have topics when you need them.

Writing-quality goals in the previous unit centered mostly on how closely
children identify with their writing. In other words, you want children to be
writing things that really matter to them and writing in such a way that readers
can understand the message. Children who have not yet quite gotten the hang
of this will need your support in planning what they put on their papers and
checking to make sure their work is clear and accurately conveys their thoughts.

Here are some possible conference topics:

- Your work makes more sense if you plan what you will write before you start writing.
- Remember to reread after every sentence to make sure that your words say what you want them to.
- You can tell when a topic is a good one because it makes you feel excited to write about it. If you’re not excited about your topic, you should probably pick a new one.

Finally, what you noticed when you looked at children’s use of conventions at the end of the last unit will determine what you need to teach to individuals or small groups. You will probably teach most of these things, such as letter-sound relationships or how to spell frequently used words, outside of writing workshop. Here are some specific suggestions you can make:

- If you remember learning a word in word study, you can find it on the word wall.
- The ABC chart or the alphabet tape on your desk can help you decide which letter to write.
- After each word, you need to move your pen over a little before writing the next word, just as you move your finger over when you are reading.
- People can read your work more easily if you try to put important information into the picture.

During writing workshop you can help children use this knowledge in their own writing.

Gathering Books

We must love the texts we choose as mentors for our students. Our teaching becomes infused with this tenderness we have for literature, and our children adopt some of it themselves. That said, it can be hard to look with love and admiration at a text like “I like to play. I like to jump. I like to run.” Nevertheless, I am acquainted with about a thousand such books, and there really are some I love—Our Granny, by Joy Cowley, for one. I can use it to help me teach some concepts with enthusiasm.
Before I teach this unit, I gather about thirty different pattern books from wherever I can: the classroom library, the school or local library, the school’s book room, the book club bonus points I’ve been saving for a rainy day. I know I may not use all of these books, but I make sure to include a wide selection of topics and reading levels. My definition of a pattern book is pretty loose; I don’t want to sift out anything that might be useful. The most important factor is loving the books—or at least liking them a lot.

As I read the books, I think about how they can become mentor texts in both minilessons and conferences. I ask myself what simple concepts a book can help me teach: labeling, writing left to right, word spacing. I notice specific ways in which it uses patterns: side-by-side lists, a repeated refrain, questions and answers. I also note how the pages of a pattern book work together to build a bigger idea: Are they parts of a whole? Kinds of a thing? Qualities of a thing? Steps in a process? I remember how a book uses beautiful or specific language. I write my ideas on sticky notes on the back covers and put the books in a basket on my desk. When I need an example of some technique an author uses, the books are right there, ready to help me teach.

Some possible mentor texts for this unit are listed in Appendix A.

**Making Paper**

It’s also important to design paper that will support your objectives. Early in the study children sometimes have trouble writing several pages on one topic. Because it takes them a relatively long time to write just a few words, they can forget what they are writing about before they finish. The first paper I give my students has four boxes, each of which becomes a separate page when the writing is finished. There is little room for words, which helps children write a number of pages in a short time while keeping a handle on the overall structure of the book. Then, gradually, I introduce paper with only two boxes and more room for words. When I am confident that a child understands the text structure, I encourage him to use a single piece of paper for each page of the book.

I make all of these papers available at all times so children can explore them independently. (Reproducible examples of these paper formats are included in Appendix B.)

**Teaching**

Though the specific lessons you teach will vary from year to year, they should follow this general sequence: reading like writers, writing with intention,
meeting a bigger challenge, revising and editing, and publishing. (Writing with intention is making sure that what is written on the paper matches the idea the writer intends to communicate. This concept is also discussed briefly in the introduction.) Drafting a general calendar for the unit (see Figure 2.1) will help you stay on track and reach your ultimate goals.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>TIME (A GENERAL GUIDELINE)</th>
<th>SECTION OF STUDY</th>
<th>WHAT NEEDS TO BE DONE IN THIS SECTION? CHILDREN WILL:</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| 2–4 days                  | Reading Like Writers | • Get to know several pattern books.  
• Identify some individual structures within the form.  
• Notice decisions writers make in their work, such as topic, structure, word choice, and voice.  
• Think about the effects those decisions have on readers.  
• Start entering this information into the first four columns of the writing decisions chart. |
| 5–7 days                  | Writing with Intention | • Choose and try some of the structures of pattern books that have been charted so far.  
• Be able to say what writing decisions they are making.  
• Keep patterns and topics consistent throughout their books.  
• Begin to think about how to match particular structures to their purposes as writers.  
• Fill in the “Have Any of Us Tried This?” column of the writing decisions chart and add more challenging texts in the first four columns. |
| 7–8 days                  | Meeting a Bigger Challenge | • Challenge themselves by trying new or more complicated structures from the writing decisions chart (parallel lists, questions and answers, counting or growing sentences, cumulative sentences, refrains, etc.).  
• Challenge themselves by adding more text.  
• Add to the writing decisions chart, especially the “Have Any of Us Tried This?” column. |
| 3–4 days                  | Revising and Editing | • Choose two pieces to publish. Repeat earlier editing technique and learn new one.  
• Learn new revision strategy.  
• Complete self-assessment questionnaire.  
• Celebrate! |

Figure 2.1  Pattern Books at a Glance
Reading Like Writers

The first section of this study focuses on reading like writers, a brand-new concept for many children. You will already be a budding community of writers, speaking of yourselves as people who write. You will have read several pattern books to the children the week before and talked with them about some features of this structure. You will now be ready to start walking in writers’ shoes, seeing with writers’ eyes, hearing with writers’ ears.

Reading like writers is an abstract concept. As with any other skill, you need to break it down for your students, teaching them the steps along the way. The goal here is that children begin to read like writers. So what part of reading like writers comes at the beginning? What part of the work do you do for them and what part can you expect them to do? One strong way to begin reading like a writer is immersing yourself in the kind of text that you can most easily envision yourself writing.

I spend the first three days of the study reading aloud a lot of pattern books and talking about them, jotting the children’s thoughts next to mine on the sticky notes. Supporting students when they need it and backing off in order to encourage independence, I ask them what they notice authors doing in these pattern books and why they might be doing them. I record their thinking on a large classroom chart (see Figure 2.2), which we will refer to and add to during the rest of the study. The headings of the chart reflect the central questions of our inquiry:

What Do We Notice This Writer Doing?

Why? What Effect Does It Have on Us as Readers?

Name It.

Have Any of Us Tried This?

(Katie Wood Ray explores the thinking behind this chart in depth in Wondrous Words.)

Possible Teaching Points

- Pattern books can have different structures. This is one kind of writing decision. You want children to notice and distinguish between the different ways in which pattern books can be structured. After you have read and understood a book together, look at how the author organized her or his ideas. I demonstrate this first in a relatively simple book, such as A Party, by Joy
Cowley, and again in a more complex book, such as *When I Was Little*, by Jamie Lee Curtis. I might say, “I’ve read aloud *When I Was Little* a few times, and we understand this book pretty well. We’ve talked about it together a few times. This time when I read it, I am going to look at how Jamie Lee Curtis decided to put this book together. Let’s see...she seems to use the words *when I was little* and *now* on every page. She goes back and forth between these two ways of starting a sentence. It turns into a sort of list of things that changed.”

- **Writers study the work of other writers, thinking about why they might have made certain decisions in their writing.** Extend the prior lesson by teaching children how to look at the effects certain writing decisions have on us as readers. This concept sounds fancier than it is, so children will need to see a demonstration. I show them a familiar book like *When I Was Little* and remind them how the pattern works, going back and forth between the past and the

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<th>NAME IT</th>
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<td>She names the thing that is in the picture.</td>
<td>It keeps the book simple. She tells us the name of the thing in the picture.</td>
<td>Labeling</td>
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<td><em>Water Changes</em>, by Brenda Parkes</td>
<td>She tells us a bunch of information and then ends with a question.</td>
<td>She leaves us with something to think about.</td>
<td>Listing, with a question</td>
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<td><em>Baby Animals at Home</em>, by Miriam Frost</td>
<td>She presents a question and an answer for each animal.</td>
<td>She doesn’t just want to tell us something; she wants us to think before she tells us.</td>
<td>Presenting questions and answers</td>
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<td><em>Well Done, Worm!</em> by Kathy Caple</td>
<td>She uses a pattern to tell a sequence of events.</td>
<td>It feels more like a story than a list.</td>
<td>Telling a story</td>
<td></td>
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<td><em>Our Granny</em>, by Joy Cowley</td>
<td>She uses rhyming words to create a rhythm.</td>
<td>It sounds kind of like a song or a chant when we read it.</td>
<td>Rhyming</td>
<td></td>
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<td><em>When I Was Little</em>, by Jamie Lee Curtis</td>
<td>She goes back and forth between when she was little and now.</td>
<td>On every page we can see how she is more grown up now than she was when she was a baby.</td>
<td>Going back and forth (seesawing)</td>
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<td><em>When I Was Five</em>, by Arthur Howard</td>
<td>He makes two lists. Everything is different except one thing: his best friend.</td>
<td>We can see the difference between being five and being six, and we can see what’s the same!</td>
<td>Making two lists</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td><em>This Train</em>, by Paul Collicutt</td>
<td>He uses opposites to show different kinds of trains.</td>
<td>We can learn about many kinds of trains.</td>
<td>Giving opposites</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

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**Figure 2.2 Pattern Book Writing Decisions**

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"Writers study the work of other writers, thinking about why they might have made certain decisions in their writing." Extend the prior lesson by teaching children how to look at the effects certain writing decisions have on us as readers. This concept sounds fancier than it is, so children will need to see a demonstration. I show them a familiar book like *When I Was Little* and remind them how the pattern works, going back and forth between the past and the
present. Then I show them clearly how this decision affects the reader: “The way the author uses this pattern really shows us how much more grown up she is now than she was when she was little.”

- **Writing decisions include more than just the topic.** Topic is one important choice a writer has to make, but there are others. Children’s ideas of a writing decision often have only to do with the topic. Teach your students about the other kinds of decisions authors make in their books, such as word choice, sentence length; sentence structure; text structure; interesting punctuation; use of dialogue, voice, and genre.

- **Even simple pattern books are the result of writing decisions.** Many children are just beginning to understand the concept of reading, never mind reading like writers. Show them how to make their own pattern books like the ones they are reading independently. You might say, “I know you were reading *A Party* in reading workshop today. I have a feeling you could write a book like that. Instead of a party, it could be about something you really care about, like painting or playing dress-up. What do you think? May I teach you how to get started on that?”

- **More difficult pattern books are the result of more sophisticated writing decisions.** A child may be able to read a more difficult book, like *When I Was Young in the Mountains*, by Cynthia Rylant, this early in the year. However, learning how a language pattern can link a series of vignettes may require some coaching: “I think she starts each page the same way for a reason. It begins to sound like a song to me. It also connects all these little stories for me, so I know that they all have to do with one another. What does it do for you when you read these repeated words?”

**Writing with Intention**

After a few days of reading books and discussing them as writers, it’s time to move on to the second section of the study. In these five or six lessons, children start to write their own pattern books. These lessons focus on intention: thinking about what you are going to write before you get to work, imagining how you are going to write, rereading your work, and considering your readers—in other words, making your own writing decisions. Because the particular kind of writing decision you want to emphasize is that of structure, you should expect the children to be able to name the structure they are going to try in their writing and to say why they are trying it.
Continue to add to the writing decisions chart, especially the “Have Any of Us Tried This?” column (see Figure 2.3). As children explore different writing decisions in their books, copy their work and tape it to the chart. This makes the chart an even more useful reference. Students can now see not only how published writers work but also how writers in their own class make decisions in their writing. They need time to explore using text structure differently in pattern books, and they need the freedom to take risks—to try things that may not work out. Encourage them to try new structures rather than become comfortable in a routine type of writing. Most children will write a few books this week and will have at least tried several of the structures they identified in the first few days of the study.

Possible Teaching Points

- **One pattern writers use to create books is labeling.** Some pattern books have only one or two words on each page, words that name the item depicted in the illustration. Teach children how to make a pattern book that works the same way. On a chart divided to look like four-box paper, draw four things that go together (and about which the students know and care a great deal). Then go back and add the words. Children learn not only to make this kind of book but also, by extension, that they can make books like any of the books in their classroom.

- **Authors also use the back-and-forth pattern to create books.** This kind of book is like two pattern books on related topics that have been shuffled together. The pages go back and forth between the topics, describing how they are similar or different. A book about butterflies and moths, for example, could be a back-and-forth book. Show children how to make a book like this, pointing out that the topics are similar and different at the same time. Choose a familiar topic to help make this clear: “I’m going to show you how Jackie’s book about butterflies and moths is a back-and-forth book. You see, these insects are similar, but they are also different. Let me show you her book. ‘A butterfly starts as a caterpillar. A moth starts as a caterpillar. A butterfly makes a chrysalis. A moth makes a cocoon.’ See? She uses the pattern to tell us how butterflies and moths are similar and different.”

- **Writers create books using many kinds of patterns.** Any pattern that a writer uses in a book can be the subject of a minilesson like the previous ones. The important thing is to demonstrate, clearly and simply, how to make that kind of book.
<table>
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<th>TITLE AND AUTHOR</th>
<th>WHAT DO WE NOTICE THIS WRITER DOING? (WRITING DECISIONS)</th>
<th>WHY? WHAT EFFECT DOES IT HAVE ON US AS READERS?</th>
<th>NAME IT</th>
<th>HAVE ANY OF US TRIED THIS?</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>A Party, by Joy Cowley</td>
<td>She names the thing that is in the picture.</td>
<td>It keeps the book simple. She tells us the name of the thing in the picture.</td>
<td>Labeling</td>
<td>Dasha labeled her favorite toys in her book.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Water Changes, by Brenda Parkes</td>
<td>She tells us a bunch of information and then ends with a question.</td>
<td>She leaves us with something to think about.</td>
<td>Listing, with a question</td>
<td>Jackie's book makes you think at the end.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Baby Animals at Home, by Miriam Frost</td>
<td>She has a question and an answer for each animal.</td>
<td>She doesn't just want to tell us something; she wants us to think before she tells us.</td>
<td>Presenting questions and answers</td>
<td>Alexis did this in her book What Is in the Flowers?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Well Done, Worm! by Kathy Caple</td>
<td>She uses a pattern to tell a sequence of events.</td>
<td>It feels more like a story than a list.</td>
<td>Telling a story</td>
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<td>It sounds kind of like a song or a chant when we read it.</td>
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</tr>
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<td>When I Was Little, by Jamie Lee Curtis</td>
<td>She goes back and forth between when she was little and now.</td>
<td>On every page we can see how she is more grown up now than she was when she was a baby.</td>
<td>Going back and forth (seesawing)</td>
<td>Jackie did this in her book about butterflies and moths.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>When I Was Five, by Arthur Howard</td>
<td>He makes two lists. Everything is different except one thing: his best friend.</td>
<td>We can see the difference between being five and being six, and we can see what's the same!</td>
<td>Making two lists</td>
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<td>This Train, by Paul Collicutt</td>
<td>He uses opposites to show different kinds of trains.</td>
<td>We can learn about many kinds of trains.</td>
<td>Giving opposites</td>
<td>Owen wrote about food that is good and food that isn't good. Owen and Sarah both wrote books that do this!</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>When I Was Young in the Mountains, by Cynthia Rylant</td>
<td>She begins each page with the same words and then describes a little scene from her life.</td>
<td>The pattern helps us see how all the scenes go together.</td>
<td>Linking scenes (vignettes)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hairs/Pelitos, by Sandra Cisneros</td>
<td>She goes back and forth between the two languages she speaks, English and Spanish. There is a pattern, but it changes a little.</td>
<td>Maybe she wants us to know that her family is from two places at the same time.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Birthday Presents, by Cynthia Rylant</td>
<td>She counts the years in which she received various birthday presents. She writes a lot.</td>
<td>We get to watch her grow up.</td>
<td>Counting the years</td>
<td>Rebecca wrote a book that shows how she has grown up over time.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Figure 2.3  Updated Chart of Pattern Book Writing Decisions
Writers use a consistent pattern throughout a whole book. When coming back to a piece of writing started on a previous day, it’s important for children to read what they’ve already written before continuing to write so that the pattern will be consistent. If a child wants to change a pattern, she should change it throughout the whole book, not just on the last pages. Demonstrate this with a piece of writing you have created ahead of time that does not stay on one topic or is not finished. Show how you stop and ask yourself, “How is my pattern working? If I add more pages, what do I need to do to make sure it keeps working the same way? If some pages don’t match, I can either change them or just take them out and make a whole new book out of them.”

Writers choose a pattern that matches their purpose. Some ideas lend themselves to certain kinds of patterns. A book about butterflies and moths could use opposite words to highlight the differences between the two insects, or it could contain side-by-side lists to show similarities and differences. A book about favorite toys or candy might use the same sentence structure throughout but have a surprise ending, thus giving one thing special status above a group of similar things. Demonstrate how you might decide to use a particular pattern to help get a point across more clearly: “Well, I like Skittles and Necco wafers and Redhots, but I absolutely love Hot Tamales! I could use a pattern that is the same for all the candy I like and then change it to show how special Hot Tamales are.”

Writers keep the whole book on one topic. Some children will need support in staying on one topic. For example, a child’s book might say, “I play soccer. I play jacks. I play bingo. My friend Joe-Joe is fun.” If a new and captivating topic enters a child’s mind as he is writing about another one, he should explore it in a new piece of writing rather than try to finish the old piece with the new topic in mind. Teach your students that it can be a good idea to start a new piece of writing without finishing the current one: “Well, this pattern book is about animals I like, but now I want to write about the games I play on the weekend. I could just add that on to this book, but that wouldn’t really make sense. I’m going to save this animal book for later and start a whole new book about the games.”

Writers make sure the pages go together. Even after teaching the previous lesson, you may still notice that a child has a book in which some of the pages do not seem to belong. Make a similar book to use as a demonstration tool and say, “Watch how I look through my book to see if the pages go together.”
This page has my mom, and this page has my dad. OK, those two go together; let’s see what’s next. My pencil?!? That does not go with my mom and my dad! My mom and my dad are people in my family, and my pencil is one of my tools for writing workshop. I need to take that page away and add a few more pages that go with my mom and my dad. Maybe other people in my family? Trying the same thing in her own book will be less scary for a child if she has already seen you do it and knows it is not such a big deal.

- If writers can’t read their writing or if it doesn’t make sense, they stop and fix the problem. There are a number of reasons writing can be hard to read, and a single lesson can cover all of them: penmanship, spelling, using words that get in the way of understanding the message. Leave it up to children to decide whether their writing makes sense and looks right and to fix it if it does not. Show them how you read your words for meaning, sense, spelling, and neatness (not that their writing has to be perfectly neat, but the letters have to be formed well enough that someone can tell what they are). I tell them, “When you see problems, don’t beat yourself up but simply fix the issue and move on.”

Meeting a Bigger Challenge

This section of the study digs deeper into the idea of writing with intention, emphasizing trying new ideas and meeting a challenge. Children start to write more text, trying different structures for their pattern books or adding more information to each page. This is a time of intense work, but don’t push children to do different work every day. You simply want students to work on one piece of writing over several days. Meeting a challenge is going to mean different things to different children. I use writing samples from the class to help me illustrate possible challenges. Again, post this work in the “Have Any of Us Tried This?” section of the chart.

Possible Teaching Points

- One way to meet a bigger challenge is to write more words on each page. Some children will now be writing book after book, with some folders containing twenty books! Congratulate children on their productivity and gently steer them toward writing fewer books with greater detail or elaboration. A good way to demonstrate this is to prepare a fairly simple pattern book and show the class how you can add information to it. A book could go from “I like apples. I like oranges” to “I like apples. There are lots of kinds of apples,
but my favorite is Gala. Apples have seeds, and if you cut them in half a certain way, the seeds make a star.”

- **Another way to meet a challenge is to write about a more complicated idea.** You will need to teach some children how to use more sophisticated structures to help communicate their ideas. Knowing a variety of books well will come in handy. Guide children to books that match their ideas. For example, Klara wanted to write about her family in both Polish and English. Instead of writing everything there is to know about the members of her family, she wanted to include one thing they all have in common (being Polish) and one thing that is different about them all. She was able to get inspiration from *Hairs/Pelitos*, by Sandra Cisneros (see Figure 2.4). Rebecca wanted to write about her birthday parties as a window into how she has grown up a little more each year of her life. She found help in *Birthday Presents*, by Cynthia Rylant (see Figure 2.5). Other possible mentor texts for writing about a more complicated idea are listed in Appendix A.

- **Writers have things they do when they think they are done.** Even though you’ve already taught a minilesson about this, some children will still need help. A classroom chart of things to do when you think you are done is a good place to start. Have conferences on this topic as necessary, perhaps making an individual checklist of things to do when a particular child says she’s done. You can also give individual advice: “Take a walk around the classroom without disturbing any other writers and then sit down and get to work,” or “Look at one book from the class library for five minutes and then get back to work.” You may not be able to force children to build stamina, but you can make sure that when they run out of it, they do not bother anyone. This will help them for years to come!

- **Writers use what they know to help them spell what they don’t know.** Children who ask you how to spell certain words may be ready and able to transfer spelling skills. I say, “If you know how to spell and, then you also know how to spell hand, and you have a pretty good idea how to spell candy or panda.” When you help children gain independence as spellers, you can use more of your time teaching them to be better writers.

**Revising and Editing**

The final section of the study is a short one. It involves getting ready for the final celebration and should take about three days. Children choose two pieces to publish, one from the first round of writing and one from the second. In the
My hair is blond and a little tiny bit curly.

My dad has hair a little bit up.

Figure 2.4 Hair/Włosy, by Klara
prior unit, you introduced a revision strategies chart and an editing checklist. So far, each has only one item on it. In this study (and all the rest), you will add another item to each and ask students do some basic editing and polishing of their work.

**Possible Teaching Points**

- **Writers take away pages or words that do not seem to belong.** In the last unit, you taught children how to add to their ideas. This month, teach the complementary strategy of taking away pages, sentences, or words that do not help their pieces. Refer back to the lessons about keeping the whole book on one topic. Encourage children to remove pages from their books that do not seem to belong. Also, ask them to make sure they do not have extra words, perhaps ones that are left over from a previous revision. The key strategy here is to get them to reread their work, asking, “Does this go with the rest of my book?” after every page.

*Figure 2.5 My Birthdays, by Rebecca*
• **One way to begin or end a pattern book is by saying what the whole book is about.** In introducing pattern books, you probably synthesized information, saying what the whole book was about, not just restating what was written on some of the pages. Some children may be ready to try this with their writing as well. Demonstrate this with a pattern book that you have prepared in advance. For example, I show a book I have made that says, “Our classroom has a block center. We like to build things in there. Sometimes people work on a building for a whole week. Our classroom has a science observation center. The teacher puts out different kinds of things from nature for us to look at and sketch. We have a microscope and magnifying glasses so we can see things close up.” There are a few more similar pages. Then I show how I can make a new page for the beginning or end of this book that encompasses the whole thing: “Our classroom has lots of centers. They are fun and they also help us learn.”

• **Writers make sure their sentences end with periods and begin with capital letters.** Remember that the skill is not so much putting periods and capitals in the right places as it is understanding what a sentence is! It doesn’t make sense to get into subjects and predicates with primary writers. Instead, rely on intuition. Prepare a demonstration text by writing a few sentences that look and sound pretty much like those your students write but without periods or capitals. Then show children how you read your writing to yourself slowly, listening for the times your voice wants to stop. “Usually, my voice wants to stop at the ends of sentences. ‘My friend Julia has a really big lawn mower.’ I heard my voice stop right then; did you hear it? Let me make sure that’s a whole idea. ‘My friend Julia has a really big lawn mower.’ Yep! That’s a whole idea, so I will put a period there. If it just ended at has or big, that wouldn’t be the whole idea. Of course, the very next letter after a period has to be capital, so I’ll just do that right now.”

• **Writers don’t forget previous revision and/or editing strategies.** Though you have posted the revision and editing checklists from the first unit as charts in the classroom, not everyone will be using them. You will undoubtedly need to teach children to remember to use the strategies they have learned for editing and revision. Model this with the same piece of writing you used in prior editing and revision lessons. “I checked my capitals and periods yesterday. Today I’m going to look at my piece of writing and make sure there are spaces between all the words. I’m also going to see if I want to add more information.”
Publishing

At the end of the unit, have a grand celebration to which you invite parents and friends. Your last celebration was small and intimate to help a fragile new community bond. This month your community is strong enough to invite loved ones to see what you have created together. Many parents work during the day, but they will make an effort to get to their children’s writing celebrations if they can. In order to make it easier for them, I like to hold the events first thing in the morning. It’s nice for children to be able to read their work aloud, but it takes a long time to hear the whole class, and most students don’t read aloud well enough to engage the parents of other children. When parents started asking, “Can my kid go first? I really have to get to work [or the grocery store or the dog groomer],” I instituted museum celebrations in which students read their pieces aloud only to the children who share their table and their guests. This takes only about fifteen minutes, and both children and guests pay better attention. After that, they leave their writing at their tables and roam the room to look at other children’s writing. Each table has a comment sheet for parents to fill out. Parents who have to leave can go without feeling as if they’re sneaking out, and parents who wish to stay can see more work.

■ Predictable Problems

When things go wrong, it does not mean we are not doing a good job. We just need to determine the cause of the problem and address it. Some issues that are common in this unit and possible ways to address them follow.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>PROBLEM</th>
<th>WHAT IT LOOKS LIKE</th>
<th>POSSIBLE SOLUTION/CONFERENCE</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| You have under-planned for the unit. | • You do not have any/enough mentor texts.  
• You do not know what you want students to be doing.  
• You have no ideas for minilessons.  
• Your minilessons seem unclear.  
• Your minilessons have too many teaching points. | Stop teaching writing for a day and give yourself time to regroup.  
Go over your lesson plans; look through children’s writing folders; get some books to use as models, look through them, and choose a couple of simple things to teach.  
Allow yourself to teach a few consecutive minilessons on the same topic until you feel clearer about where to take the study next.  
Now you’ll be able to make this clearer to the children. |
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>PROBLEM</th>
<th>WHAT IT LOOKS LIKE</th>
<th>POSSIBLE SOLUTION/ CONFERENCE</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>You have over-planned for the unit.</td>
<td>• The children seem unable to do what you ask.</td>
<td>Try to look at what your students are doing, rather than at what they are not doing. Plan the next few minilessons based on what you see them doing in their work. Spend a few days using children’s writing as models for your minilessons so that the class can get a clearer sense of what you expect from them.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The class shows a lack of interest.</td>
<td>• Children are not working.</td>
<td>Try writing a pattern book together as a whole class; then add the book to your classroom library.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Children say, “I’m done!” during the workshop.</td>
<td>Allot a little extra time to share writing for a few days so that you can show the class several examples of student work.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Children say, “Awww,” when it is time for writing workshop.</td>
<td>Try teaching one or two minilessons in which you fishbowl what good conferences look like.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Make sure you are talking about writing as if you are the luckiest person in the world to get to teach it (which you are, by the way).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The class shows a lack of basic understanding.</td>
<td>• Children copy directly from mentor texts.</td>
<td>If the issue is limited to just a few students, you may want to pull them aside for a semiprivate minilesson or for a supported writing group. If the whole class is having a problem, you will need to simplify your minilessons, refer to simpler published mentor texts, and model some examples of pattern books that are within the children’s range of ability.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>You’re not reaching all learners.</td>
<td>• More advanced students do not appear to be working at their full potential.</td>
<td>Be sure you have mentor texts appropriate to the ability levels in your class.</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Struggling students have no idea what to do or how to do it.</td>
<td>Try conferring with these children more often: they may need more individualized teaching until they have a better idea of what they can expect from themselves.</td>
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</tbody>
</table>
Assessment

Your students’ published pieces are one kind of assessment. They are how you really determine whether children are able to write a whole piece on one topic, a piece that follows a consistent structure and in which they purposefully try to write in ways they have seen in published pattern books. Finished pieces also tell you how children revise and edit their work and which writing conventions they are using consistently or are beginning to use.

I also like to have children complete some kind of self-assessment, such as filling out a questionnaire about their work (see Figure 2.6). I might ask them what they did well, what they found difficult, and what they would like to try again. Learning about their attitude toward writing and their opinion of their own work influences how I confer with individual students. The questionnaire also tells me what was clear in my teaching and what I may have to address again in future units. If ten students find it difficult to add information to work started on a previous day, for example, I probably need to find another way to demonstrate it.

More formal assessment involves revisiting your goals for your students and evaluating whether they are being met. Using rubrics (see Figure 2.7) helps you evaluate your own teaching, determine your children’s needs and strengths, and set future goals.
WOW!! We are ready to celebrate our pattern books and all the hard work that went into them.

What did you do really well in your book?

________________________________________________________________________

________________________________________________________________________

________________________________________________________________________

________________________________________________________________________

What was difficult for you?

________________________________________________________________________

________________________________________________________________________

________________________________________________________________________

________________________________________________________________________

Tell me one new thing you learned this month.

________________________________________________________________________

________________________________________________________________________

________________________________________________________________________

________________________________________________________________________

Figure 2.6 Self-Assessment Questionnaire for Pattern Books

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### Writing Quality

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Description</th>
<th>1 Rarely</th>
<th>2 Sometimes</th>
<th>3 Most of the Time</th>
<th>4 More than I Expect</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Child focuses all the pages of one piece of writing on a single topic.</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Child makes conscious decisions about text structure.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Child uses a simple text structure consistently through a whole piece of writing.</td>
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</table>

### Writing Habits

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Description</th>
<th>1 Rarely</th>
<th>2 Sometimes</th>
<th>3 Most of the Time</th>
<th>4 More than I Expect</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Child begins each workshop by looking over what is in his/her folder.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Child chooses sometimes to begin a new piece of writing and sometimes to revisit a piece of writing started on a previous day.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Child chooses topics that she/he knows and cares a great deal about.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Child tries what is taught in minilessons and extends it to other pieces of writing.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Child reads and rereads everything he/she writes.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Child revises her/his work, with support and encouragement.</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Child names simple writing moves and tries them in his/her own writing (for some children, this may mean matching the words to the picture, writing from left to right, or making the text follow a pattern; other children may write vignettes, chapters of a nonfiction book, or steps in a process).</td>
<td></td>
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</tbody>
</table>

### Community

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Description</th>
<th>1 Rarely</th>
<th>2 Sometimes</th>
<th>3 Most of the Time</th>
<th>4 More than I Expect</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Child is aware of which topics many of her/his peers have chosen.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Child offers help to classmates who need it.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Child shares books and observations about books with classmates.</td>
<td></td>
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<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Child asks questions about and compliments classmates’ work.</td>
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</table>

### Writing Conventions

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Description</th>
<th>1 Rarely</th>
<th>2 Sometimes</th>
<th>3 Most of the Time</th>
<th>4 More than I Expect</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Child puts spaces between words (some may still use dashes).</td>
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<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Child represents most sounds with the correct letter or letters.</td>
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<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Child spells correctly any words that are on the word wall.</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

**Figure 2.7 Pattern Book Assessment Rubric**
Thank you for sampling this resource.

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