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Research that supports statements made in the text can be found through corresponding page numbers in the end Notes on pages A-22–A-45.

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A successful writing program requires a knowledgeable, organized teacher with excellent classroom management skills. Mostly, students need lots of time in which to write, a say in what they write about, strategies that allow them to problem solve independently (plan, revise, edit), and helpful response.
Writers don’t improve their craft unless they have a real purpose, a real audience, and a real investment in their writing.

—Mem Fox

We’ve made writing way too complicated by breaking it up into bits and pieces. That keeps us and the kids busy, but it’s not teaching writing. We’ve been overfocused on standards, rubrics, a correct teaching sequence, procedures, isolated skills, and looking for the “right” program. Instead of asking What skills should I be teaching? we need to ask How can I be a more effective teacher of writing? and How can I engage my students’ hearts and minds so they want to write and do their best writing?

When I am working in schools, teachers’ initial questions and concerns often focus on the “skills”—parts of speech, sentence building, paragraph structure. Rightfully concerned about sloppy writing, with its poor grammar, spelling, and punctuation, dedicated teachers tell students, I want complete
sentences with capitals and periods or I want a topic sentence with supporting details. Our students will learn to “do” all the necessary skills and a whole lot more if we shift our focus to meaningful teaching of writing and then teach the necessary skills to support that writing. I’ve seen it happen again and again in my residencies around the country.

Imagine having all the pieces of a large jigsaw puzzle on the floor in front of you but never seeing the picture on the lid of the box. That’s what learning is like for kids when we start with the parts. They can’t figure out what it all means or how the skills fit together. However, when we teach from whole to part and back to whole, when we teach the concept first and label it later, learning becomes easier and much more meaningful.

When I began teaching children to write free verse, I made writing harder for them by first teaching individual parts. I would say, Today, we’ll learn how to do line breaks [or use white space or craft endings]. Not only did that slow down the process, it took away the enjoyment. To my surprise, I found kids, even kindergartners, grasped the whole of poetry easily in one fell swoop—the title, the line breaks, the white space, the rhythm—when I started by reading and writing whole poems and noticing what poets do. After kids wrote their own heartfelt poems, we celebrated these poems and then dealt with specifics as we focused on what each writer was trying to do. (See the “heart poems” lesson, on pages 305–315 and on the accompanying DVD.)

Reduce Isolated Skills Work

I have not been able to locate any research showing that worksheets or drills carry over into students’ successful application of skills in authentic reading/writing contexts. In fact, decades of research show that drills do not improve student writing. Much like passing the Friday spelling test, students can perform the skill in isolation, but they don’t apply it in the course of daily writing and reading.

The National Reading Panel made the same finding with relation to phonics:

Programs that focus too much on the teaching of letter-sounds relations and not enough on putting them to use are unlikely to be very effective. In implementing systematic phonics instruction, educators must keep the end in mind and ensure that children understand the purpose of learning letter-sounds and are able to apply their skills in their daily reading and writing activities.
I believe most of us already know that if we look closely at isolated skills work with an open mind, we'll agree that it cannot turn kids into writers (or readers).

The big problem with teaching isolated skills is that kids don't know what we're talking about and why. Our lessons should arise from what you see kids doing, or not doing, in their writing: “Skill instruction should intrude as little as possible upon students’ ongoing efforts at constructing meaning from text.”

Only isolate the skill if students know how and why that skill is used. For example, until a child understands that words can be broken into sounds, teaching “p is for paint” has no meaning for them. Most students easily gain that necessary phonological awareness through lots of read-alouds of alphabet books as well as through informal rhyming, word play, and invented spelling. Or, again, teaching paragraphing makes little sense to many kids when we say *A paragraph is a group of sentences about the same topic* and then assign them to write one. However, once you have a piece of writing then you can say something like *Let me show you how we can organize these sentences to make it easier for the reader to follow; when we put like ideas together like this, we are paragraphing.*

**Focus on Quality First**

If your students are doing practice exercises, take a hard look at their everyday writing. Are the skills transferring? One group of teachers wrote me: “Daily oral language exercises work; they just don’t transfer.” It took a while for them to realize what they had actually said about what they already recognized.

Making the shift to focusing on meaning and quality first and teaching whole-to-part-to-whole may mean changing some of your beliefs about writing and learning. In an effort to do a better job teaching writing, fifth-grade teacher Debbie Fowler and her grade-level colleagues, in Westminster, Colorado, used students’ scores on the high-stakes state writing test to plan their writing program. Identifying students’ weakest areas, they prioritized a list of writing skills (in isolation) and addressed them with practice sheets. Debbie had an eye-opening moment when she realized her students were doing exactly what she was asking them to do:

I was always referring to the rubric and saying things like, “Kids, remember you need a good beginning, middle, and end. Oh, and don’t forget details. You should have at least ten.” I wondered why the kids had a hard time getting started or asked, “How many pages does it have to be?”
Debbie and her colleagues made four major changes to their writing program in their shift away from teaching isolated skills:

1. **Identifying writing genres that would interest students** and also fulfill district requirements.
2. **Deciding who the audience would be for each piece of writing.**
3. **Modeling their own writing process and struggle** in front of students, still the most difficult part of the new approach.
4. **Having students share their writing regularly** as a basis for celebration and great teaching moments.

(See their original Essential Writing Goals and their New Writing Goals, below.)

At the end of the school year Debbie wrote to me. She described how her kids were now “taking chances with their writing,” that writing was “going great,” and that “some kids were asking if they could write more than one piece and that has not happened before.” Regarding the skills, she said that “skills teaching has
become more efficient and effective.” As part of the change process, she and her colleagues do refer to their original list but now it is as a check on the “parts” within the meaningful whole of a piece of writing.

What convinced these dedicated teachers to shift their teaching emphasis, to start with meaning and teach the skills in the context of meaning? It was seeing the quality of students’ work and what was possible when students wrote for meaningful purposes and real audiences. (See the DVD poetry lesson and the supporting material in the Teaching in Action section. Notice in particular the list of skills we taught in the context of writing poetry.)

One of the problems with skills teaching is it leaves out the audience. Yet writing for a real audience (not just the teacher) is one of the best ways to get quality writing. We adjust our language according to who our audience is (including ourselves), but kids don’t know this. Too often, they are not aware that they need to think about providing information that the reader will need to have to understand the writing. When students write primarily for the teacher or for a test, they are not thinking about the reader.

When I worked with a group of fifth graders on creating a guidebook to their school (see pages 105–110), I discovered they were not used to writing for an audience. During our shared writing, it took a while for them to realize that we needed to add a personal closing—not because I said so, but so the reader would feel a sense of closure. Once they understood that, they took writing all endings more seriously.

Another example. A kindergarten teacher was having difficulty getting kids to write the letters and sounds they knew. “Teacher, teacher, I can’t” many said, and they were just using dashes or marks and ignoring the resources in the room that could help them. But once the teacher added a real audience and told kids it was important to use all the letters and sounds they knew so people could read their writing, they all used some letters and sounds.

Include Audience in All Writing

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<th>TRY IT APPLY IT</th>
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- Make writing as real as possible. Write and publish classroom texts such as “Our Favorite Food [Hobbies, People],” “A Day in Kindergarten [Our Classroom, My Life],” “All About Us [Bugs, Our School].”
- Use shared writing to write fictional stories, books for next year’s students, advice to parents, and much more. (See Chapter 5.)
- Springboard off favorite texts. One kindergarten class had read all the Miss Nelson books and wrote a fictional book about their teacher.
- Write patterned texts with young students and use them for guided and independent reading. One teacher and her primary-grade students wrote a “Don’t Be Scared” book that began, “Don’t be scared when your mom leaves. She’ll come back.”
Focus on Voice Through Meaningful Writing

“Voice is the single most important element in attracting and holding a reader’s interest.” Voice is the writer’s unique personality on paper, his own melody in words, her “mark” as an individual. No two voices are alike. To write with voice, the writer has to be interested in the writing. Without that interest, students don’t invest in the piece. You can’t teach voice as a separate subject. Nor can you fake it, as the following story illustrates.

High school senior Andrew Thomas was a straight-A English student. He knew just how to write an essay for school and how to meet every one of the teacher’s requirements, such as putting in figurative language and checking off all the parts of the accompanying rubric. So I was surprised when I read the important personal essay that was going to accompany his college applications. He knew how to apply the sophisticated skills he’d been taught, such as including detailed elaboration and clever metaphors, but his writing was bland and impersonal. When Andrew asked me to respond to his writing, he was confident that it was an “A paper.” He told me his English teacher said his essay was “great.” After several honest conversations that led to suggested revisions, Andrew and I talked frankly about his writing. His comments on voice are striking.

When you’re graded on putting your voice into your writing, it becomes a calculated thing. You’re trying to say certain things to make it sound like your voice, but it’s not your voice. It appears to work. You’re rewarded with positive grades and feedback. But then, when you have to write something real, like a college essay, it doesn’t work at all.

Writer Amy Tan helps explain why Andrew had such difficulty being true to his own beliefs and experiences. She writes:

Your own voice is one that seeks a personal truth, one that only you can obtain. That truth comes from your own experiences, your own observations, and when you find it, if it really is true and specific to you, you may be surprised that others find it to be true as well. In searching for your own voice, be aware of the difference between emulation and imitation, inspiration and intimidation.

Contrived Writing Stifles Voice

A school writing program of rigid requirements and formulaic writing constrains students’ real voices. When students are focused on constructing paragraphs and sentences to comply with a program or format, they may learn to write to a standard, but we often lose the voice of the writer in the process. Not
only that. They often have to start all over again in learning how to compose interesting, well-written pieces. In other words, they don’t automatically grow beyond the formula.

Be sure you are writing and thinking aloud in front of your students and being yourself in your writing. Kids aren’t likely to write with voice if they don’t hear your truthful writing voice. Don’t worry about getting it “right.” Close your door and write what’s in your mind and heart.

Voice can be emphasized and “taught” without the teacher or students really knowing what it is. Instead of saying Andrew has voice in his writing, which isn’t how we talk, try instead: Doesn’t that piece sound just like Andrew? I love the way he [used humor, carefully described what happened so you felt you were right there, etc.]. Voice is in the details—but details that show the real person and story behind the words, not just details for the sake of adding more words, transitions, or sentence variety.

Use shared writing, in which you write alongside and with students, to help individual voices develop.

Voice and passion go together. Make every effort to ensure students are interested and invested in their writing topics and audiences.

“Voiceless writing is like soup with no seasoning.” Help students notice what authors (including their peers) do to “season” their writing. Remember, though: you can identify voice, but you can’t “measure” or quantify it.

When I asked students in a third-grade classroom why they were creating story maps, they couldn’t tell me. I got the following responses: “Our teacher asked us to”; “I think they’re going on that bulletin board over there”; “You learn story maps in third grade.” Now, the teacher in this class was as conscientious and excellent as they come, and the quality of the story maps reflected her diligence. I have no doubt she was clear about her purpose: She wanted students to learn how stories work so they would internalize those essential features when reading stories and writing their own stories. But she never told the students that, and so, to a large extent, the activity was a waste of time. They would be unlikely to transfer skills that had no broader meaning for them.

Our students are not likely to take work seriously or feel the “need” to learn something unless they understand and value its purpose (nor do we!). And this is particularly true for our culturally and linguistically diverse learners. I always tell students why I’m doing what I’m doing—whether I’m calling them up for a guided reading group, doing a shared writing, teaching note-taking, or having a
conference. I say to students, “The reason we’re doing this is . . .” And often, as a check to be sure they understand, I have them say it back to me: “Tell me why we’re doing this and why it’s important.”

Make Sure Your Demonstrations Include Why

A fourth-grade teacher whom I was coaching and co-teaching with was demonstrating writing. On a projected transparency, she wrote (silently) about herself, focusing on beginning with an interesting sentence and including personal facts. She stopped after she had written almost a page. Her draft looked neat and complete. Although her writing was good, unless she explained her thinking, the techniques she used were unlikely to transfer to her students’ writing. She wanted her students to view drafting as making changes in thinking, but she hadn’t modeled that.

So I encouraged her to:

☐ Reread and see if it was the way she wanted it.
☐ Think aloud as she wrote.
☐ Not to be content with the first draft, to rethink how it might go and make changes.

She went back, crossed out, moved things around, added information, and stopped to explain why she was making her changes. She reread her draft four or five times for the purpose of clarity, and each time she made improvements. The message she sent to her students changed from Write down the page and you’re done to writing takes time, much rereading and rethinking, and you work on your draft to make sure it says what you want it to and is clear and interesting to the reader.

Think out loud as you write; let students in on your problem-solving, ruminating, struggling writing process.

Don’t Assume Transfer Is Automatic—it’s Not

Don’t assume that because you have modeled writing, your students “got” your demonstration. Good teaching is more difficult than that. Here’s a case in point.

A third-grade teacher wants her students to write better leads after she notices that most students begin their autobiographical writing with their names and ages. In her demonstration lesson, she shows three leads and asks students which is best. The first one is, “My name is Naomi. I am eight years old.” The second one has good vocabulary and interesting “telling details.” The third one is even more interesting and elaborate.
Kids easily see that the second and third leads are better than the first. However, the teacher doesn’t go to the next step: why are these leads better? She assumes that because her students can identify the best ones, they will now write like that. When the students go to write, more than half of them choose the first, boring beginning.

So the teacher backs up. “Why is this lead better?” She names the qualities. This is what all good teachers do, evaluate, rethink as they go. Teaching is like a draft-in-process: never linear, always changing. Now when students are asked to write a better lead, they can do it.

If we want all the parts of writing to make sense to kids, they need to focus first on authentic writing of whole texts for a real audience. A fourth grader says, “I don’t have my lead” and can’t start. I say, “Your lead and title can come later. Just start.”

**Shift the Focus in Teaching Writing**

When I ask teachers how they teach writing, many respond as this teacher did:

I teach it through minilessons and writing prompts. At the beginning of the year I focus on ideas, organization, and conventions. Then I add word choice, sentence fluency, and finally voice toward the end of the year.

In other words, students learn the *language* of writing (*organization, sentence fluency, voice*) but aren’t helped to understand what good writing is. For example, when I ask a class of fourth graders what a draft is, they respond, “You write it before the final copy.” I really have to push before the idea surfaces that a draft is our first thoughts, “getting our ideas down.” When writing workshop becomes a set of procedures or isolated writing traits, our students just go through the motions.

Unfortunately, much of this fractured teaching is now being promoted in professional development programs mandated by states and school districts seeking to raise test scores. Teachers are “trained” in how to teach the individual aspects of writing, such as organization or sentence fluency, and they, in turn, teach these to their students. Students get lots of practice writing sentences and paragraphs, but their overall writing does not necessarily improve.

Here’s how I respect such mandates but still teach in a way that makes sense and helps students become better writers. I tell teachers, I will teach your students how to do all that is required, but the easiest and most efficient way to do this is to first engage students in writing about topics they care about for a reader who matters to them.
TEACHING BEYOND THE STANDARDS

Focus on Excellent Teaching of Writing

Teach Your Writing Lesson. Now go back and look at your state standards, district objectives, checklists, and scoring guides. You can teach everything on your list faster and more effectively if you use “efficiency of context” as you teach.

Here’s What I’m Talking About. Look at the strategies we taught in a second grade classroom in just two days (page 151), working on writing to inform for a real audience and with a valued purpose (see pp. 316–322 for complete lesson). In two days we addressed:

- effective use of language
- appropriate sentences
- transitions
- focus on main ideas
- words that connect ideas
- language that fits audience and purpose

Take a look at the highest level on the grade 4 scoring guide used by the state for content, organization, style, and conventions on the high stakes test (below). Also note the district checklist for writing to inform or explain (grades 3–5). I have deliberately skipped over grade 2 requirements to make this point: If you focus on excellent teaching of writing, you will be teaching beyond what the standards require.

Now look at what Brian, an average-performing second grader, has done. Compare it to our “What a Good Writer Does” (a list we developed as a shared writing in the process of drafting). You’ll notice that reflected in this simple, delightful “Cafeteria Rules” are many of the characteristics of good writing we identify on our list. (I’ve highlighted just a few of Brian’s strengths as a writer with arrows and checked off more.) Also, notice that our young writer is already employing many of the same required elements (although at a lower level of sophistication) listed on the checklist for writing to inform or explain (grades 3–5).

Once as teachers we “see” that, we can relax and stop worrying about teaching all the little pieces of writing and keep the “big picture” in mind. More than that, we begin to realize that complex learning cannot be decontextualized or compartmentalized into discrete skills.

I laid out these pieces—state scoring guide (grade 4) and checklist for writing to inform or explain (grades 3–5)—on a table, along with copies of the district’s required scoring guides/rubrics, state standards, curriculum requirements, writing continuum, and/or benchmarks—and put “What a Good Writer Does” in the center. I asked teachers working in small groups to notice how what we taught in grade 2 aligned with what is required beyond grade 2. In fact, if you notice the descriptors for grade 4 on the state rubric, we have begun to address all of these in grade 2.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>State Scoring Guide for High-Stakes Test (Grade 4, Highest Level)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Content, Organization, and Style</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Maintains consistent focus on the topic and has ample supporting details;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Has a logical organization pattern and conveys a sense of wholeness and completeness;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Provides transitions that clearly serve to connect ideas;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Uses language effectively by exhibiting word choices that are engaging and appropriate for intended audience and purpose;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Includes sentences, or phrases where appropriate, of varied length and structure;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Allows the reader to sense the person behind the word.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Conventions</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Consistently follows the rules of standard English for usage;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Consistently follows the rules of standard English for spelling of commonly used words;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Consistently follows the rules of standard English for capitalization and punctuation;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Consistently exhibits the use of complete sentences except where purposeful phrases or clauses are used for effect.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
What a Good Writer Does (Grade 2, Room 108)

✔ Writes for a reader
✔ Rereads many times
✔ Gets ideas and help from other writers
✔ Decides what to change about the writing
✔ Makes the writing make more sense and sound better by:
  ✔ Crossing out words
  ✔ Adding information
  ✔ Using different words
  □ Using more interesting words
  □ Changing a word like "it" to a word that is clearer to the reader
  □ Taking out information the reader doesn’t need
  ✔ Lassoing words to move them around

✔ Has a title that goes with the writing
✔ Has a "snappy" beginning
✔ Has an ending that completes the writing
□ May use conversation
✔ Explains what she/he is writing about
✔ Writes so that the reader can get a clear “picture”
□ May use humor
✔ Sometimes uses exciting marks like “!”
✔ Listens and responds to others’ suggestions (“It might be helpful to the reader if…”)
□ Sometimes “has a little trouble”
□ Helps readers understand “how to” do something by:
  □ Using words like “first,” “then,” “next”
  □ Making lists
  □ Using bullets
  □ Using numbers

✔ Rereads

Grade 2, Writing to Inform—An Example Cafeteria Rules - When you are in the cafeteria you need to eat politely by using silverware and excuse yourself when you forget something. You use a conversation voice and talk quietly with your friends and don’t share food! You don’t leave until you are dismissed. Make sure you follow the rules, and enjoy your food! —Brian

DISTRICT CHECKLIST FOR WRITING TO INFORM OR EXPLAIN (Grades 3–5)

My writing will be very good if I:

**Have good content and organization.** That means I…
- Follow the directions in my writing task;
- Keep focused on my main ideas;
- Use specific details, reasons, and/or examples to support my ideas;
- Organize my writing so that there is an opening, a middle, and a conclusion;
- Organize my writing in paragraphs;
- Use well-chosen information that is interesting, thoughtful, and important;
- Use words that help show how my ideas are connected.

**Have an interesting style.** That means I…
- Show that I am interested in my topic;
- Use language that fits my audience and purpose;
- Use words that help the reader understand my ideas;
- Use different types and lengths of sentences.

**Follow conventions in writing.** That means I…
- Write complete sentences;
- Use correct capitalization and punctuation (for example, periods, commas, quotation marks, question marks);
- Use correct grammar;
- Have subject-verb agreement for each sentence;
- Spell words correctly;
- Show where new paragraphs begin.
When teachers see the high quality of work this approach produces (which goes beyond state standards, curriculum guidelines, benchmarks, and rubrics—see Teaching Beyond the Standards, pages 150–151), plus students’ engagement and enjoyment, their thinking shifts: *If I focus first on excellent teaching of writing through writing for a valued reader, I will also be teaching all the skills in the context of that writing.*

In Beth Petrie’s and Jeanne Lamp’s second-grade classroom, for instance, we taught students how to do procedural writing for a valued audience and in two days introduced all the skills a good writer needs. Furthermore, the students’ achievements went far beyond the “standards” for second graders. It was the “efficiency of context” that made it possible. See What a Good Writer Does on pages 150–151. (The lesson on procedural writing is presented in its entirety in the Teaching in Action section, pages 316–322.)

Or again, the following lists all the techniques we covered in one hour in the second month of school as Kari Oosterveen’s fourth graders wrote a short piece about something they disliked. Through Kari’s and my demonstrations, our scaffolded conversations with students before they began writing, and a whole-class share afterward, we identified what made the writing memorable:

- Use leads.
- Have descriptive words and feelings.
- Use humor.
- Sound like the people we are.
- Make every sentence count.
- Give our endings some punch.

We didn’t just list these things and forget about them; the kids referred to the list again and again in order to do their best writing, and Kari and her students continued to add to the list throughout the school year.

Choose your language carefully when you embed skills with younger writers for whom the terms don’t yet make sense:

- *Let me show you how you can cut and paste and move these sentences around, like this, so it will be easier for your reader to follow.* (Instead of, “Today we’re going to work on organization.”)

- *Write a message or story about....* (Instead of, “Write two sentences with....”)

- *You’ve got a lot of good ideas here. Let’s put the ones that are all about the same thing together, like this. That will make it easier for your reader to understand.* (Instead of, “I’m going to teach you how to write a paragraph.”) Later, when the writer is more likely to have some idea of what you’re talking about, you can say, *What we worked on today was paragraphing.*

- *When you’re an author you get to choose the words. Let’s listen to the words this author uses.* (Instead of “We’re going to learn about word choice.”)
Have a colleague observe your teaching and record all your teaching points. Then, review and name what you did. What did you teach?

Notice the language you use. Be sure it’s the language of encouragement.

Use a faculty meeting to develop your own criteria (and check it for “child-friendly” quality with students). See rubrics one school wrote with students, page 241.

Ask kids, "What do good writers do?" Use their responses as an evaluation of what they believe and the messages they have received about “good writing.”

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**Be Efficient and Integrate Basic Skills**

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**Keep Standards in Perspective**

One conscientious teacher told me:

I try to hit the standards, month by month. I spend two days doing what I have to do, for example, teaching capital letters, or verbs, or subject and predicate. I feel I have to teach these skills in isolation because they’re listed that way on our standards and district curriculum. Then, the other days I focus on good writing.

Like many other teachers, she was exhausted trying to “cover” everything that was required. Let me assure you: you will be teaching subject and predicate and sentence variety and fluency and grammar in the course of teaching writing well. Even if your state or district standards and curriculum documents focus narrowly on the parts of learning, you will easily satisfy those minimum standards—and much more—through meaningful teaching. Believing that takes a leap of faith, along with much professional knowledge and common sense.

For example, California’s K–12 language arts standards calls for students to “write clear and coherent sentences” and create “a single paragraph with a topic sentence and supporting details.” If you focus only on teaching students how to write a complete sentence or paragraph, you frustrate yourself and shortchange the students, and sentence and paragraph writing in everyday writing do not improve. It’s impossible to define what a sentence is in a way that helps students produce one; the best and fastest way to teach what good sentences are is to call attention to them in the context of students’ good writing. Whole-class sharing and brief celebration conferences are the perfect places in which to do that. Once you have the well-expressed sentence, you can work on the conventions and correctness part.
Similarly, the more students work on writing a paragraph in isolation because writing a well-constructed paragraph is on the state test, the worse their paragraph writing usually becomes. However, once students have produced good writing (there are many examples throughout this text), I say:

*Take a look at your informational essay [or secrets story or journal entry].*
*Find the sentence at the beginning that tells what your writing is about.*
*Now find all the information you added to tell about that. When the state writing test asks you to write a topic sentence and supporting details, that's what they're asking for. You already know how to do that.*

Your students learn about sentences and paragraphs not by studying about them in isolation, but through reading widely, hearing good literature read aloud, and writing for audiences and purposes that matter. Kari Oosterveen's fourth graders had been schooled in formula writing. They told Kari, “Our other teacher always wanted a topic sentence and supporting details.” Kari replied, “I’m not asking you to write a paragraph. I’m asking you to write.”

### Teach Useful Minilessons

*What minilessons should I teach and how should I teach them?* There is no one right sequenced list. Listen carefully, pay attention to what your writers are trying to say, and help them say it.

Minilessons—or intentional, explicit teaching—can be presented to the whole class, a small group, or one-on-one. “In minilessons we teach into our students’ intentions.” That is, we teach what they need to know and are ready to learn so they can continue to write and polish their writing to make it clearer, easier to understand, livelier, and so on. Minilessons can and should take place any time students are writing—during whole-class share, in other kinds of conferences (see Chapter 8), as part of your demonstration teaching, during shared writing, throughout the day, across the curriculum—not just at the beginning of a writing class.

Be authentic with what you teach. Kids must internalize the reason for using descriptive words, strong verbs, leads—otherwise these lessons become writing exercises in isolation. Think about the purpose of a lesson. Ask yourself, *Is this the most important thing students need at this time to continue writing well?* Look for patterns of need during whole-class share and other conferences. Refer to the writing essentials on pages 13–14 and on the inside back cover. I teach based on what I notice kids do and need to do and make notes to myself on what I notice so I don’t forget. (There are examples of minilessons in the Teaching in Action section and on the DVD.)
A SAMPLING OF COMMON MINILESSONS

Content
- Writing on a topic you care about.
- Narrowing the topic.
- Using interesting words (removing boring ones, using strong verbs).
- Rereading (before you continue, to check that it makes sense).
- Revising as you go along (as a result of rereading, rethinking, response).
- Using resources.
- Writing a beginning that grabs the reader.
- Organizing writing in a logical order (moving information around).
- Backing up statements with examples (because, why).
- Thinking about what the reader wants/needs to know.
- Taking out boring and repeated information.
- Adding information helpful to the reader.
- Adding helpful transitions for a smooth flow.
- Adding visuals to support and enhance text.
- Crafting an ending (to bring closure).
- Having the writing “sound like you.”
- Knowing how and when to ask for help.

Conventions
- Stretching out sounds in a word.
- Using beginning and ending sounds.
- Using best invented spelling (for example, showing that long words have more letters).
- Spelling frequently used words correctly.
- Spacing words and skipping lines.
- Using lowercase letters in words.
- Using resources.
- Editing.
- Knowing how to seek and find help.
- Capitalizing (I, important names and places, etc.).
- Adding ending punctuation.
“Revising and editing can be real torture. I’d like help in that area,” an intermediate-grades teacher told me as her colleagues nodded in agreement. We’ve made revising more difficult than it needs to be. When we require revision as part of the writing process or a formatted writing program, kids go through the motions and cross out a few words and add other ones, but they don’t put their hearts into the work or value revision. On the other hand, when kids care about their writing, revising is no big deal. It’s work, but it’s work they eagerly engage in. (See pages 292–304 for examples of the work of second graders who were empowered by revision.)

Revision means, literally, to see again. Revision is when we revisit, revalue, reconsider, and look again at our writing. Revision involves rereading in order to clear up confusions, reorganize text, rewrite for clarity and interest, rethink word choices. Revision takes place even when we’re not writing; it’s part of our thinking process around the writing.

Help Students Develop a Revision Consciousness

I write, reread, and rewrite with a revision consciousness. That is, I value revision, strive to revise where and when doing so makes sense, and take responsibility for revision because I care about the writing. We want students to do the same and to write and revise with a mindset of will my writing make sense to my readers? will it engage them? Peter Elbow notes, “Of course anything must be revised if you really want it to work for an audience.”

We need to teach kids to hold internal conversations so that they write with a revision consciousness (see page 48 in Chapter 3 for specifics). This is exactly what I do as a writer, and not because my editor tells me to; I do this internal thinking because my reader matters to me. Following the optimal learning model, we must show our own revision-in-process and make our thinking visible, keeping in mind that our goal for students is always independence. We want students revising on their own without our telling them to do so.

We also want students to take responsibility for the kind of feedback they want to the texts they write. Just as I guided my reader-responders to this text with questions like those above, we need to teach our students (through demonstrations and guided practice) to do the same.

Revise Your Writing in Front of Students

Students need to see what the thinking behind revision and work of actually doing it look like and sound like if they are to do that thinking and revising
themselves. Much of revision is getting as close as you can to your intended message. Peter Elbow notes:

The more you zero in on the precise meaning you have in mind, the more you can strip away unnecessary words and thereby energize your language. The key activity is crossing out words and sentences.

Getting at precise meaning is also what we teach kids to do in writing a summary (see pages 127–131). Being able to put the most important points in your own words usually involves rethinking and revision.

When I wrote my get-well letter to Zach as a demonstration (before a group of fourth graders and their teacher wrote their own letters to their hospitalized classmate), I revised in front of them as I wrote and thought out loud (my draft and revisions are shown on the next page). Afterward, I asked them, “What did you notice that I did?” and we charted their responses, creating the chart below. We left the chart up for them to use as a reference while they were preparing their own letters to Zach.

Many students quickly complete writing assignments, turn them in, and never look back. When we model how to revise, we are also modeling the work ethic of effective writing. Good writing takes time and effort.
Dear Zach,

We haven’t met, but I know about you because I am working in your classroom. I’m teaching writing with Mr. Torrens this week. It’s a great job. I love it. It’s challenging, rewarding, and fun.

Your classmates are writing to you, and I decided to write to you too. You see, my dad had brain surgery about a year ago. He is doing well now, and I’m happy to hear you are feeling well too. I think everyone in your class misses you a lot and would be really glad when you return.

Maybe, when I come back to BBC in the spring, I can meet you. I hope so. Till then, I wish you an easy, speedy recovery.

Sincerely,
Regie Routman

(I handwrote my final copy.)
Read Your Writing Out Loud

We need to demonstrate to students how to read their writing aloud “with the fresh eyes of a reader” and show them how we listen for:

- Precise language (such as lively verbs).
- Unnecessary words that we can cut.
- Confused meaning.
- Clear organization.
- Places where you stumble.
- Places where you get bored.
- Places where it doesn’t sound right (grammar).

While writing this book, I read many chapters out loud to my dad. Hearing the sound of the text out loud—which is more immediate and concrete than rereading silently—helped me notice missing words, pinpoint confusions, see what and where I needed to cut, and know where I needed to reorganize. When students share in a conference and read their piece aloud, they naturally cut, add, and make changes on the spot as they hear how their piece sounds. We need to teach them to do this as a key strategy to strengthen all their writing.

Make Your Thinking About Revision Visible

A great deal of my revising happens as I am rereading and rethinking in the act of composing. I move things around, delete, add, change the direction of my thought, start again. Writing is not a sequential process, with revision neatly tucked in midway. Again, I only revise because I care about my reader. (Sometimes that reader is myself—when I write poetry, for example.)

Thinking about revision also means knowing when not to revise. Lots of stuff we write—free-writes, diaries, letters, some drafts—never gets revised. In order to learn when not to revise, students must do lots of writing: “If you want to take revising seriously . . . you need to write plenty that you don’t revise.” That is, students take revision seriously when they are in writing classrooms where writing happens all day long, for genuine purposes and audiences, across the curriculum.

Finally, let students know that when the writing matters to you, you are willing to do the time-consuming work of revising. Writing and rewriting these few pages on revision in this book took me two days (I reread and reworked the section at least a dozen times), because I kept rereading and rethinking what I wanted to say that would be helpful to my readers.

Much of the final revising I do is “polishing,” being picky about a word here and there, after I am fairly satisfied with my writing. When I revise in front of students, they observe me reread a couple of extra times, just to be sure the wording is exactly “right.”
Too many of our students from the early grades through high school only understand revision as a teacher-directed step in the writing process. Once you model the recursive, back-and-forth nature of purposeful writing, everything changes. Students become writers who willingly revise.

- Do a shared writing with your class in which you develop (and post) a chart listing what to check for when reading a draft aloud to yourself.
- Have students write a lot of short pieces (see pages 198–199); this gives them more energy to revise and write than writing that goes on and on.
- Look at students’ papers. Are they revising willingly? If not, evaluate whether or not there is sufficient interest in the topic.
- Be sure students write for audiences that matter to them. An awareness of audience sensitizes writers to their readers and encourages revision.
- Make sure your students understand the difference between revising and editing. Do a shared writing on revising. Chart students’ responses. Evaluate what they understand, where they are confused, and what you need to teach. Revisit the draft and revise it as students become more knowledgeable.

Overattention to grammar and mechanics while composing adversely impacts writing. That is, when teachers overemphasize correctness when students write, writing quality declines. Let me be clear. I am not advocating that anything goes. I expect kids to have basic conventions and spelling when they write. In fact, they must have those in order to write fluently. But I want quality writing, and I focus on that first.

When I was working with intermediate-grade students in a residency in the Southwest, their teachers requested I demonstrate how to teach grammar, editing, and spelling. We hit editing hard but not until students had content worth working with, and that took the first three days of the week. (See the “Hero Writing” lesson in the Teaching in Action section.) A fifth-grade teacher later told me, “That’s the best editing work I’ve seen students do, and you didn’t even mention editing until Thursday.”

Truly, editing is the easy part, but it only matters if students have a piece of writing worth reading. It matters little if my text is perfectly edited and spelled, if what I have to say is trivial, boring, and a waste of the reader’s time. Once students understand the importance of editing for making their intended message clear and easy to read (that is, after they have developed an editing consciousness), they take editing seriously and invest their energies in it. Until then, they view editing as the teacher’s job.
Make Sure Students Know Why Conventions Matter

Students won’t pay attention to conventions if they don’t care about the writing. When they write with a valued reader in mind, they take conventions seriously, even in a first draft. They come to understand that conventions are a necessity that make the text readable. For example, punctuation “directs you to read, in the same way musical notation directs a musician how to play.”

Owen was the most struggling writer in a second-grade class. He made a breakthrough after he was celebrated for the wonderful story he told in front of the class as part of our prewriting experience (see the “Secrets of Second Graders” Teaching in Action lesson). During sustained writing, when I checked on how he was doing, I noticed he had gotten right to work on his draft. But, as usual, he wasn’t spacing between words. Rather than say, “You need to space between words,” I told him, “Owen, I can almost read all of what you’ve written. You’ve got a terrific start here. But, I’m having trouble reading this easily because you’re not spacing much between words. You need to use spaces between words so your reader can read your great story here. Use your finger as a spacer, like this, as you write.”

Teach Spelling Well

I ask a group of second graders what they like about writing. A few students talk about choosing their own topics and getting to use their imagination. Then a student raises her hand: “I’m worried about spelling.” I tell her, “Just concentrate on what you want to say. I will help you with your spelling.” It is necessary to teach spelling, but let’s not lose sight of the fact that spelling only matters so the reader can make sense of the written message. Being able to spell makes writing easier, as the writer can focus on meaning and audience.

All teachers I know struggle with how to teach spelling, but spelling can’t be left to chance: “the most recent research supports the need for most learners to experience words through reading, writing, and focused examination.” A comprehensive literacy curriculum requires a strong spelling program that includes:

- Ongoing assessment and evaluation.
- Writing for authentic purposes and audiences.
- Developing a spelling consciousness.
- Word study and investigation.
- Effective communication with parents.

Competent spellers are almost always competent readers. They also write more and do it better and more easily. Students who struggle mightily with spelling or worry unnecessarily about perfect spelling do not write fluently or
easily. You will want to have schoolwide conversations about spelling and formulate a policy on teaching spelling that also includes excellent teaching of reading and lots of time to read.

**Set Up the Environment for Teaching Spelling**

A classroom environment that teaches and encourages students to be good spellers provides lots of:

- Opportunities to write and talk about words.
- Opportunities to read and talk about words.
- Spelling references (wall charts, personal dictionaries, classroom dictionaries, print displayed in the classroom, word walls, classmates).
- Daily time in which to write (to include talking about spelling in an editing conference—whole class, peer, or one-on-one).
- Explicit teaching of common word patterns (which enables students to figure out related words and correct misspellings), onsets and rimes, frequently used words, prefixes and suffixes, root words, unusual features of words.
- Strategies for spelling unfamiliar words and for “fixing up” misspellings.
- Playing around with language.

**Value Spelling Approximations**

I choose to use the term *invented spelling* for the practice others prefer to call *temporary spelling*, *transitional spelling*, or *phonetic spelling*. I define invented spelling as the reasoned linguistic approximations and thoughtful strategies students use as they write, never as anything goes. In invented spelling, students make their best attempts based on what they know about words—the rules, patterns, visual configurations, and origins of language. Use the term you're most comfortable with; what's most important is that you understand invented spelling, can apply its principles to your practice, and can talk knowledgeably about spelling with other educators and parents.

Children who have the opportunity to use invented spelling to infer how the spelling system works become better spellers than students who learn to spell by rote. Since we're after fluency, invented spelling is a good thing as long as we don't overdo it. That is, students should not be inventing spellings for common words we expect them to have mastered, but we do want them to use lively vocabulary in their writing and not be limited to the words they can correctly spell.
First graders who are encouraged to use invented spellings write more words and spell more of them correctly than students who are focused on correct spelling. Such students also write more interesting text (see Kelly’s story and writing sample in Chapter 4, page 64). And teaching phonics by encouraging invented spelling is faster and more effective than teaching letter sounds in isolation.

In addition, we can teach and assess phonemic awareness through writing. When we demonstrate how writing works—through writing aloud, shared writing, interactive writing, in conferences—we can stretch out the sounds in words to help students hear the individual phonemes. We can also quickly assess phonemic awareness by looking at a child’s writing, “Phonemic awareness is very likely to develop as a consequence of learning phonics, learning to read, and learning to write, especially when teachers encourage children to use invented spellings.”

Phonemic awareness is also easily promoted through rhyming, segmenting words, substituting sounds, omitting sounds—not as isolated activities but as part of the real reading and writing you are already doing; for example, segmenting or omitting sounds using kids’ names or words from a content area.

Raise Your Expectations for Spelling

While invented spelling is great for freeing kids to use words they might not typically write, sometimes we accept invented spellings for words kids are capable of writing conventionally. It is reasonable to expect students to spell a bank of frequently used words correctly, even in drafts. Midyear in many first-grade classrooms I still find many students misspelling words such as my, can, and I. Well-intentioned teachers tell me they don’t want to “interfere” with kids’ writing, but invented spelling is for words we wouldn’t expect students to be able to spell at their stage of development. I do interfere and say something like this: Kids, in order for me to read your message easily, I expect that you will do your best job spelling. You can no longer misspell my, can, and I ever again in your writing. Check yourself on the word wall. As long as kids are writing those words over and over again, they might as well write them correctly. (See first-grade teacher Lea Payton’s letter [Appendix B] to her students’ parents about raising expectations and the video clip of Derek’s spelling lesson on the accompanying DVD.)

Recently I was teaching and guiding the writing of friendly letters in a second-grade classroom. A number of first-, second-, and third-grade teachers were observing. When we got to editing, I negotiated—during a shared writing of editing expectations—how much of the spelling the students should be expected to “fix up”: “Should it be three words, five words, some words, most words, all words?” To my surprise, most of the teachers responded, “Some.” It was midway through the school year, these letters were not more than a page or page and a half,
and the words had been suggested by the children. I suggested the children could fix up most of the words, and the students agreed. This goal, in fact, turned out to be very doable. (See pages 203–204.)

Develop a Strong Spelling Consciousness

Research shows that five or six misspellings in a three-hundred word text can cause the reader to say, “I can’t read this.” Until students have a spelling consciousness—that is, until they value the necessity of conventional spelling and strive to produce it—they will not set high-enough expectations for themselves as writers. Specifically, having a spelling consciousness means valuing correct spelling as a courtesy to the reader. “Errors create the impression that a writer either doesn’t care or doesn’t know better.” Stress with your students that publishing a piece means you have a contract with your reader to have correct spelling and conventions.

I had been working for months with a beginning teacher and her class of eager fourth-grade writers. The teacher skillfully taught all her writing lessons in the context of a monthly, class-published and illustrated news magazine that was directed primarily to parents but also went to every teacher and administrator. Each student was responsible for one article about such class-selected topics as a current unit of study, a field trip, a class happening, an interview with a staff member, and so on. They worked hard on their drafts, revisions, and final copies. They proudly showed off their first edition and gave me a copy.

I spoke honestly with the students after I read it:

Kids, I am so impressed with your writing. Wow! You have great leads, engaging writing, wonderful illustrations, lots of interesting information, and strong conclusions to your articles. Congratulations! You’ve done a great job. I can’t recall when I’ve seen better writing by fourth graders. I have to tell you, though, I found nine spelling errors, and that surprised me. Instead of being able to concentrate fully on your message, I was distracted each time I came upon a misspelling. It made me stop and focus on the misspelled word.

That’s all I said, but the students “got it.” Conventional spelling was necessary to fully engage the reader’s concentration and interest. After that, the students tracked me down each month and challenged me to find a spelling error in their latest edition. I never did, and they were very pleased with themselves. Because they saw the necessity for correct spelling, they took it seriously. No less than eight students proofread each article. While the teacher was also one of the editors, students took the job of being the final spelling editors seriously. They not only rose to the challenge, they enjoyed becoming sticklers about spelling. They had developed a spelling consciousness that would serve them well with all their writing.
I told that story to a class of fifth graders working on a school guidebook (see pages 105–110) and they published it with no errors.

Use Word Walls and Other Resources Effectively

Word walls can be powerful literacy resources for students if they are accessible, manageable, and created with the children based on their needs and interests. On the other hand, when word walls are posted according to the scope and sequence of a commercial program or to fill a bulletin board, their benefit to students is limited.

Know why you are choosing to use a word wall, and explain its ongoing use to students. A word wall is only a useful literacy tool if you and your students understand and value it as a reference for finding, checking, and learning how to read and write specific words and figure out related words. Without understanding why the word wall is an important help for writing and reading, students will mostly ignore it.

I say something like the following:

On this wall we’re going to display important words that you all need to know how to read and write. We’ll decide many of those words together and talk about how and why they’re important as we post them. Sometimes, I’ll highlight part of a word in color, and that means you can use that word to help figure out other words. Let me show you what I’m talking about.

As in all excellent teaching, you will need to follow the optimal learning model and first show students how to use the word wall, then try it out together, and next give them time to practice using it (with your guidance) before expecting them to use the word wall on their own.

Construct Word Walls with Students

While there are many commercial word wall packages available from publishers, I much prefer the word walls I create myself with student input. A published program can be useful as a resource or framework, but the publisher does not know your students and their needs. When you decide what words to highlight and talk about the words with students as you post them, students are more likely to refer to them and remember them. Also, by constructing the words and the word wall yourself, you give your room an inviting, unique look that you cannot get with mass-produced materials. Instead of using a commercial alphabet of upper- and lowercase letters with commercial pictures to go along with each letter, you can have your students write the letters and draw the cueing pictures.
Here are some things to keep in mind that will help you make your word walls the best they can be:

- **Choose a space that is easily visible to all students and close to their eye level:**
  - Bulletin board.
  - Classroom door.
  - Chart paper.
  - Flipchart.

- **Post only those words that students will use often:**
  - Frequently encountered words (including the most important rimes). Kindergarten teachers often call these “quick and easy words”: *my, and, like, to, the*, etc.
  - Students’ names (for kindergarten and grade 1).
  - Words students need for their daily reading and writing.

- **Use personal word walls:**
  - Blank sheets with squares for all the letters of the alphabet, affixed to writing folders, journals, writing notebooks.
  - Personal words added to consumable spelling dictionaries.
  - Words specific to the needs/readiness of individual students

- **Create specialized word walls:**
  - Family words (*grandma, brother, cousin*, and so on).
  - Days of the week, months.
  - Content-area words.
  - Holiday words.

For older students, word walls or charts might also include common troublesome words, such as some homonyms and homophones (*there, their, they’re*), multisyllable words (*beautiful, principal, audience*), and words illustrating common prefixes and suffixes (*reintroduce, precaution, preparation*).

### Highlight Words and Features of Words

Keep in mind that we want students to check and evaluate their work on their own as they move toward independence. Teaching them why, how, and when to use the word wall aids their growing competency as language learners. The goal of the word wall is to empower students “to independently take words apart in reading and construct words in writing.”

For example, students do not automatically grasp the fact that if they know the rimes *all* and *at*, they can figure out lots of other words (word families). Just telling them won’t teach the concept. They will need lots of practice (word sorts, cut-up sentences, manipulating letters) to become expert on word families. (See pages 93–97.)
Here are some things you can do:

- Teach patterns of words by highlighting the pattern. (Use a different color, shape, or texture; Wikki Stix; transparent tape—anything to make the pattern stand out.)
- Teach exceptions by talking about the “tricky part.” (Use mnemonic devices, tracing letters, talking while writing—whatever will help students think about the difficult part of the word.)
- Assess whether students are using word wall words:
  - Cover the word wall and then have students write specific words.
  - Verify that word wall words are being spelled correctly in daily writing and reading.
- Ask students to figure out new words using the rimes of highlighted words.
- Provide multiple ways to practice working with words.
- Reteach constantly and with urgency.

**Capitalize on Students’ Names with a Name Word wall**

For developing readers and writers, a word wall that features each child’s name and accompanying photo is a great aid for learning to read and write classmates’ names and for teaching phonics generalizations. It can be a separate word wall just for names (see *Reading Essentials*, pages 57–62) or combined with frequently used words. Kindergarten teacher Michele Fronk now has her students use the name word wall and accompanying pictures when they pass out valentines. In earlier years, she’d had to supervise, helping three or four students at a time match their valentines to the appropriate student. She notes: “They looked at the picture and name and passed out the valentine. I did not have one single student ask me for help. They were all on task and were so proud of themselves. It was a powerful experience for all of us.”

**Make Your Word Wall Flexible**

When you write the words in marker on heavy paper or a posted chart, you can’t change your mind. They’re on the wall for the school year. On the other hand, when you post words on individual cards—using Velcro or some other reusable backing—you can:

- Move words around.
- Alphabetize words.
- Remove words that all students know.
- Group words to suit needs and interests.
Monica Carrera-Wilburn, a teacher in a multiage classroom of first, second, and third graders, had been using a word wall for years, but she only recently realized how valuable it could be as a student resource.

For many years I’ve used a word wall in my classroom without really knowing why. Therefore, its use was limited to providing a spelling resource for my students. Now that I am beginning to understand the whys, my word wall has become a valuable literacy tool and a part of my daily literacy instruction.

Limit Dictionary and Thesaurus Use

When students write with dictionaries on their desks, taking time to look up the spelling of words, their free flow of thinking and writing is interrupted. Overconcern about correctness while composing slows writers down. Put the dictionaries away until the editing stage. Another reason to put aside resources, at first, is to encourage students to figure out spellings and choice of words on their own.

Use a thesaurus with caution, if at all. I see lots of contrived writing in classrooms because kids stick in words they would never use and don’t know the meaning of. The writing no longer sounds like that particular child wrote it. Pulitzer prize–winning writer Don Murray advises, “Never use a long word where a short one will do.”

Make resources in the room useful and easy to access: consumable dictionaries when editing, word walls placed at eye level, laminated cards of frequently used words on writing tables, a classroom library that supports a wide range of reading and writing, peers who have been taught how to be helpful.

Provide High-Quality Instruction to Writers Who Struggle

Writers have difficulty composing and organizing ideas for a variety of reasons. Often, they are also struggling readers or students for whom English is a second language or students who see themselves as writing failures. For these students, immediate success is necessary to break the pattern of failure and lack of writing confidence.

Our writers and readers who struggle need the same first-rate instruction, excellent resources, challenging and relevant curriculum, high expectations, and ongoing support that the rest of our students do. However, they need additional demonstrations, scaffolding, writing choices, and one-on-one conferences, all customized to fit their specific needs and interests. Unfortunately, many struggling writers receive instruction solely in basic skills and writing exercises. They rarely get
to focus on the process of writing for real readers, and, consequently, they never get much better as writers or view themselves as writers. Also, don’t neglect expository writing, which struggling writers often find more interesting and engaging.

Four special education students (whose label I was unaware of till later) wrote some of the best informational essays in a fifth-grade class (see pages 105–111). I did not create a different, stricter structure structure for them, but the nature of the lesson was very explicit and gave enough scaffolding and examples and conversations for them to be successful.

**PROVEN STRATEGIES FOR WRITERS WHO STRUGGLE—AND ALL WRITERS**

- **Writing Aloud**
  *Students:*
  - Listen in as you explain your thinking and planning before you write and while you write.
  - Get ideas for writing and composing.

- **Shared Writing**
  *Students:*
  - Focus on meaningful message making as you do the transcription.
  - Offer ideas without the pressure of having to write them down.
  - Hear your and their peers’ thinking and ideas.
  - Observe the parts of the whole (ideas, words, grammar, spelling, editing) as you shape and write the content/message.
  - Reinforce and rethink content area concepts.
  - Receive needed support and more easily generate their own language.

- **Interactive Writing**
  *Students:*
  - Focus on meaningful message making as you do the transcription.
  - Share the pen with you. (This is most effective one-on-one or in a small group.)
  - Receive positive feedback for what they are able to write.
  - See your modeling close up.
  - Experience immediate success.
Guided Conversations
Before, during, and after writing.

Students:
- Explore and try out ideas with your or a peer's support.
- Hear and incorporate rich language.
- Focus, narrow the topic, and add lively detail.
- Capitalize on the fact that speaking comes before writing.

Short Writing Assignments
Letters, book reviews, advice, procedures.

Students:
- Complete them more easily (there is less writing, revising, and editing; conferences are shorter).
- Experience more success (they are less overwhelming).

Personal Writing
Journals, friendly letters, notes, short memoirs.

Students:
- Have their personal experiences, life stories, family, and culture valued.
- Are assured of a possible entry point, particularly if they are second language learners.
- Have their knowledge affirmed.

Free Verse

Students:
- Play around with language and form.
- Write fewer words to create a meaningful message.
- Have fun creating the shape and style of poem.
- Experience immediate success.
- Deemphasize mechanics while writing.
- Express feelings with their personal voice.

Short Texts Created for Shared, Guided, and Independent Reading
Predictable and pattern books, innovations on familiar stories, original text added to wordless picture books, writing modeled on an author’s style, informational texts based on their interests or a curriculum focus, photo texts, bilingual texts, Readers Theatre scripts, texts for peers or younger students.


**Students:**
- Experience high motivation.
- Build on familiar language, experiences, and stories.
- Merge content and visual representations of that content.
- Write for a real reader.

- **Simple Planning Techniques**
  Lists, charts, outlines, maps, systematic writing, patterned writing.

  **Students:**
  - Learn how to brainstorm.
  - Use a temporary structure (template) to help them get started.

- **Differentiated Instruction**
  Content being taught to everyone is made accessible to all learners; for example, taking the details out of a well-developed shared writing but keeping the main ideas.

  **Students:**
  - Experience the same meaningful curriculum as their peers.
  - Receive support and appropriate materials to ensure success.

- **Visuals**
  Illustrations, captions, comics, graphs, photos, labels, wordless picture books, timelines, use of color.

  **Students:**
  - Experience success even though writing/transcription may be difficult.
  - See the interrelationship between visuals and text.
  - Value another medium for composing, displaying, and arranging information.
  - Can showcase their knowledge of elements of art.
  - Are able to provide another perspective or point of view.

- **Paired Writing**

  **Students:**
  - Create new text with a more capable writer.
  - Create familiar text with another struggling writer.
  - Retell a familiar story.
Daily Sustained Time to Write

*Students:*
- Keep the flow of writing going (build fluency).
- Choose their own topic.
- Try out writing forms, ideas.

Daily Sustained Time to Read

*Students:*
- Experience how authors work.
- Internalize writing models, ideas, vocabulary.
- Learn to read like a writer.

Frequent Conferences and Ongoing Evaluation

Includes whole-class share.

*Students:*
- Receive affirmation, encouragement, guidance, and explicit teaching.
- Set manageable goals.
- Refer to established criteria (rubric) before, during, and after a writing assignment.
- Encounter examples of good writing that will raise their standards and broaden their ideas about what writing is and what to write about.

Writing Celebrations

Especially in connection with whole-class share.

*Students:*
- Have their efforts affirmed.
- See the reason for drafting, revising, and editing.
- Are encouraged to do their best work.
- Publish their writing for real readers.
- Take pride and enjoyment in writing.
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