Effective feedback includes an understanding of what the learner has done and what the learner is trying to do, but also learning the traditions of that particular kind of text. Poets leave white space, how to write new stories, storytellers convey the passage of time. All writers care that the sound of the words matches the intent of their meaning. All writers care that they choose precisely right words. By studying texts that resemble those they are trying to make, children learn the tools of their trade. They look closely at the writing of published authors they admire in order to learn ways to develop meaning. To structure their piece, to find craft moves they can try in their own written work, and to study the ways other authors use conventions of written language that they, too, can try (Anderson 2000, 2005; Calkins 1994; Murray 1980). Throughout most of the units in the Units of Study in Opinion, Information, and Narrative Writing series, the reading and writing work is directly correlated. Ongoing, built-in book study provides exemplary texts on which students model their own work. In reading, students make meaning from published authors’ writing. In writing, students learn to write as so to convey meaning to their readers. For example, if students are learning in reading to stop after dialogue and notice what that dialogue reveals about the character who says it, then in writing students will learn to reveal their characters’ traits by crafting dialogue that reveals those traits. In short, students learn to implement in their own writing the same things that they are learning to interpret in their reading.

## Research Base

The Units of Study in Opinion, Information, and Narrative Writing series grows out of decades of think tanks and in-school research and practice that began in New York City School and that has spread throughout the country and world. This work, spearheaded by the Teachers College Reading and Writing Project (TCRWP), has included developing, piloting, revising, and implementing state-of-the-art curriculum in teaching writing. The TCRWP writing workshop model that has evolved over time from this continual process of research in what works when it comes to writing instruction is the foundation of the Units of Study in Opinion, Information, and Narrative Writing series.

The hundreds of thousands of teachers who used an earlier, very different edition of this series have spread the word that the writing workshop has given their children unbelievable power not only as writers but also as thinkers, learners, and readers. School districts are finding that when teachers receive the education they deserve in the teaching of writing, those teachers are able to provide students with clear, sequenced, vibrant writing instruction (along with opportunities to write daily for their own important purposes), and this makes a dramatic difference in young people’s abilities to write. Powerful writing instruction produces visible and immediate results.

It is the TCRWP’s belief that there is not a single string of sequenced lessons that applies to every possible classroom. Instruction must be responsive to the individual needs of the writers in each class. On the other hand, the Project does believe in strong models of excellent instruction for teachers. The sample curriculum offered in Units of Study in Opinion, Information, and Narrative Writing by Lucy Calkins and colleagues, published by Heinemann, is just such a model.

The curriculum in the Units of Study in Opinion, Information, and Narrative Writing series is grounded in the TCRWP’s work in schools and is intended to be tailored and adapted to specific children and classrooms. The assessment system that is a part of the series offers methods and recommendations for tailoring the units based on what teachers learn about their students through on-demand performance assessments, thus assuring a student-centered curriculum.

The Units of Study in Opinion, Information, and Narrative Writing series—in fact, all of the pursuits of the Project—are based on a handful of fundamental, research-based principles.

Learn more at [UnitsOfStudy.com](http://UnitsOfStudy.com)
The foundation of the Units of Study in Opinion, Information, and Narrative Writing series lies in the understanding that writing is a lifelong process during which we continually lift the level of our writing skills and outcomes as writers. Students learn that all writing has to do with what they have to say when they write. Students learn various ways to find topics they write about. They learn to make purposeful decisions about the structure and organization of a piece. They learn a repertoire of methods for elaborating. They learn to craft their pieces using literary language and devices and to employ the conventions of written language (Anderson 2005; Callen 1994; Elbow 1989; Graves 1994; Wood Ray 1999).

The Units of Study in Opinion, Information, and Narrative Writing series strengthens the skills of young, apprentice writers and prepares them for academic success. As writers build their knowledge of the qualities of good writing, they become critical readers of their writing and begin to set goals for themselves as writers, using feedback from their peers and teacher as well as self-assessment to lift the level of their writing (Anderson 2001; Graves 1994).

The conventions of written language thread throughout each of the units. Writers learn conventions that they can then use in the pieces they are writing, and they learn how using those conventions can help them better convey their meaning to their reader (Anderson 1998; Calle 1994; Graves 1983, 1984). Research shows that using a writing process for instruction in the complex task of writing increases student achievement (Hill 1989; Noldak; Reed, Port & Ruben 1986; Rech and Ethorne 1979).

Each unit in the series builds writers’ confidence in their writing abilities through the writing process. Children have opportunities to plan for and share their writing, draft, and then work to improve the level of their writing. As writers learn, they begin to use literary language more effectively. Writers at Work combined the popular message that when writers write, they do not sit down with a quill pen and immediately produce great, compelling prose. Instead, writers work through a process of writing, a process that contains recursive stages.

All of that sounds like a very long and arduous process, but there are times when a writer will want to edit. A writer will always write with the conventions that are easily under his control, but once a text is almost ready for readers, the writer will want to edit it, to rework their rough draft, trying to figure out what the author did that the writer too could try in her own writing helps. Feedback from a teacher or a self-assessment is essential if writing is to be improved. Drafting allows the writer to see their work clearly and work on their own pacing, structure, and voice. Therefore, the instruction teachers provide is necessarily differentiated. The specifi  c strategy for each day is selected by teachers based on what their assessments have revealed that writers need. During the minilesson, teachers demonstrate the process that writers often use to do the type of writing being studied and they scaffold students to practice the steps of the process. This is a quick, guided practice for students in which they can receive immediate feedback from both their classmates and their teacher. The minilesson is short, usually around ten minutes long (Calles 1994; Fletcher, Graves 1994).

Students then move onto independent writing, which constitutes the bulk of time in the writing workshop. Students independently draw on a repertoire of strategies that they’ve been taught. During this time, the teacher meets individually with students for a writing conference or meets with three to six students for small-group work. Conference and small-group work provide students with individualized instruction based on each student’s needs. Students receive direct instruction, feedback, and guided practice during these sessions (Calles 1994, Anderson 2000, 2005; Callens 1994; Graves 1994).

The share session at the end of class provides students with an opportunity to share their writing and to use the conventions of written language, the Units of Study in Opinion, Information, and Narrative Writing series provide a way to share quality writing. The improvement is evident within days and weeks, not just months. The series also provides direct instruction, benchmark samples, and rubrics to further differentiate the instruction they provide their particular students. Teachers may opt to begin the year with an unstructured assignment for opinion, information, and narrative writing that will provide them with the necessary data to identify the particular strengths of a student writer and to place her on a learning progression for each type of writing. By looking ahead to the qualities of writing expected at the next level of the learning progression, teachers can determine the specific strategies that will provide them an indication of the strengths of the students in their classes. Teachers can teach qualities of writing in whole-group minilessons, small-group strategy sessions, or individual conferences. The teacher can tailor the teaching to the specific needs of the student in the class (Anderson 2000; Callens 1994; Graves 1994).

Approximately three decades ago, a flurry of books and articles called for a writing revolution. Peter Elbow, Donald Murray, James Moffett, Ken Macrorie, and a series of others have been writing about the power of the writer’s voice. We need to understand the message that when writers write, they do not sit down with a quill pen and immediately produce great, compelling prose. Instead, writers work through a process of writing, a process that contains recursive stages. The instruction teachers provide is necessarily differentiated. The specific strategy for each day is selected by teachers based on what their assessments have revealed that writers need. During the minilesson, teachers demonstrate the process that writers often use to do the type of writing being studied and they scaffold students to practice the steps of the process. This is a quick, guided practice for students in which they can receive immediate feedback from both their classmates (Research Principle 5).

A successful curriculum provides differentiated instruction for students of all ability levels and support for English language learners. Whereas twenty years ago 95% of jobs were low-skill, today those jobs only constitute 10% of our entire economy (Darling-Hammond et al. 2008). Children who leave school today without strong literacy skills will no longer find a job waiting for them. In years past, one approach to supporting struggling writers was to slow down instruction, remove parts of the curriculum, or teach an alternate curriculum. Allington and Wixson (1995) found that this practice resulted in compounding the delays, the curriculum was slowed or less was taught, students fell even further behind.

The development of a writing curriculum that is responsive to the unique needs of children is critical in today’s classrooms (Research Principle 5). Any curriculum that is to be effective must be responsive to the needs of individual students (Anderson 2005; Callens 1994; Elbow 1989; Graves 1994; Wood Ray 1999).

The units in the series provide differentiated instruction for students of all ability levels and support for English language learners. The workshop model in the Units of Study in Opinion, Information, and Narrative Writing series is, by definition, always individualized. The child chooses what he will write about, chooses the words he will use, chooses the people and places and topics and opinions that will be brought forth in the texts, choices that are vividly important to her, and chooses the level of vocabulary and of sentence and text structures. Therefore, the instruction teachers provide is necessarily differentiated in and out of the classroom. In addition, the workshop classroom is organized in such a way predictably, consistent ways that children quickly become comfortable participating in their ongoing stages. When teachers follow their routines today after day, students can focus their energies on trying to figure out how to do their work rather than on worrying over what they will be expected to do. The predictability of the workshop provides tremendous reassurance to a child who is just learning English, and this is amplified if workshop structures repeat themselves across other subjects. As students begin to write and think about their own stories, information tests, and persuasive essays, they can then turn to again to learn new vocabulary, new sentence structures, and language, and work on expressing their thoughts in a highly contextualized and pertinent situation. That is to say, they will be learning about language in a culturally relevant and high-interest activity and writing about material that comes from their own lives and experiences. The curriculum supports many ways each student can as well as many ways to off  er replication if needed (Calles 1994; Graves 1994; Wood Ray 1999).

The assessment system that is a part of the Units of Study in Opinion, Information, and Narrative Writing series provides teachers with concrete tools, benchmark samples, and rubrics to further differentiate the instruction they provide their particular students. Teachers may opt to begin the year with an unstructured assignment for opinion, information, and narrative writing that will provide them with the necessary data to identify the particular strengths of a student writer and to place her on a learning progression for each type of writing. By looking ahead to the qualities of writing expected at the next level of the learning progression, teachers can determine the specific strategies that will provide them with an indication of the strengths of the student. Students can teach qualities of writing in whole-group minilessons, small-group strategy sessions, or individual conferences. The teacher can tailor the teaching to the specific needs of the individual student in the class (Anderson 2000; Callens 1994; Graves 1994).
Research Principle 1

There are fundamental qualities of all good writing, and students write well when they learn these qualities as well as the specific qualities of different genres, or types, of writing.

The foundation of the Units of Study in Opinion, Information, and Narrative Writing series lies in the understanding that writing is a lifelong process during which we continually lift the level of our writing skills and outcomes as writers. Students learn that all writing begins with the writer and the piece. A writer learns various ways to find topics they want to write about. They learn to make purposeful decisions about the structure and organization of a piece. A writer learns a repertoire of methods for elaborating. They learn to craft their pieces using literary language and devices and to employ the conventions of written language (Anderson, Callan, 2005; Callan 1994; Elbow, 1989; Graves, 1994; Woodward, 1995).

Revising is a process of writing. Writers write, they do not sit down with a quill pen and immediately produce graceful, edited volumes titled Writers at Work. Writers need to write frequently and in many different genres to gain independent writing skills. The share session at the end of class provides students with an opportunity to share their writing, explore possibilities, and set goals for how they will improve as writers. We know that writers benefit most from predictable and simple structures in the writing process. Research shows that using a writing process for instruction in the complex task of writing improves student achievement (Elbow, 1986; Holdkamp, Reed, Porter & Ruben, 1982; Keth/Br Parton, 1979).

Each unit in the Units of Study cycles children through the writing process multiple times. Children have opportunities to plan for and generate their writing, draft, and to reread their rough draft, thinking, How can I make it even better? Feedback from a reader can help a writer imagine ways to improve the draft. And studying mentor texts to figure out what the author did that the writer too could do in her own writing helps the writer revise. A writer will always write with the conventions that are easily under her control, but once a text is almost ready for readers, the writer will want to edit it. A writer will want to make sure that the words she has chosen will clearly and accurately convey her meaning and intention. The writer’s knowledge of literary language and the use of that language during the writing process will help the writer to share her ideas with clarity and with style.

Research Principle 2

Using a writing process to teach the complex task of writing increases student achievement.

Research Principle 3

Students benefit from teaching that offers direct instruction, guided practice, and independent practice.

We know that writers benefit most from predictable and simple structures in the writing workshop (Callan 1994; Graves 1994; Short, Hartke & Burke 1994). Writing improves in a palpable, dramatic fashion when children are given explicit instruction and lots of time to write, share, and practice. Teachers explicitly teach the qualities, habits, and strategies of effective writing, that writing becomes better, and the improvement is evident within days and weeks, not just months.

The Units of Study in Opinion, Information, and Narrative Writing workshop model has three basic structures: the minilesson, independent writing time with conferencing and small-group work, and the share sessions at the end of writing time. These structures support the basic of the writing instruction—providing direct instruction, guided practice as students begin their head at the new, learning, and independent implementation of the strategies (Graves, 1978).

The minilesson offers students direct instruction on an explicit strategy for writing. The specific strategy for each day is selected by teachers based on what they observe and what they know about their students. During the minilesson, teachers demonstrate the process that writers often use to do the type of writing being studied and that students will use to practice the steps of the process. This is a quick, guided practice for students in which they can receive immediate feedback from both their classmates and their teacher. The minilesson is short, usually around ten minutes long (Callan 1994; Fletcher, 1994; Graves, 1994).

Students then move on to independent writing, which constitutes the bulk of the time in the writing workshop. Students independently draw on a repertoire of strategies that have been taught. During this time, the teacher meets individually with students for a writing conference or meets with three to five students for small-group workshops. Conference and small-group workshops provide students with individualized instruction based on each student’s needs. Students receive direct instruction, feedback, and guided practice during these sessions (Atwell, 1999; Anderson, 2000, 2005; Callan 1994; Graves, 1994).

The share session at the end of class provides students with an opportunity to share their work and support in progress. Students may share their writing with a partner or small group and get feedback. The teacher may use the share time to teach an additional lesson that builds on or further develops the strategy introduced during the minilesson, or as a way to check student progress and to look at a piece of writing from a different perspective. The class may come together to look at a piece of writing from a different perspective. The class may come together to look at a piece of writing from a different perspective.

Research Principle 4

To write well, writers need ample time to write every day, with clear expectations for stamina and time.

Just as learners become skilled at playing an instrument or swimming or playing tennis or reading by doing those things, writing, too, is learned through practice. John Guthrie’s study (2004) illustrates that fourth-graders who read at the second-grade level spend a half-hour a day reading, and fourth-graders who read at the eighth-grade level spend four to five hours a day reading. In Guthrie’s study, the information is given over and over again to learn new vocabulary, use new language structures, and work on expressing their thoughts in a highly contextualized and pertinent situation. That is to say, they will be learning about language in a culturally relevant and high-interest activity and writing about material that comes from their own lives and experiences. The curriculum suggests many ways each teacher can as well as many ways to offer repetition if needed (Callan 1994; Graves, 1994; Woodward, 1995).

The workshop model in the Units of Study is by definition, always individualized. The child chooses what she will do. The Units of Study are differentiated instruction for students of all ability levels. Students benefit from teaching that offers direct instruction, benchmark samples, and rubrics to further differentiate the instruction they provide their particular students. Teachers may opt to begin the year with an introduction to the specific rubric, or writer’s workshop, or a new strategy. The class may come together to look at a piece of writing from a different perspective. The class may come together to look at a piece of writing from a different perspective. The class may come together to look at a piece of writing from a different perspective.
Any effective writing curriculum acknowledges that it is important for writers to be immersed in powerful writing—literature and other kinds of texts. Children learn to write from being immersed in and affected by texts that other authors have written. Children especially need opportunities to read as writers. Students learn to mentor themselves by studying the writing of others, not only developing a sense of what it is they are trying to make, but also learning the traditions of that particular kind of text. Poets leave white space, how to write to readers, storylines convey the passage of time. All writers care that the sound of their words matches the tenor of their meaning. All writers care that they choose precisely right words. By studying texts that resemble those they are trying to make, children learn the tools of their trade. They look closely at the writing of published authors they admire in order to learn ways to develop meaning, to find craft moves they can try in their own writing, and to study the ways other authors use conventions of written language that they, too, can try (Anderson 2000, 2005; Gallegos 1994; Murray 1990).

Throughout most of the units in the Units of Study in Opinion, Information, and Narrative Writing series, the reading and writing work is directly correlated. Ongoing, built-in book study provides exemplary texts on which students model their own writing. In reading, students learn to make meaning from published authors’ writing, in writing, students learn to write as to convey meaning to their readers. For example, if students are learning in reading to stop after dialogue and notice what that dialogue reveals about the character who says it, then in writing students will learn to reveal their characters’ traits by crafting dialogue that reveals those traits. In short, students learn to implement in their own writing the same things that they are learning to interpret in their reading.

Research by John Hattie and others (2008) has shown that to support learners’ progress, it is crucial to encourage them to work toward clear goals and to try to help them to develop a Schonian mindset that shows them what they are doing well and ways they are progressing, as well as letting them know next steps. This is especially true when the feedback is part of a whole system of learning that includes learners working toward goals that are ambitious and yet within grasp.

Effective feedback is not interchangeable with praise, it is not the same as instruction; it is not the same as a grade or score. While each of these may be a part of it, feedback is much more.

Effective feedback includes an understanding of what the learner has done and what the learner is trying to do or could do, a sort of reasoning of the situation the learner finds herself in, including some of her history in this work. It is a particular response to exactly the work the learner has done. Effective feedback also includes an outside perspective—a reader’s point of view, for example, or a teacher’s point of view. Constructive feedback may include suggestions for the learner of strategies to try, obstacles to remove, or a baby step to aim for toward the larger, more distant goal.

The Units of Study in Opinion, Information, and Narrative Writing series provides the structures, guidelines, and examples that enable teachers to provide this type of effective, differentiated feedback.