Gretchen S. Bernabei  Jayne Hover  Cynthia Candler

CRUNCHTIME

LESSONS TO HELP STUDENTS BLOW THE ROOF OFF WRITING TESTS—
AND BECOME BETTER WRITERS IN THE PROCESS

Foreword by Jeff Anderson

HEINEMANN
Portsmouth, NH
For Barry Lane

Who got us started on this path,
who sees and creates the best in people,
and who believes with faith in things unseen.
Ba-da-bing.

JAYNE, CYNTHIA, AND GRETCHE
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You picked up this book to thumb through it for a reason. Perhaps it was the title or you knew one of the authors, but more than likely you picked it up, at least in part, looking for solutions, for ways to prepare your students for state and national writing performance tests. But I bet you wanted to find some lessons that will not only improve test scores but also prepare your students for all the writing they need to do for a life in the twenty-first century. Many would say the two are mutually exclusive. Not these authors. Let me tell you, finally a book like we all wanted has been written, and you have it in your hands.

First, you need to know about Gretchen Bernabei, a tireless supporter of students, teachers, and other writers. Much like the credit the authors give to Barry Lane—a man whose joy for writing and learning has influenced many of us—Gretchen Bernabei is quietly carrying on the work of her mentor, spreading accessible lessons and supporting teachers to share their successes on the page much like Barry did for her.

Gretchen Bernabei is a connector, and it’s a good thing because she is connecting the readers of this book with two new voices of real classroom teachers who have scoured the face of the earth looking for solutions to writing tests that actually work—and who found a solution in Gretchen’s writing and her workshops. But because of her humility, and her ability to connect people and ideas, Gretchen kept working with these two special teachers. Cynthia and Jayne took her ideas and played with them with kids, added to them, and altered them. Gretchen listened to them, cheering them on and visiting their classrooms. The result of all this interaction is Crunchtime, a culmination of conversations about what works. The result is a fine-tuned set of lessons that are good enough to be done throughout the year but are also quite helpful in—yes, I’ll say it—preparing kids for a test.

Gretchen writes her mission is to “find, adapt, and develop lessons that are healthy for kids, that promote lifelong literacy” and these ways will just happen to “blow the roof off test scores.” I’d add one more word to Gretchen’s mission: joy.
She helps teachers and students find joy in writing again—or for the first time. She did it for Cynthia and Jayne, and now the three of them do it for us.

And the Crunchtime strategies do help improve students’ writing performance for a reason. They are based in sound pedagogy and current research. Yes, test prep doesn’t have to be worksheet after worksheet. In fact, you should know that this is not a series of practice tests or fill-in-the-blank worksheets, but rather lessons that excite and incite kids to write, to develop confidence, by actually doing the very thing they will be tested on—writing. It’s common sense but not common practice. Gretchen, Cynthia, and Jayne make the journey toward better test scores simple and concrete, without insulting your intelligence or using one worksheet.

Just in the first few pages you will stumble into some gems that are so deceptively simple, it’s hard to believe how effective they are. Gretchen, Cynthia, and Jayne give voice to what every good writing teacher has tried to say, but they do it with visuals and movement, which we know will help the ideas stick, and it’s all done in seconds. I won’t forget it and neither will you—or your kids. Check out the Text Dude.

But the list goes on. You will find ideas you may have used that worked a little, like keeping lists of things to write about, but Gretchen, Jayne, and Cynthia make the very concept simple and concrete—for the teacher and the student. And this bank of ideas, as Gretchen calls it, actually helps kids delineate what could become something of substance or worthy of their writing time—something many students struggle to get. With examples of ways to say things to your kids to get the ideas flowing, such as “list the memories you would choose to keep if a robot were erasing the rest of your memory tomorrow,” you know you are in the hands of real teachers who work with real students.

If you have never experienced Gretchen’s kernel essays, you are in for a treat. The same with Cynthia’s flip book, or Jayne’s F.I.T. lesson. These are all methods that help students begin to organize their writing. These strategies help students access the thinking they may not believe they have, but invariably that thinking will spew out when prompted with the lessons on these pages. Simple and concrete.

A trove of student examples helps each lesson become clearer, and some of the most delightful writing comes from their students. The truisms are my favorite. You might find yourself thinking, “Kids can do this?” Yes, they can, and together,
these three master teachers show us how, step-by-step, inspiring hope in the hopeless, giving tips to the tipless, and filling those empty pages with thought and life.

    Joy.
    Yes, we can.

I think in these pages, Gretchen, Cynthia, and Jayne have lived up to their missions because each lesson fosters students’ thinking and embraces their most human need for self-expression—and how writing is there for the taking.

–Jeff Anderson

Author of *Mechanically Inclined* and *Everyday Editing*
The Thermometer Rubric

In the beginning, teachers wrote their own tests. I remember being a student, sitting in my chair at Horace Mann Junior High, breathing in the fresh, damp ditto fragrance from Mrs. Kramer’s test. When I became a teacher, the vantage point changed—I got to carry the damply drooping purple pages over my arm and into my own classroom. I don’t know what mimeograph machines or ditto pages cost, but it surely couldn’t compare to what we spend now on high-stakes testing. Teaching has changed. More important, being a student has changed.

Starting around October of her third grade year, my daughter, Matilde, woke up every morning, padded into the bathroom, and slipped the thermometer into her mouth. She would concentrate and listen for the beep, hoping that she’d be too sick to go to school. It seems funny, but it’s not. I understood. She had a life of drudgery: packets of work to be done in class; homework packets to work on before and after dinner; interminable, uncompletable packets, day in and day out. Children who didn’t work their packets fast enough lost their recess and occasionally had to finish during detention. Matilde would look at me and whisper, “Please, Mom, don’t write a note.” Meanwhile, her school flew banners outside, proud of its exemplary status and its “Blue Ribbon” award—one of the nation’s finest.

One day as Matilde took her temperature, I remembered my own third grade. It was fun. Donny and Ronny Barton were always funny, and Sharon Courville was my first best friend. Mrs. Cole was pretty beastly some days, but not every day; jump rope, freeze tag, and kickball reigned on the playground.
Something inside me hardened that year, watching Matilde with dismay. Our schools should be accountable, but do they have to become joyless halls of drudgery? I’m not against measuring student achievement and learning. But can’t we develop lessons that use the best of what we know about learning and about children, lessons informed by research and results, lessons that include color, life, conversation, and laughter? That became my mission as an English teacher—to find, adapt, develop, and invent lessons that are healthy for kids, that promote lifelong literacy, and that almost coincidentally blow the roof right off test scores—and then to share these lessons with and learn from my teaching peers for the benefit of every Matilde in our data-driven land.

Sharing Within the Profession

Years ago, when my friend and mentor Barry Lane first told me that I should publish one of my lessons, I told him that I didn’t have the first idea about how to publish something. He reached into his wallet and pulled out three phone numbers for me to call, numbers of people at three different publishing houses. “They’d want to see what you’re doing,” he told me. I was astounded. I had this image that people who write books would be competitive and guarded with information like that. As I wrote down the numbers, I said to him, “Barry, I can’t believe you’re helping me like this.” He grinned and said, “Gretchen, we’re all fighting the same battle. If we help each other, we all get stronger.”

Since that time, I’ve shared with colleagues, through books and workshops, some ideas that work well in classes, especially with struggling students. In return, I’ve been gratified and exhilarated that many of them share back with me. While many teachers have contributed valuable thoughts and twists, two teachers in particular have knocked my socks clean off with their thoughtful inventions and triumphant successes in the face of harsh testing challenges.

Two Teachers: Jayne Hover and Cynthia Candler

Jayne Hover is a tour de force with her fourth-graders in San Antonio. She took an idea I shared with her about truisms and subsequently emailed me some student writing that was so insightful, so profound, and so abundant that I found myself
scratching my head and picturing her class filled with child-sized Albert Schweitzers and Marie Curies. I was compelled to visit her class and watch how in the world she did it. Sure enough, her students weren’t tiny Einsteins. They were real, shiny, squirmy children nestled into her classroom in this Title I school, jiggling and thrusting their hands up to read their writing, responding to the sounds of each other’s voices and to her encouragement and leadership. I knew that not one of them would reach for a thermometer in the morning. And not only were her children enjoying their time in her class but their test scores caused a stir among area principals. Jayne’s work over the next few years would continue to create such joy and consistently high scores that it was obvious we needed to clone her methods. She has taught me her ways, and I can vouch that they work with students well beyond the fourth grade level, even up to high school.

Cynthia Candler is an elegant seventh grade teacher in Terrell, Texas. When I met her, she told me in her hushed and velvet voice that although most of the students at her school were passing the state writing test, a high percentage of them were just barely passing. She was frustrated and desperate to improve their writing, to help them move toward “commended performance” scores. She herself had been a professional writer in her preteaching life, but she felt she needed to rethink what would help her students grow as writers. I shared with her what I knew about alternatives to the formulaic five-paragraph essay, and she went right to work with them. When I ran into her a year later, she showed me a glowing array of student work, using efficient twists I’d never imagined. I’ve been using and sharing Cynthia Candler’s innovations ever since, and they have become a staple in many classrooms from elementary through high school. Oh, and test scores? Within two years, 42 percent of the seventh-graders at her school had “commended performance” on their writing scores.

But Shouldn’t Test Writing Be the Same as Real Writing?

Is “test writing” a genre unto itself? Well, not exactly. Every state announces what kind of writing they’ll test at what grade levels: persuasive, expository, literary analysis, personal narrative, descriptive, informative, combinations of these, or open choice. Each type of writing is authentically found in the real world, and it’s reasonable to imagine that if we’re teaching students to write authentically, then they will be equipped to score well on the tests. But it doesn’t always work out that way.
Careful analysis of failing papers can reveal some of the differences between “real writing” and “test writing.” For example, in the real world, a very brief persuasive letter to the editor might be powerful and accomplish its aim, but that same letter on a test could fail because it’s not developed enough. It’s not long enough. Or maybe the student didn’t include enough ideas, even though the single point she made would have been effective in the real world. What makes a piece of writing successful? It depends on the situation.

So teachers must go beyond preparing students for successful lives in the literate world when we design our classroom lessons; if we don’t, we may face chagrin when we receive our test results. We have to familiarize ourselves with what “the test” is really asking for and what the scoring rubrics really say. We have to become students of the details in the test. Is first-person writing acceptable? Are the students expected to repeat the prompt? Most states publish scoring guides that offer samples of student papers demonstrating the full range of scores, and these samples provide the best education for teachers interested in helping students.

Does this mean that students should write only practice test papers all year? Absolutely not. The best year would incorporate daily writing and reading activities, instruction that is fully informed by research about what helps students grow as writers, and instructional methods like those endorsed by the National Writing Project. Furthermore, one of our most important duties is to protect students from test anxieties. To that end, it’s really most effective if students don’t hear much about the test until the date is near. The teacher is the one who needs to be informed about the end result. So this book focuses on processes that will lead to a successful product. As stated by Lynnette Van Dyke of Michigan’s Department of Education, “If you are interested in making real the central tenets of the National Writing Project, you have to attend to process as much as product. It seems as though we are focusing on product—people don’t know how to get there.” The lessons in this book are unified in their emphasis on process toward product.

Knowing the Research

The National Research Center on English Learning and Achievement published Judith Langer’s Guidelines for Teaching Middle and High School Students to Read and Write Well: Six Features of Effective Instruction, which describes characteristics
shared by the most effective schools in the study. The *Writing Next* report, published by the Alliance for Excellent Education, contains research findings outlining eleven elements found in effective writing instruction. Both of these reports echo the foundation beliefs of the NWP (see the Appendix, Research on Foundations of Effective Writing Instruction).

So what of research-informed classrooms? One would assume that students in classrooms incorporating these characteristics do well on tests, right? Well, they should—but they don’t always. What happens these days when students fail a high-stakes test? At best, they shrug it off and do better next time. At worst, the student is retained at that grade, families feel pain, and schools are sanctioned or potentially shut down. Unfortunately, the problem often reflects students’ inability to make connections between what they’ve been learning to do in class and how to apply it to a testing situation. For instance, how well are students likely to do on the district’s “benchmark” test if they have been immersed in writing workshop or another form of process-based instruction? You guessed it—the scores predict poor performances.

It’s crunch time.

We offer up the lessons in this book as strategies that incorporate the research, that engage students, and that can shore up some gaps between learning and testing. And one thing we know for sure is that when we use these lessons with our students, not one of them will say a silent prayer and reach for a thermometer.
CHAPTER 2

ORGANIZING AND PREWRITING STRUCTURES

The Talking List

THE PROBLEM: The student says, “It makes sense to me,” but the paper leaves the reader befuddled. The challenge for struggling writers is to find a topic and then stay with it.

THE SOLUTION: Using a Talking List outline produces well-organized, focused papers.

“Think what you need to say. Then say just what you mean. Make your words say just what you mean to say. Tell enough. Learn to say things in new ways. Listen for words that make you think of a picture. Tell the whole story. Leave out things that do not belong in the story.”

—PAUL McKee AND M. Lucile Harrison, 1947

HOW THIS LESSON CAME ABOUT

Children need to think through their stories before they put them down on paper; otherwise, their thoughts are disorganized, unfocused, and confusing to most readers. For more reluctant writers or for writers who have difficulty organizing their thoughts, a talk-through can be a tremendous tool in their arsenal. Kids love this lesson because it does most of the work for them.
The challenge of working with most writers at risk of failing is to keep them on topic. They have a story to tell and wonderful words they want to use. They have some voice in there, too, but it can be disorganized—wandering from the main path onto little rabbit trails.

Webbing can be a helpful tool for prewriting, but we came to realize that it was confusing for those who struggled with organization. Our students wanted to write about each thing on their web independently, and it was difficult for them to focus on the main idea. Their composition ended up disconnected.

The Talking List works like an outline. It’s a timeline of important events in chronological order that can be rearranged and edited for clarity. We have found that students who don’t like to write rarely write in paragraphs. This exercise, adapted from Ruth Culham’s 6+1 Traits of Writing (Scholastic & NREL, p. 95), provides paragraphing painlessly.

**INTRODUCE THE CONCEPT**

As with most new concepts, the most successful outcome begins with modeling the process. It’s important for students to see that if all they have included are small details (labeled “Qs”), they haven’t told us anything important. Conversely, if we have only main events, they’ve left out all the details. To help bring this concept home, try this method before the lesson: Prepare a transparency of a numbered list outline (in sequential order) derived from a favorite personal story or classroom experience. Leave out one important event and add an extraneous event. Model the process as follows:

- **Tell your complete story to the class.**
- **Display the transparency.** Have students identify the parts that they heard (label “✓” on overhead) and the parts not mentioned (label X). Add any parts students heard in the story that did not appear on the Talking List. Discuss.
- **Label Talking List items I (for important information) and Q (for quick or small details).**
- **Look at each Q and decide which I it goes with.** (This will create clumps.)
- **Organize the list by rewriting the items labeled “I” in order and adding the “Qs” that go with it.**
- **Draw a line under each clump.** (A “clump” is one “I” and any “Qs” that may be attached; these clumps will eventually become paragraphs.)
• Explain: “Remember when you first learned to color and people always told you to stay inside the lines? Remember how outlining your picture made everything look defined? The Talking List is an outline for your story to make your writing clear and easy to follow.”

**Practice Session**
• Students will now make an outline list of their story (suggested time limit of three to eleven minutes). With a partner, students will exchange outlines and tell their stories. Their partner records a check (✓) by everything on the outline that the writer tells, marks an X on items not told, and jots notes for parts not in outline.
• With their partner’s help, students label parts “I” and “Q,” revise their own outline by pairing the “Is” with supporting “Qs,” and draw lines between clumps for paragraphs. Students are now ready to write their stories. Remind students to stick to their Talking List; they can always add more details as they remember them when writing.
• Students will add an appropriate introduction and conclusion to their stories.

**Debriefing**
1. How did you feel when you could write just a word or a phrase?
2. How are you a better listener when you do this activity?
3. What did you like about this way of writing your story?

**Variations**
1. For younger or special needs students, write the outline for them as they tell their story. Go through each item and ask, “Do you think this was important in your story? Do we really need to know . . . ?” This will guide them as they make decisions about their story.
2. Have students record their story as they tell it to a buddy, and let them write their outline from the recording.

**Teacher Reflections: Three Tangible Results**
✓ This lesson was the most effective one for raising the scores of struggling writers, because they now had a plan that told them where they were going and what ideas needed more attention.
✓ We noticed that students would immediately begin writing when they used the Talking List outline. Their story was before them, all laid out in paragraphs, but in list form. All they needed to do was put it together in sentence form.
✓ It was easier for my students to write on the day of the state test when they couldn’t talk because they were used to thinking their story through. They had talked through their stories so many times before that on test day, they could talk inside their heads.
Student Examples from the Classroom

Fiona (Figure 2.1) and Brandon (Figure 2.2) used the Talking List to organize their thoughts and to select the elements they wanted to include in their story. Each produced a coherent and interesting story.

**Gun Shot**

As a little girl I helped my dad around the house. My dad is a carpenter. He painted the living room shiny red because that is my mom’s favorite color.

My dad started to work on the crown molding. That is a piece of wood at the corners of the ceiling. I saw this tool and I was curious.

All of a sudden you hear a gun shot “Poow.” There was only a single drop of blood on my shoulder. I did not cry but my dad was worried what had happened. I told him that my arm hurts. He tried to find more blood on my body but there was none.

My parents took me to the hospital. The doctor took out a one and one half inch nail from my shoulder. After that my parents don’t let me be curious any more.

**Some People Have Bad Days**

As I stepped out of bed my foot landed in some left over raseberry pie from last night! It felt mushy. Sense I had to wipe my foot off I mist the school bus. My parents were furios but they took me to school any way but I got grounded.

When I got to school I asxeditely bit my tongue by chewing on the inside of my check. Just a few minutes later after I bit my tongue school was over when I got home I played out side then my friend Jonathan came. We played basketball and I won. He said I let you win! I said yeah right so I walked of and while I was walking he pushed me so I pushed him back, and then we both went home and went our seprat ways. From that day on I learned that some people have bad days.
Writing a Kernel Essay with Text Structures

**THE PROBLEM:** In between a prompt and a draft, students need structure and explicit, step-by-step guidance.

**THE SOLUTION:** Kernel essays provide an alternative to the five-paragraph essay, and every writer can do them.

**HOW THIS LESSON CAME ABOUT**

Imagine your class. You say, “Okay, students, time to write a composition. Your job is to say one thing you know and tell how you know it. You have the rest of the class period. You may begin.”

What would happen? Would the group nod, show outward signs of inner introspection, and quietly sit there producing said compositions?

A few might. Lysette would pleasantly blink a couple of times and start writing. But Eduardo would want to know exactly how to tell “how you know it.” Ashley would ask, “One thing we know about what?” Jesse would ask for an explanation from the beginning again. Jonathan would put his head down until the bell.

Students need guidance, and a kernel essay is an ideal scaffold to help them get started. It provides students with a concrete strategy for translating thought into sentences that will eventually result in a paragraph, or an essay, or any other form of writing that serves their purpose—one sentence for each step of the thought process. The following introductory lesson is the simplest way to ease students into the kernel essay process, beginning with a narrative of a personal moment and a text structure called “A Memory.”

**INTRODUCE THE CONCEPT**

Hold up an imaginary kernel of corn and ask, “What could you do with a kernel of corn?”

“Eat it!”

“Plant it and grow a whole plant.”

“A whole cornfield!”

Which answer is correct? It depends on what you want. They’re all correct. The same is true of a kernel essay. You could expand it into a full novel or a movie...
script. Or it could certainly be expanded into a two-page composition (see “Expanding a Sentence,” p. 65). Often, it’s perfect just as it is, suitable for formatting and framing as a gift, with or without added photo graphics. Tiny but packed.

**Whole Class**

- Put the memory text structure (Figure 2.3) on an overhead projector, covered up.
- Ask students to select a moment from a Quicklist (see “The Quicklist,” p. 14).
- Give students these directions: “Number your papers one through five. Think about the moment you chose. I’m going to ask you five questions about that moment, one at a time. Answer each question about that moment.”
- Then ask the following questions:
  1. Where were you and what were you doing?  
     (As the students write, uncover the first box on the overhead.)
  2. What was the first thing that happened?  
     (As students write, uncover the second box on the overhead.)
  3. What was the second thing that happened?  
     (As students write, uncover the third box on the overhead.)
  4. What was the last thing that happened?  
     (As students write, uncover the fourth box on the overhead.)
  5. What did you think about just then?  
     (As students write, uncover the last box on the overhead.)
- Now ask them to remove the numbers.
- Explain that they now have written a kernel essay. It’s like a kernel of corn, tiny but packed.
- Let them read their kernel essays to a partner or group just to see what they said.
- Repeat this process on two or three subsequent days, and let students choose a kernel essay to expand.
This exercise works very well with narrative text structures. Try some variations (Figures 2.4–2.7) as students become familiar with the process. But what about academic writing? Or expository writing? Could the text structure format for narrative writing be useful to students asked to write a summary of a science experiment or a literary analysis? Consider your own thoughts. Each one has a history, a life story. Each began somewhere, had an infancy as an inkling, grew toward a question or a notion, either fell off or continued to grow into a mature concept, accepted fact, or real belief. You could even create a timeline for the life of any thought, idea, or belief that you contain.

So text structures work for expository and literary prompts as well as narrative. It seems that the more of our personal discovery process we put into the information, the more readable it will be to someone else. Looking into sources like *The Best American Science Writing* (from the Best American Series), you will find that these text structures incorporate authentic research and expository information into similar thought-tracking structures. And if you add an audience and an agenda, these also serve as persuasive structures.

**Debriefing**

1. Was this easy?
2. Why did it work/not work?
3. Do you realize that you have a beginning, a middle, and an end?
4. Did anyone feel "oh no!" when I got to number four and asked you to write the last thing that happened? Did you need to put in another thing that happened? Or two more? (When this happens, draw a new text structure, with boxes as the student needs them.)
5. Introduce variations. Name finished text structures after the students who completed them and leave them up. Soon there will be variations all over, and other students will begin to invent their own structures.

**Variations**

A kernel essay is simply a sentence-by-sentence summary of the main points of a story that makes an outline for the writer. With text structures, students write one sentence for each box.

A Memory: The basic form, as we saw in Figure 2.3, might result in this story:

- We were gathered at the windows watching the rain.
- My Aunt Sue was getting dressed.
- The phone rang, and we heard that the preacher was lost.
• Several hours later, the wedding happened.
• Rain and traffic can’t spoil a good romance.

The Story of My Thinking (Figure 2.4): This twist encourages students to document a change of opinion:
• I used to think that you had to be a special personality type, like a pirate or a trick rider, to have adventures.
• But then our family spent some time on my grandfather’s farm.
• And now I think that real adventure can be in all kinds of backyards, ready for everyone.

TRUISM: You can find adventures anywhere in life.

THE STORY OF MY THINKING

What I used to think  but this happened  so now I think

Evolution of a Term (Figure 2.5): Here, students can see how their thinking changes over time:
• When I was four, adventure was a herd of tricycles in the driveway.
• When I was ten, adventure sounded like hoof beats on my grandfather’s farm.
• Now, adventure means being an activist for a better world.
• When I’m old, adventure will be vicarious: The thrill will be in hearing about my children’s adventures.

EVOLUTION OF A TERM (WORD OR PHRASE IN THE PROMPT)

What the word meant to me when I was four  What the word meant to me when I was eight  What the word means to me now  What the word will probably mean when I am ______ (pick an age)
Discovering a Lie (Figure 2.6): Students think back on an old belief and relate how they learned the truth. Many will probably reflect on how they felt about the revelation:

- When I was little, my parents told me about the Easter bunny.
- So I believed that every Easter he came along and hid eggs and presents for me.
- Then one year I saw my father hiding the eggs.
- Now I realize that my parents wanted me to have a good childhood.

The variations are as diverse as your students. See Figure 2.7 for four more text structures students may wish to use, or invite them to create their own.

Kernel Essay Text Structures for Other Genres

As we have discussed, other genres are equally accessible through this activity. See Figure 2.8 for text structures that work with expository writing, an I-search paper, or literary analysis.

Teacher Reflections: Four Tangible Results

✓ You see students' need for a firm grip on a definite structure, like holding onto a steering wheel tightly. As they become comfortable with the structure and the kernel essay process, they begin to feel comfortable changing the structure. Before your eyes, they can develop fluency with creating their own structures, and your wall fills up with structures they have invented. They still need a steering wheel, but they like being in charge of where the car goes.

✓ On test day, students often squander their own stamina by writing lengthy first drafts on the practice paper. Writing kernel essays is both time-saving and strength-preserving for our young writers.
✓ Students voice appreciation for so much result with so little drudgery. “I can know in four short sentences if I have something worth working on,” Heather told me.
✓ Students who know how to use kernel essays and text structures now have an alternative to the standard five-paragraph essay.

**TRIBUTE TO A PERSON WHO TAUGHT ME SOMETHING**

- What the lesson is
- Flashback to lesson
- Description of person
- Words the person said
- What you wish you could find out now from the person

**BACKFIRE (ARMANDO BARRERA)**

- I did this
- Because of
- What I was hoping for
- But instead this happened
- So now I think

**METAMORPHOSIS (KELSEY MAHAN)**

- How you felt before it
- ...while it was happening
- ...after it happened
- How you feel now
- What you believe now

**CAUSE AND EFFECT (CELESTE RAMIREZ)**

- I did this
- It caused this
- Now I know this

Figure 2.7: Additional Variations—Tribute to a Person Who Taught Me Something; Backfire; Metamorphosis; Cause and Effect
Ken Macrorie’s I-Search paper takes students on a journey with a path something like this:

How One Event Changed a Character, and Here is How You Could Tweak It Further for Literary Analysis

Or...The Story of a Character’s Thinking

Figure 2.8: Expository, I-Search, and Literary Analysis Text Structures
**Student Examples from the Classroom**

**A Memory**

I was in the hospital waiting room with my dad while my mom was having a baby.

A lady came to get us.

We went into Mom’s hospital room.

I saw my baby brother for the first time.

Life is a miracle.

The waiting room at the hospital smelled like disinfectant and medicine. All of the couches and chairs were full with people reading, sleeping, staring off into space—all waiting for someone to walk in and tell them that the family’s new baby had been born.

We were waiting, too. My dad was trying to read a magazine. I noticed that he was having trouble focusing. I guess it’s hard to read something when your eyes keep wandering to the door.

I wasn’t doing any better. Even though I was sleepy, my eyes wouldn’t stay shut. I kept looking at the door, too, wondering how my mother was doing and when my brother would finally get here. I wasn’t really nervous . . . or was I? Surely everything would be OK with my mom . . . or would it?

In the middle of my confused thoughts, a lady in a green suit walked through the waiting room door and asked, “Is there a member of the Smith family here?” After sitting for so long, my dad nearly fell over when he jumped up to answer her. I couldn’t move, suddenly afraid that one of a million things might have gone wrong.

Somehow, though, putting one eager foot in front of the other, we found ourselves at the door to her room. We saw my mom staring into the wadded blanket in her arms. Then the blanket cried. The sound made me want to cry, too, but I was afraid my mom would think I was jealous or disappointed. She looked at us, smiled a huge, tired smile, and held the blanket up for us to see. We all saw my brother for the first time, all red-faced and sleepy. And beautiful. Wow! I thought. I just met him so how can I already love him so much? The words “I’m a big sister now” kept getting louder and louder in my head, until I thought my brain would explode.

Life is a beautiful miracle. And our little miracle was staring right at me.
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