Tony Stead • Linda Hoyt

A Guide to Teaching Nonfiction Writing

Grades 3–5
In celebration of classrooms where nonfiction writing, nonfiction reading, and research thrive in an atmosphere of inquiry and collaboration.
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A Guide to Teaching Nonfiction Writing

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Explorations in Nonfiction Writing

Nonfiction writing is essential to learning and to inquiry, to communication, and to the support of deeper levels of thinking. It is the currency of the new workplace and our increasingly global economy. Nonfiction writing, in its many forms, helps us convey ideas, solve problems, and understand our changing world.

A Rationale for Nonfiction Writing

Nonfiction texts fill our lives. Everywhere we look there are newspapers, magazines, directions, street signs, recipes, letters, maps, menus, emails, Internet sites, advertisements, directions, and so on. As writers in the real world, we make lists, craft letters, send emails, provide explanations, and jot notes. In the real world, we have clear purposes and select the text types that help us fulfill our goals for remembering, recording, and communicating to others. To be successful in school, in the workplace, and in our personal lives, we must learn to understand this wide range of nonfiction text types so we can navigate them with comfort and purpose—gaining control over the unique structures, linguistic features, and visuals that comprise the heart of nonfiction texts. It is interesting to note that while informational texts comprise the majority of those written and read by literate adults, evidence suggests that far too few children are taught explicit strategies for reading and writing these text types (Barone and Morrow, 2002; Brozo, 2010; Duke, 2004).

It is logical, then, to focus writing instruction on the text types that our students will need throughout schooling, in the workplace, and in their lives. The Common Core Standards movement (Common Core State Standards, 2010) along with grade-level expectations and standards from most states now call for a strong emphasis on reading and writing nonfiction texts. This means that learners of all ages need to become acquainted with the structures and features of informational text types. They need to develop strategies for using those features to increase efficiency in seeking and recording information and then in communicating ideas to others. In addition, nonfiction writers need to develop confidence and expertise as researchers—gathering information, organizing it, and synthesizing facts into their writing. They need to learn to use facts gained from research to

#In this information age, the importance of being able to read and write informational text critically and well cannot be overstated. Informational literacy is central to success, and even survival, in schooling, the workplace, and the community.

—Dr. Nell K. Duke, Michigan State University.
Craft an argument or a persuasion—offering a position of personal belief or a call to action that is supported by relevant facts and a powerful conclusion to help readers make an emotional connection and consider the writer’s point of view. Nonfiction writing and authentic research carry the power to release children’s intrinsic sense of wonder, fueling a natural desire to understand and to learn—lifting them to greater levels of achievement across the disciplines.

With nonfiction writing, writers in grades 3, 4, and 5 learn about the world while they develop expertise in the nuances of written communication.
The Nonfiction Writing Classroom

Nonfiction writing happens best in a rich classroom environment that features lots and lots of writing—in every subject area. There is modeled writing by the teacher, explicit think-alouds, shared analysis of mentor texts, a focus on a wide range of text types, intriguing informational resources filled with subject-specific vocabulary, online media, and a continuous invitation to write. In this optimal environment, learning is collaborative and interactive. Partners think together—learning, talking, and using oral language as an integral part of the writing process. Learning floats on a sea of talk, and collaboration abounds through all stages of the writing process—from research to presentation.

HALLMARKS OF A NONFICTION WRITING CLASSROOM

1. Writing in every discipline
2. A culture of inquiry and research
3. Collaboration and partner thinking
4. Many purposes and multiple text types
5. Modeled writing
6. Analysis of mentor texts
7. Visual literacy
8. Nonfiction text features
9. Critical literacy
10. Confidence that vulnerable writers can succeed

1. WRITING IN EVERY DISCIPLINE

Teachers in nonfiction writing classrooms realize that writing is a tool for thinking. They understand that when writers write in response to their learning, they think of things that they did not have in mind before they began writing. The act of writing generates ideas—serving as a medium for thought. So when writing is routinely in place—across the disciplines—intermediate-age children actively utilize academic vocabulary, and they learn more! With nonfiction writing as a tool for learning, language arts, science, math, health, and more become invitations for writing, thinking, and analyzing with pen and paper in hand.

It has been well proven that writing influences content retention and acquisition of academic vocabulary and enhances reasoning ability (Stead, 2002; Marzano, 2004; Hoyt, 2007). So, why wait? It’s time to integrate writing as a response to read-aloud, math, science, social studies, small-group literacy instruction—every segment of the learning day. With this focus you...
could soon see third, fourth, and fifth graders creating labeled diagrams of plant growth, writing letters to a partner explaining what they learned in math, crafting directions for a project in art, making a list of resources needed for a unit of study in science, developing a scientific report based on research, or creating a list of questions that will guide inquiry.

2. A CULTURE OF INQUIRY AND RESEARCH

Research is the heart of nonfiction writing. So it is essential that the nonfiction writing classroom showcase the collection and reporting of factual information as a central focus of student work so writers learn how to acquire the facts that will fuel their work as nonfiction writers. This means that writers need to have time and opportunity to generate questions and take a posture of inquiry. When kids are engaged in research that they find meaningful, questions flow as freely as the facts being gathered, immersing writers in exploratory thinking, observation, and the use of the academic vocabulary that will give strength and purpose to their writing.

As researchers, writers need print resources and multimedia sources from which to absorb images, gather data, and collect facts. They need thinking partners with whom they can talk, share ideas, and generate I Wonder statements.

Research provides a time for thinking partners to engage in close observation of real things, noticing attributes and details—a time when nonfiction writers extract meaning from text, communicate their learning to a partner, synthesize ideas from multiple sources, and prepare to write for a real audience. Most of all, during research writers are writing as they inquire, take notes, or draft sentences that will help them remember the content.

Show Them How . . . To ensure that writers get maximum advantage from research opportunities, it is essential that the teacher take time to model and show writers how to generate questions, take notes, make sketches to consolidate content understandings, and engage in close observation. This type of modeling ensures that research opportunities are accessible to all learners and that skills are developed that will empower research and writing forever.

Provide Personal Experience . . . With elementary readers and writers, the first and perhaps most significant source of information is personal experience. Those experiences may be part of their prior knowledge or built through hands-on experiments and observations that you have provided for your students. To create a culture of inquiry and an understanding that real life is filled with opportunities for research, it is important to label observations and life
experiences as research. When you gather your students to observe changing weather patterns, notice the intricate webbing spun by a spider, study the veins in a leaf, or examine the fragile pollens clustered at the heart of a daisy, you are conducting research. Tell your students that this is research. Label it! Then invite them to pick up their pencils and join you in recording their observations.

Fine-Tune Observations, Language, and Shared Learning . . . When writers are engaged with research, a teacher might coach them to look more closely and actively seek out interesting details. She might guide writers in selecting precise descriptors for visual attributes, actions, and behaviors of their subject, or lead them to compare and contrast the way multiple resources present the same content. During research the teacher is a learner, too, generating questions, guiding observations, and demonstrating a genuine sense of wonder right along with the students.

Stimulate Questions and Inquiry . . . Research and questioning are inseparable partners in the nonfiction writing classroom. Whether writers are researching the parts of a flower or the process of using ice and rock salt to change a liquid (cream) into a solid (ice cream), questions should be flowing in a constant stream of engaged wonder. For intermediate-age writers, questions are a significant device for seeking to understand their world. These writers need to understand that it is good to ask questions and wonder collaboratively with their thinking partners. They need to understand that their questions will lead them to more research and to deeper learning. It is interesting that many states and the Common Core State Standards now require students to generate questions on a topic and then follow their own line of questioning with research and nonfiction writing. So fire up those questions and keep them rolling!

Use Realia . . . We know that it is not likely that your students will be able to have hands-on experience with a polar bear, be able to touch the ridged surface of a glacier, or wiggle through the jungle with a giant anaconda. So we need to be sure writers have access to the next best thing—realia.
Real fruits, vegetables, plants, animal hides, turtle shells, fish tanks, fossils, models, and so on provide rich opportunities for hands-on research, questioning, and language building. This is particularly important for students who are learning English as an additional language. For these learners, firsthand experience and realia provide the strongest possible foundation for the development of academic language and concepts. For all learners, realia—including video—adds a sense of excitement and wonder that can be far more difficult to achieve with a picture or written text.

3. COLLABORATION AND PARTNER THINKING

Historically, conversations in classrooms have been teacher-centered. The teacher asks a question. Students’ hands are raised. One student responds, speaking directly to the teacher. This type of interactional pattern results in very few learners getting to speak and produces a sluggish attitude about learning (Britton et al., 1975; Keene, 2008; Hoyt, 2009). In contrast, when we open the door to lively dialogue and genuine conversation, we create an atmosphere in which inquiry is expected and celebrated, and rich vocabulary abounds. In a collaborative setting, students learn to express their ideas, justify thinking with evidence from a resource, pose guiding questions, establish conversational skills, and engage in critical thinking that will inform and support high-quality writing.

The key is to have writers identify a thinking partner, so when the teacher asks a question during whole-class sessions, partners can quickly and effectively put their heads together and consider possible responses. These partners can work in concert to explore research opportunities, share the work of creating guiding questions for inquiry, or compare facts presented by two different authors writing on the same topic. In a learning environment where conversation and collaboration invite deeper, richer thinking, nonfiction writing is sure to flourish.
Some stems thinking partners might use as they collaborate on a topic include:

- I wonder . . .
- I noticed . . .
- I can infer . . .
- What did you notice?
- What key ideas did you identify?
- Which points did you think were most important?
- An important point for me was . . .
- I realized that . . .
- This selection helped me see that . . .
- Additional questions that come to mind are . . .
- When summarizing the key points, I think we should mention . . .
- The perspective of this author suggests that . . .
- If we were to look at this from another viewpoint, we could consider . . .
- What conclusions might we draw?
- A fact in the text that supports my position is . . .

4. MANY PURPOSES AND MULTIPLE TEXT TYPES

Intermediate-age writers need to learn that nonfiction authors write for specific purposes. They write to describe, to persuade, to explain, to entertain, to tell a personal story, to provide instructions, and so on. Most of all, writers in grades 3, 4, and 5 need to realize that nonfiction writing is a rich tapestry of text types that differ dramatically in form, structure, and features. Writers need to be able to explain that a note, a poem, a lab report, a history paper, a literary analysis, and a persuasive poster all have unique purposes, differing degrees of formal language, and specific physical attributes. These understandings are extremely important, as nonfiction writers must develop a keen awareness of their purpose for writing and then select a text type and corresponding features to match their purpose.

So, as we plan instruction for nonfiction writers, it is important to understand the purpose for which they are writing and the audience they will address, and then to present scaffolds for integrating appropriate text features. If the goal is to describe, a nonfiction writer could create a news article, a poem, a question-and-answer book, a letter, an email, or an informational report. If the goal is to persuade, then it might be best to deliver the message with a poster, a brochure, a PowerPoint presentation, a personal letter, or an essay. With deliberate purposes and a wide range of text types in mind, nonfiction writers develop flexibility in their writing and begin to understand that each text type has unique features that they can integrate into their own work (Stead, 2002, 2007; Hoyt, 2004, 2009; Saunders-Smith, 2010).
Text Type: Poster

Features of a Poster

- Visuals
- Limited text
- Large font
- Key points

Text Type: Persuasion

Features of a Persuasion

- Statement of position
- Supportive argument
- Conclusion
- May recognize the opposing view
Text Type: Procedure

Features of a Procedure

- Title
- Visuals
- Transition words to show order or numbered steps
- Clearly established sequence

Text Type: Explanation

Features of an Explanation

- Heading formatted as a question
- Emphasis on how or why
- Facts linked to research
- May include transition words to introduce examples: specifically, for example, in fact, to illustrate
- Labeled diagram
Text Type: Flowchart

Features of a Flowchart

- Text boxes
- Arrows showing order
- Captions
- Explanatory text
- Title
Text Type: Personal Narrative

Features of a Personal Narrative

- Use of personal pronoun I
- Focus on emotion
- Draws the reader into the setting or situation
- Descriptive language
- Focus on a single moment or a portion of an event

*Riding My Minibike*

Vroom! I am going 30 miles per hour but I feel like I’m going 200—gliding, flying, loving the feel of wind in my hair. For just a moment, no one else matters. I can focus on myself, the pounding of my excited heart, the rush of the wind, and the sense of power as I skim across the pavement. Vroom!

Text Type: Response to Literature—Character Analysis

Features of a Response to Literature

- Introduction
- Clearly organized paragraphs
- Statements of opinion
- Specific examples/evidence from the text
- Transition words
- Conclusion

*Identify a main character in your novel and describe characteristics of this character. Support your ideas with details from the text.*

In the book *Brian’s Winter*, the main character is Brian. I will describe 3 characteristics about Brian.

First, I think he was grateful. In the story Brian was grateful about all the food he had. The part that described it was when the passage said, “He tried to ration the food out but found it impossible, and within two weeks he had eaten it all, even the package of dried prunes—something he had never in his life.” He was thankful to have any kind of food to stay alive.

Secondly, I thought he was intelligent in coming up with ways to survive. He was intelligent when he thought of using arrowheads to hunt with. The part that described it was when the passage said, “First, there the word came to him. They weren’t just arrowheads, they were flint arrowheads— maybe they had to be flint to chip right.”

Another example of smart survival is not wasting parts of animals that he hunted and killed. “The head, and lungs and intestines and stomach and liver he set aside for fish bait and food, as well as the heart.”

Those are 3 characteristics about Brian. I hope you learned more about Brian and some traits to help him survive in the Canadian wilderness.
# Purposes and Text Types: Nonfiction Writing

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>PURPOSE</th>
<th>CHARACTERISTICS</th>
<th>TEXT TYPES</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>INFORM</strong> to provide information: describe, explain, give the reader facts, tell what something looks like, summarize</td>
<td>Characterized by expository or other topic-centered structure, title, opening statement, information organized in logical clusters, conclusion or summary</td>
<td>EXAMPLES: informational report (Understanding How Frogs Eat), descriptive report (The Body of a Blue Whale), explanatory report—telling how or why—(How Wind Farms Work), observation log (Effect of Water Color Added to Water and a Stalk of Celery), scientific description (Patterns of Scales on a Fish), comparison, news article, question and answer, poem, photo with caption, sign, letter, note, list, email message, postcard, presentation, sign, interview, speech</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>INSTRUCT</strong> to tell the reader how to do something; outline a process</td>
<td>Characterized by title and/or goal, materials or equipment list; steps are numbered with verb-first sentences or presented in a specific order using time-order words (first, second, third)</td>
<td>EXAMPLES: recipe, science experiment, directions, instructions or manual, safety procedure, health procedure (washing hands, covering a sneeze), itinerary/schedule, rules, describing steps in a process such as a math operation, art project, steps in a fire drill, writing process, map with directions</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>PERSUADE</strong> to influence the reader to take action or to subscribe to a belief</td>
<td>Characterized by overview of the topic, statement of author’s position/argument, supporting facts/evidence, appeal to reader, conclusion or summary</td>
<td>EXAMPLES: letter, advertisement, poster, essay, brochure, review (movie, book), speech (e.g., political), debate, poem, pro/con argument</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>NARRATE</strong> to draw the reader into an event or sequence of events to provide insights into the life of a human, life form, or situation</td>
<td>Characterized by well-developed setting, sensory imaging, sequential (usually time-ordered) structure, distinct ending; relevant details that situate events in a time and place; significance/importance of situation is established</td>
<td>EXAMPLES: personal narrative, narrative nonfiction (factually accurate writing that is infused with craft elements and imagery), eye-witness account, news/magazine article recounting an event, nonfiction storyboard, diary, autobiography, biography, historical account; photo essay (sequential), observation log that includes personal thoughts and reflections (over time), narrative poetry, retell</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>RESPOND</strong> to express ideas about a text or topic; to engage in critical, evaluative thinking; may include a specific prompt or format</td>
<td>Characterized by clear reference to a text or prompt created by an outside agent; cites specific examples and includes analysis</td>
<td>EXAMPLES: (to literature) reflective, analytical, or evaluative analysis, critical review, character study, author study; (to academic prompts) essay answer, response to a test prompt; (to personal communications) letter, note, email</td>
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</tbody>
</table>
5. MODELED WRITING

Explicit demonstrations of writing are central to helping nonfiction writers understand how nonfiction texts are shaped and crafted. As intermediate-age writers watch their teacher construct a piece of nonfiction text, they see how it is structured—notice the introduction, the way facts are organized, and the way a conclusion creates a satisfying ending. They see how facts are carefully woven into a rich mix of varied sentence types and how the features of a text type are carefully integrated to create a powerful message. They closely observe as the teacher thinks out loud about placement of headings, photographs, and captions on the page. The goal of modeled writing is to show rather than assign, so nonfiction writers have an opportunity, every day, to observe high-quality writing as it is crafted (Hoyt and Therriault, 2008; Routman, 2004).

Modeled writing, like the picture on the front of a jigsaw puzzle box, sets the stage for high levels of proficiency by helping writers establish a vision of possibility for their work. It is a forum for sharing a broad range of genres, interesting sentence formations, sizzling interjections, and well-supported arguments. The think-alouds teachers provide during modeled writing make the inner workings of the writing process transparent so intermediate-age writers have a greater sense of how to enter into and proceed through the construction of a text.

When we read aloud to our students, we read at the top of our game. We read with expression and fluency, offering drama and a very adult delivery. This same stance is essential for modeled writing. If you write as you think your students might write, you immediately limit the possibilities for their growth. If, on the other hand, you write at the top of your game, bringing complex ideas and sentence structures into the modeled writing, students have a vision of what is possible, and they have a model they can aspire to emulate.

As modeling begins, writers are careful observers. Their job is to watch closely and pay attention to how the text is being created. They listen closely as the teacher explains what he is thinking as he writes. They watch, they listen, and they get the gist of what is being modeled before they are invited to join in with comments or suggestions for the writing.

As the modeling progresses, thinking partners put their heads together and reflect on what they are watching. What did they see the teacher do? How did the teacher do it? What should they remember when they go to do this in their own writing? A midstream pause in the modeling for partner reflection can assist writers in clarifying what they are learning and help them be better prepared to utilize the demonstrated skill in their writing.

DON’T STOP MODELING

Once the writing process is understood, craft elements are beginning to appear, and writers are moving toward independence, modeling is still needed. Don’t stop modeling! Instead, focus modeled writing on increased levels of sophistication. As

“Do lots of modeling and take time to think aloud as you write under the watchful eyes of your students. Let them hear what is in your mind as you capture an interesting fact on paper, insert a label on a diagram, or list the attributes of a tree frog. Spelling, sentence structure, and traits will develop—hand in hand—within the context of the instructionally rich writing opportunities you provide.”

“When students are taught to see how writing is done, this way of seeing opens up to them huge warehouses of possibilities for how to make their writing...good writing.”

—KATIE WOOD RAY
you model increasingly complex levels of sophistication with the writing process and craft, students synthesize and adjust their vision of what is possible within their own work. They learn that there isn’t just one way to gather research, one way to revise, or one way to construct a sentence. With ongoing demonstrations at increasing levels of complexity, nonfiction writers build an arsenal of tools, strategies, and craft elements that they can independently control within each phase of the writing process.

The box below contains examples of what modeled writing in a focused minilesson might look and sound like:

### Focused Minilesson

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>INSTRUCTIONAL TARGET</th>
<th>SAMPLE THINK-ALOUD LANGUAGE</th>
<th>MODELED WRITING TO CREATE IN FRONT OF STUDENTS</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Bullets Are a Helpful Nonfiction Feature</td>
<td>When I was sketching today, I tried to add lots of facts from this book on sharks. Now, I am ready to make a list with bullets, showing things I know about sharks. Watch as I make my first bullet. I make a little dot and then make it very dark. In my sketch I drew the shark’s big teeth, so after my first bullet, I will write teeth. In my sketch, I also see its small eyes. So for my next bullet, I want to write small eyes. That is an important fact, and bullets help my facts stand out. Shark • teeth • small eyes • fins • big • long nose</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Use Specific Descriptors</td>
<td>As I write today, I am going to focus on bringing out lots of detail about frogs. I know that frogs have big, bulgy eyes and long, sticky tongues. I will use those details so my reader understands that these are important parts of a frog. My first sentence is A frog’s big, bulgy eyes . . . Notice that I don’t say “Frogs have big eyes.” I am using bulgy because that helps the reader get a better picture of the frog. When we describe something, it is important to use really specific words. Bulgy is much better than big. Watch as I write about the frog’s tongue . . . A frog’s big, bulgy eyes help it to catch food because the eyes allow it to see all around. As the frog watches and patiently waits, it gets its long, sticky tongue ready. When an insect approaches, the lightning-fast tongue flashes out. Snap! Yum.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Adverbs Can Make Great Sentence Openers</td>
<td>Adverbs are especially useful because they help nonfiction writers to describe actions. With adverbs, we can write about moving slowly, cautiously, quickly, painfully, or tiredly. I read about tree frogs and the danger they face from snakes, so now I can visualize a little frog sleeping while the snake creeps toward it. As I look at our list of adverbs, I am going to select quietly as my adverb for the snake. Watch as I write Quietly and then follow it with a comma. One of the tricks to this kind of sentence is to use an adverb followed by a comma, then write the rest of the sentence. For my next sentence, I will begin with Suddenly. That will show how the frog wakes up. Adverbs help us write great sentences. Quietly, the snake slithers toward the sleeping frog. Suddenly, the little frog’s eyes pop open.</td>
<td></td>
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</table>
6. **THOUGHTFUL ANALYSIS OF MENTOR TEXTS**

The array of high-quality and gorgeously crafted nonfiction texts is growing at an astronomical rate. While there once was a shortage of nonfiction resources with powerful visuals and artfully written text, it is exciting to realize that this is no longer a problem. With the work of nonfiction authors such as Walter Wick, Seymour Simon, Gail Gibbons, Stephen Kramer, Nicola Davies, Nick Dowson, Karen Wallace, Snead Collard, Doreen Rapaport, and many more, we have valuable tools for showing nonfiction writers that nonfiction writing does not need to sound like a dictionary. What becomes critical is positioning writers as apprentices to the masters of nonfiction, teaching them to analyze mentor texts—noticing language, style, visual and text features—and then guiding them as they implement those same elements in their own nonfiction writing.

Well-crafted nonfiction mentors serve as models for the use of imagery, detailed description, comparisons, precise word choice, direct address to a reader, and so much more. With high-quality nonfiction mentors in hand, nonfiction writers will begin to emulate rich language, eye-popping page layouts, carefully inserted similes, and thoughtfully placed text features—creating nonfiction writing that sizzles.

7. **VISUAL LITERACY**

When it comes to nonfiction writing, a picture really is worth a thousand words, as visual images such as photographs, diagrams, charts, and graphs are powerful tools of communication. These visuals bring significant amounts of information to a reader, greatly enhance understanding, and provide nonfiction writers with an alternative system for communicating their ideas and images.

Wikipedia describes visual literacy as “the ability to interpret, negotiate, and make meaning from information presented in the form of an image, a chart, or a symbolic representation.” It is based on the understanding that to teach learners to read and write at top levels of effectiveness, we must provide direct instruction in how to both understand and produce visual images such as photographs, illustrations, diagrams, and charts—to use graphic organizers, flowcharts, and storyboards to communicate information.
As coaches for developing writers, it is important to remember that the images we encounter in nonfiction resources greatly influence comprehension. With this in mind, we need to teach nonfiction writers, especially English Language Learners, to pay close attention to those visuals and consciously integrate information in the visuals with any available print (Stead, 2006; Freeman and Freeman, 2009; Stead and Hoyt, 2011).

Mentor texts can play a role in visual literacy if writers engage in scavenger hunts, scouring nonfiction mentors for great examples and ideas they can include in their own nonfiction compositions.

Nonfiction writers can and should use visual literacy to engage in interpreting, inferring, and critically analyzing visual information in the resources they encounter in their research. With modeling and coaching, writers can analyze the perspective of a photograph, consider the goal of the photographer, and search for details within an image. They can weave language and description around a storyboard or flowchart explaining the life cycle of a butterfly. With critical and visual literacy as partners in thinking, a comparison chart that shows a great white shark as the same size as an automobile should be subjected to a rigorous round of challenges such as What kind of car? Is it a compact car or an SUV?

Through visual literacy, nonfiction writers learn to seek detailed descriptions, to improve observation, and to engage in critical thinking. Then, as they construct nonfiction texts of their own, writers continually wonder, "Which visual features might I add that will help my reader to understand? Is this information better represented by a visual or by sentences?" Visual encoding and decoding are essential skills for comprehension in reading and in writing.
Visuals are a characteristic and important feature of informational text. Often a visual text (such as a map or diagram) will convey the meaning more clearly and memorably than the same information written in words or paragraphs.

—STEVE MOLINE, I SEE WHAT YOU MEAN.

Nonfiction writers quickly become adept at including text features such as labels and diagrams to support reader comprehension. When we foster the use of text features in nonfiction writing, we enhance a writer’s ability to comprehend throughout his life.

—JANE OLSON, AUTHOR/EDUCATOR, APPLE VALLEY, MINNESOTA.

8. NONFICTION TEXT FEATURES

Nonfiction text features have two major functions. The first is to communicate information in a visual way using a variety of images and visuals. Within this function, as already mentioned, we see photographs, illustrations, diagrams, charts, graphs, tables, flowcharts, arrows, and storyboards. The second function of nonfiction text features is to draw attention to important ideas and concepts. Within this function, we see titles, headings, subheadings, bold words, captions, a table of contents, a glossary, an index, and so on (Mooney, 2001).

Teaching Tip: Improve visual literacy by teaching students to use T-charts organizing lists of facts gathered from visuals in one column and those identified in text in another.

Note: As you become familiar with this resource, be sure to notice that there are at least two visual texts in each cluster of Power Write lessons. In addition, please note that the Extended Writing Units have taken great care to highlight visual sources of communication in the mentor texts and in the nonfiction writing that writers construct. As you guide your nonfiction writers, be sure to take advantage of opportunities to think aloud about visual texts and to demonstrate how to infuse them into writing.
When nonfiction writers expect features such as headings, captions, a table of contents, or an index to appear in informational resources, they can navigate the material with confidence and purpose. To build this confidence and purpose with text features, nonfiction writers need to first attend to these features in mentor books, read-alouds, and resources used for small-group and independent reading. They need to carefully note which features occur most often and which ones help them most as readers and then consciously infuse nonfiction features into the nonfiction texts they create themselves.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>NONFICTION FEATURES</th>
<th>TO COMMUNICATE INFORMATION GRAPHICALLY, USE</th>
<th>TO DRAW ATTENTION TO IMPORTANT IDEAS AND CONCEPTS, USE</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Photograph</td>
<td>Title or headline</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Illustration</td>
<td>Heading</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Diagram</td>
<td>Subheading</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chart</td>
<td>Arrow</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Graph</td>
<td>Bold words</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Table</td>
<td>Caption</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Flowchart</td>
<td>Table of contents</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Storyboard</td>
<td>Glossary</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Map</td>
<td>Index</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Legend/key</td>
<td>Text box</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cross section</td>
<td>Bullets</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cut-away</td>
<td>Call out</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

As nonfiction researchers and writers, intermediate-age students become thoroughly engaged in identifying and using nonfiction text features such as labels, bullets, arrows, cross-section diagrams, and bold words. They find enormous purpose in capturing their learning in labeled diagrams, charts, posters, and student-authored books.

9. CRITICAL LITERACY

As the volume of world knowledge continues to grow, it is essential that nonfiction writing classrooms challenge students to read critically. As nonfiction readers and writers, students need to consider perspectives, point of view, accuracy, and relevance of information. When learners adopt a stance of critical literacy, they can more easily recognize the persuasive and biased tones inherent in advertising, letters to the editor, promotional brochures, and Internet sources. They can question, wonder, and consider multiple sources on each topic. They learn to be deliberate in separating fact from opinion and steadfast in their search for clear communication (Hoyt, 2003).
Writings about Christopher Columbus have become classic examples of misinformation spread as truth. For centuries, children have grown up celebrating Christopher Columbus as the discoverer of North America, even though we knew that he didn’t discover America. The continent was already richly inhabited by people with sophisticated cultures and a possibly more livable lifestyle than that of Europe at the time (Mann, 2002). With a stance toward critical literacy, we can guide students to read about Christopher Columbus and about the Vikings who explored the area two hundred years earlier and then read about the highly developed cultures and agricultural talents of the native North American tribes. With this broad base of perspectives, writers can engage in thoughtful conversations that go far beyond a simple recounting of dates and events.

### LEARNING TO PRESENT BOTH SIDES

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>WE READ . . .</th>
<th>WE THINK THIS MEANS . . .</th>
<th>WE WONDER . . .</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>The Pilgrims landed and started to build homes.</td>
<td>The natives had to share the land.</td>
<td>How did the natives feel?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Were they mad at the Pilgrims?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Did the natives have to leave because the Pilgrims took their land?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Did this book tell us both sides of this story?</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The above is an example.

Additional examples:

- To develop perspective:
  - Present a topic of interest to the students, such as recess or lunchtime, and engage them in a conversation about perspectives. What is their perspective? How might the perspective of a teacher or a principal be different? What suggestions might the students make to help recess or lunchtime run more smoothly? How many minutes should be allocated for recess and lunch? Why? What would the principal say about that? Write a letter to the principal with your suggestions.

- Compare and contrast point of view:
  - *My Brother Martin* by Christine King Farris with *Martin’s Big Words* by Doreen Rappaport.
  - *Through My Eyes: The Story of Ruby Bridges* by Ruby Bridges and a news account telling the story of the integration of schools.
10. CONFIDENCE THAT VULNERABLE LEARNERS CAN SUCCEED AS NONFICTION WRITERS

It is helpful to remember that it is through real experiences with real things that concepts, understanding, and language are acquired. When learners get to touch, think, talk, and wonder, they feel a stronger sense of connection to their learning and move forward with a powerful sense of intrinsic motivation. For these reasons, nonfiction writing is perfect for special education learners, students learning English as an additional language, and learners with limited academic language and experience.

In the nonfiction writing classroom, there is a sense of energy as writers observe, think together, and connect with their subject. This classroom often erupts with excitement as researchers and writers share their observations and factual learning. In this classroom, learning floats on a sea of academic talk that supports and lifts content understanding and language.

All writers, even those who are most vulnerable, benefit from the concept development and language acquisition that go hand in hand with nonfiction writing.
The emphasis on visual literacy, collaboration, and modeled writing in the nonfiction writing classroom offers important systems of support for learners who need additional scaffolding to reach their highest levels of potential.

For example, Sketch to Stretch, a TESOL-endorsed strategy, is often used during research so students can represent their learning through a sketch or a labeled diagram. With Sketch to Stretch, the academic vocabulary is highlighted and the visual representation of the facts helps learners access the content through multiple systems of communication (Hoyt, 2009). Visual texts such as this scaffold content understanding, build academic vocabulary, and support even the most vulnerable learners toward success with nonfiction writing.

“English Language Learners learn language best when it is embedded in meaningful context. When ELs read high-interest books about science, social studies, and language arts, discuss their reading to build oral language, and then respond to learning through different kinds of writing activities, they gain the academic language they need for school success.”

—DR. YVONNE FREEMAN AND DR. DAVID FREEMAN, AUTHORS OF NUMEROUS BOOKS ON SUPPORTING ENGLISH LANGUAGE LEARNERS.
The Gradual Release of Responsibility: A Framework for Instruction

Research on the impact of a gradual release of responsibility model (Pearson and Fielding, 1991) suggests that the highest levels of achievement can be reached when instruction is framed by three explicit steps: (1) teacher modeling, (2) student application of the skill or strategy modeled by the teacher, and (3) students reflecting on and considering their progress toward the standard set by the teacher. Learning experiences that are framed by this model—showing versus assigning—have been well proven to result in greater achievement than instruction that is based on assignments alone. The gains in student performance are measurable and immediate.

The gradual release of responsibility provides nonfiction writing experiences with a predictable structure that, like the framework of a building, gives strength and resilience to cross-curricular writing experiences and the writing workshop environment. Whether writers are composing a brief response to an observation in science, drafting an explanation of how a hydroelectric dam produces power, or engaging in an in-depth study of the Civil War, their writing will reflect increased power and proficiency if you apply the gradual release of responsibility.

THREE KEY STEPS

1. Modeling: The Focused Minilesson

Focused minilessons are times when teachers make the internal thinking and behaviors of an accomplished writer transparent to the students so developing writers can more easily utilize behaviors and understandings that will bring greater effectiveness to their nonfiction writing. Through explicit modeling and demonstration of procedures, writing techniques, organizational tools, strategies for revision, and so on, writers see the process in action.

To increase the intimacy of the focused minilesson/modeling experience, the whole class gathers close to an easel, a document camera, or an electronic whiteboard as the teacher models how to develop and enhance a piece of writing. This is a time to set the stage for the writing by constructing a piece of writing that reflects the format, writing trait, or research strategy you expect the students to employ. As students watch you write, they gain explicitly clear insights into the expectations for their own writing so performance
and achievement are elevated, creating a fertile environment in which the writing process can flourish. In a cross-curricular writing lesson or *Power Write*, this focused minilesson may take as few as two or three minutes.

In the writing workshop or an *Extended Writing Unit*, there is time to demonstrate in greater depth, so the modeling may last up to ten minutes. Because there is more time in a writing workshop than is available for writing in the content areas, the teacher works on a *same piece of writing* over a period of several days—modeling and thinking aloud as the writing is developed. The process of returning to the same piece of writing helps nonfiction writers develop the understanding that it takes time and reflection to move from research to presentation while helping the stages of the writing process become more transparent for developing writers.

2. Writing and Coaching

The objective of any writing effort is to *get kids writing*, so this segment of the lesson needs to comprise the bulk of the time allocated. After the focused minilesson, writers begin to work independently—consciously trying to implement the strategies and behaviors modeled by the teacher in the focused minilesson (modeling). This is a good time to check and be sure that all writers are applying the target learning that was demonstrated. Then the teacher either meets with individuals for one-to-one conferences or gathers a small group of students who all share a particular need. During a conference or small-group session, the teacher may do a bit of personalized modeling to explicitly demonstrate a writing strategy, craft element, or process that will help these students move forward as writers.

> *Teach a small, learnable amount. Use think-aloud language to give observing students a window into your thinking. Let writers hear what is inside your head as you create a nonfiction text, demonstrate a strategy for recording research facts, or reread to check for sentence fluency.*

> *Never ask writers to do something they haven’t seen you do first.*

—TERESA THERIAULT, COAUTHOR OF *MASTERING THE MECHANICS*.
3. Sharing and Reflecting

The gradual release of responsibility calls for a time of reflection during which writers consider their work and assess their own efforts in emulating the writing modeled by the teacher during the focused minilesson. While writers workshop has always featured an end-of-workshop share, we propose that all writing sessions should close with sharing and reflecting so writers have a sense of a real audience and a chance to consider the work they accomplished.

It is our strong belief, however, that this not be a whole-class share. Rather, we encourage you to have students meet in partnerships to share their writing and reflect upon strengths they observe in their own work. When students meet in partnerships, everyone gets to talk. Everyone is engaged. Everyone has the benefit of a real audience. This format produces far higher levels of engagement than having a single writer or two get to share their work while the rest of the class sits and listens. The other benefit of a partner share is that in only two to three minutes, every writer has had a chance to talk, share a bit of their writing, and feel affirmed for their hard work.
Emphasize the Writing Process

The writing process is the heart and soul, the essential framework, of any high-quality writing program. With an emphasis on process, writers in grades 3, 4, and 5 begin to understand that writing is about communicating and that nonfiction writers need to consider both the purpose and the audience for the writing. Guided by purpose and audience, writers can make better decisions about what to write, how much to write, whether or not to take a piece to publication, and so on. So if a writer is taking notes based on observation of an emerging butterfly, the writer is his or her own audience, so it doesn't make sense to revise, edit, and publish the notes. If those notes are turned into a piece that will be part of a class book, a poster, or a published product, then the writer has an obligation to revise—to be sure that communication of content is clear and effective. The next step is to edit and ensure that conventions such as grammar and spelling have been addressed. Finally, the writer also has an obligation to be sure that the handwriting or electronic presentation are neatly done and a source of personal pride.

The power of the writing process lies deep within the process itself—thinking about why you are writing and who will read the work. If it is determined that someone else will read the work, then writers must understand that the writing is not over when you finish taking notes or conclude a draft. Those steps are but the beginning. Writing is over when you have met your goals as a communicator and a thinker—when you are sure someone else can learn from what you have written—and when you can take pride in the writing that you present to others to read.

LEARNING THE PROCESS

When writers are first exposed to the writing process, they may work through the phases one after the other in concert with teacher modeling, guided practice, and one-to-one support. As the process is gradually unveiled, writers should see their teacher return to the same piece of writing day after day to add content, focus on sentence variety, insert an eye-popping title, revise for powerful verbs, insert headings, or edit for conventions. Close observation of the teacher modeling how to research or how to revise is powerful scaffolding that will provide a framework for independence as writers immediately apply those same processes and craft elements to their own work.

Once the process is understood, nonfiction writers may be ready for a fully implemented writing workshop model in which writers move in and out of the phases as individuals.
Nonfiction Writing and the Writing Process

**PREWRITING: PLANNING AND RESEARCH**
- Getting ready to write
- Think.
- Observe.
- Research: Get facts from pictures, books, the computer, videos, interviews, anywhere.
- Write or draw your research facts.
- Talk about your facts.
- Choose a topic.
- Think about who you are writing for.
- Think about why you are writing.

**DRAFTING**
- Getting ideas on the page
- Focus on what you want to say.
- Use your research to get the facts.
- Write the letters you know to spell words.
- Use the structure and features of the text type (letter, note, poster, report, and so on).
- Use interesting words: precise nouns, powerful verbs, sensory images.
- Include nonfiction features like headings and pictures.
- Write an interesting beginning and a satisfying ending.

**REVISIONING**
- Polishing my thinking
- Reread and ask:
  - Does this make sense?
  - Is there enough detail so a reader can "see" what I’m writing about?
  - Are facts about the same thing grouped together?
  - Are facts accurate?
  - Does this look like my teacher’s example of this kind of text? (procedure, explanation, letter, report, and so on)
  - Are the sentences varied? Do they start with different words? Are some long and some short?
  - Did I use interesting words?
  - When I read this to my friends, what questions did they ask me? What can I make better?

**EDITING**
- Tuning up conventions
- Focus on one thing at a time. Read to check for spaces between words. Then read it again to check the spelling, and so on.
- Check for:
  - Spaces between words
  - Spelling
  - Capital letters
  - Title
  - Neat handwriting
  - Periods, commas, exclamation points
  - Complete sentences
  - Clear titles, headings, pictures, captions, and so on.
  - Do I have clear titles, headings, pictures, captions, and so on?
  - Can my friends read this? What are their ideas for making it better?

**PUBLISHING: PRESENTING, SHARING, AND CELEBRATING**
- Publishing and presenting for an audience
- If your writing is a book, number the pages and make a cover, a title page, a table of contents, an author page, an index or glossary, and a page for reader comments.
- If your writing is a letter, mail it!
- If your writing is a poster, display it!
- Show off your work!
  - Display it in the classroom library, the school office, the library, a doctor’s office, a retirement center, and so on.
  - Read it aloud to your classmates, your family, the school staff, or friends from another school.
  - Send your writing to a newspaper or an online publishing service.

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The Importance of Self-Pacing: An essential understanding is that teacher-controlled movement through phases of the writing process in the writing workshop should be short-term—a bridge to independence. Once writers come to understand and develop confidence with the writing process, they can and should set their own pace, moving through stages of the writing process as they feel they are ready. For example, some students may need several days on research, while others may find that a single day on research is adequate, and they are ready to begin planning and drafting. Another student might move rapidly through the early stages and start revising but then decide to backtrack and do additional research. Yet another writer may find he has bogged down a bit, so he takes a portion of the writing through revision and editing to reflect and regain momentum with the topic and then return to drafting additional sections.

Like a Dance . . . Diagrams of the writing process may cause it to look linear, but it is actually more like a dance. In a choreographed dance, there are often repeated steps that take a dancer forward, around, and then backward before once again moving forward. In the same fashion, nonfiction writers should move fluidly in, around, and through phases of the writing process.

Some examples:

Julio is very excited about the research he is conducting on westward migration in the United States. He has been reading primary source diaries, viewing diagrams of wagon train mechanics, and reading descriptions about life on the Oregon Trail. He is so excited that after only two days of research, he is already drafting—rapidly pouring ideas and sketches into what will be a multipage description. Suddenly, Julio realizes that he forgot to collect data on how the travelers on the Oregon Trail managed to feed themselves. It is essential then that he return to research, gather that important information, and then spiral back to his draft. Julio clearly understands the writing process and is not bothered that some of his peers have begun to revise. He understands that the writing process is cyclical and that writers must move in and out of the phases in response to their purpose, their content, and the inquiry in which they are engaged.

Bella has been writing about various types of hummingbirds but finds that she is losing momentum and focus, so she puts all of her energy into a single section on the rufous hummingbird and takes that single section through revision and editing and begins inserting visuals that will be important when she presents her work. This intense focus on the rufous helps her focus on key organizational features as well as the content. Taking the single section through the phases of the process has helped Bella reenergize, and she is now ready to tackle additional sections on Anna’s hummingbirds, black-throated hummingbirds, and majestic hummingbirds.
SCAFFOLDING EACH PHASE OF THE WRITING PROCESS

PLANNING AND RESEARCH: GETTING READY TO WRITE

Planning and research is the time when writers gather facts and explore the content that will fuel their nonfiction writing. Three major objectives—research, recording data, and understanding the text type—need to be considered during this phase of the writing process:

- **Research**: Writers need to gather facts and academic vocabulary to infuse into their writing. The goal is to immerse writers in the content that they will be writing about and to ensure that they have rich and diverse opportunities to gather facts for their writing. (Please see the section on research in the Resources section at the back of the Lesson book, as it provides additional information about research opportunities and strategies for gathering content.)

- **Recording Data**: Writers need a variety of accessible strategies for recording the facts related to their topic. As facts are gathered, nonfiction writers need to know how to create diagrams and sketches, add labels, and jot down important words and phrases.

- **Understanding the Writing Purpose and Text Type**: Nonfiction writers need to think about their purpose and know which text type they will be using when they begin to draft. If they are writing a report, they will need lots of facts and details. If they are creating a persuasive poster on protecting sea turtles, they don’t have room for a lot of facts, but they do need to use their research time to select a small number of compelling ideas. The text type that writers will use to present their work influences research and planning. (See Purposes and Text Types on page 12 of this guide.)
DRAFTING: GETTING IDEAS ON THE PAGE

Drafting that is based on top-quality research and planning will heighten writer productivity and solve the age-old dilemma of kids not knowing what to write. If writers spend adequate amounts of time immersed in researching their topic, taking notes, making sketches, and thinking of their audience, they will be burning to put their pencils into action and write!

As drafting begins, it is helpful to have some tools readily available to support the drafting process. Writers at all grades benefit from having a personal collection of tools that empower them to keep moving.
The tools that may benefit your writers during drafting may include:

- A personal word wall as a quick-reference tool (See Resources CD-ROM.)
- A personal dictionary for recording words they want to remember
- A writer’s notebook where they can experiment with language by trying out different adjectives, precise verb choices, or various sentence structures
- A research notebook, research folder, or personal RAN chart with research facts and diagrams
- A list of tricky words and homophones (See Resources CD-ROM.)

*Note: The Resources CD-ROM contains a high-frequency word list that lists the most commonly occurring words from the highest to the lowest frequency. This tool is a teacher reference to inform your work as you plan for word walls, spelling lists, and so on. It is not intended for student use.
REVISING: POLISHING MY THINKING

Revision is a moment when you stop, reflect, and wonder. This is a moment when a writer asks herself, Does this make sense? Will a reader understand? Is there enough detail so a reader can visualize my subject? Could I make that sentence more interesting? This is a moment when writers need to remember that writing is about making the world valuable to others by writing about it in the most powerful and reflective way we can manage. The simple act of pausing to consider the quality of the communication generates a powerful sense of awareness in a writer, an understanding that the writing you have created isn’t just for yourself. Someone else will read and attempt to understand what you have put on paper.

“...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.”

—REGIE ROUTMAN
During revision, it is important that writers focus on their message: on the facts and details, on the features of the nonfiction text, on the words and the way they work together. Great caution needs to be utilized to ensure that writers don’t slip over to editing and begin to address surface-level issues such as spelling, punctuation, and so on, as this can cause them to forget the power of the ideas they are infusing into the text.

Nonfiction writers benefit from self-reflection, peer revision, and revision conferences with a teacher. In all cases, it is helpful to have a revision checklist that helps a writer focus on key questions about the content, sentence fluency, voice, word choice, and so on. Samples like these can be found on the Resources CD-ROM for you to adapt to match current revision strategies and the developmental level of your writers.

Revision Checklist 1

Revision Checklist 2

Revision Checklist 3
# Focused Minilessons to Support Revising

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>TARGET UNDERSTANDING</th>
<th>LESSON SUGGESTION</th>
<th>SAMPLE THINK-ALOUD LANGUAGE</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| Add Details           | Show writers how to expand short sentences that have too little detail. | I have a sentence that says Snakes bend. I wonder what details I can add about snakes bending that will make it easier for my readers to imagine this. Watch as I revise and add details.

Snakes bend . |
| Create a Strong Lead | Remind writers to revise their first sentence, if needed, to make it more interesting. | Your first sentence is the one that will get your reader’s attention, so make sure it’s the best it can be. Watch as I change my first sentence to make it more interesting. Right now it says Snakes slither. I am going to create some leads that might be more interesting to a reader:

If you were a snake, you could slither . . .
Did you know that snakes can slither?
Down in the crinkly leaves, the snake slithers . . .
Which one do you like the best? |
| Combine Sentences     | Teach students to link two short sentences with a conjunction and a comma (and, but, so, or) to vary sentence length. | Writers, watch as I take these two short sentences and turn them into one longer and more interesting sentence.

Some snakes eat frogs.
Some snakes eat bugs.
I will change the period after frogs into a comma and add the word and. Now my sentence says: Some snakes eat frogs, and some snakes eat bugs. |
EDITING: TUNING UP CONVENTIONS AND MECHANICS

Traditional conventions such as spelling, grammar, and punctuation make our writing readable to others. Nonfiction conventions such as labels, headings, bold words, captions, and so on are distinctive to informational texts and greatly enhance reader understanding. When editing a piece of nonfiction writing, it is important to focus on both kinds of conventions so students know that nonfiction writers have two major focus points when they are editing.

Editing is also a time to fully engage our powers of observation, noticing strengths in the writing and accompanying conventions. If all emphasis is on what is wrong, writers may feel discouraged while editing. If, on the other hand, editing is both a celebration of what is great as well as an opportunity to infuse more finesse, writers enter this phase of the process with self-esteem and confidence intact.

The editing formats on the following pages, Express Lane Edits, Focused Edits, and Editing Checklists, are highly accessible editing tools for nonfiction writers but should only be used after a writer is satisfied that the meaning of the piece has been thoroughly considered.

**Focused Edits:** In a Focused Edit, writers reread once for each editing point. They read once to check for spaces between words, then read again to check for spelling. They read a third time to check for capital letters. With each editing point, nonfiction writers have a single focus and reread from start to finish with only that point in mind. This provides numerous opportunities for each writer to read—while building the understanding that editing is an important step that deserves time and attention. (Hoyt and Therriault, 2008)

**Express Lane Edits:** Jeff Anderson, author of *Mechanically Inclined*, suggests the use of Express Lane Edits to narrow the scope of review during editing time. Like the express lane at the grocery store, an Express Lane Edit includes only a small number of items. Writers review their work with a small number of items in mind and use a highlighter to place a tiny dot each time they find they have used the target convention correctly. If writers insert the target convention to improve their work, they get to make a dot there as well. The emphasis is on *celebrating the correct use of conventions*, so it is a positive and exciting way to approach editing.

“If you can’t find something good in a kid’s writing, you aren’t looking hard enough. For lack of noticing, a thousand forms of loveliness elude us every day. As educators, we need to learn to love the errors and all they reveal.”

—JEFF ANDERSON, AUTHOR OF *MECHANICALLY INCLINED*
Editing Checklists: Editing checklists can be helpful, but we must remember that editing checklists do not teach. They can only remind writers of what they already know. So with that in mind, we must remember to offer carefully scaffolded lessons in editing, and then remind writers of what they know by continuously changing editing checklists to reflect their most current understandings. Here are a few examples:
PRESENTING: SHOWCASING YOUR WORK—SHARING WITH AN AUDIENCE

Presentation is the final moment when a writer, like an artist, unveils the creation and offers it as a gift to others. At that moment, the work should be as compelling to the audience and as true to its purpose as it can be. Presentation is about appearance, making a text appealing to the eye of a reader. Presentation is the moment when the words, the spacing, the features, and the visuals intersect. It is like the icing on a cake or the moment of final performance at a recital. When writers attend to presentation and give careful thought to the impact of visuals, binding, paper size, and neatness, they give themselves the gift of pride and bring enticement to the reader.

The Common Core State Standards have identified the importance of electronic presentations and distribution of the work as powerful components of presentation. These standards also identify speaking as presentation and encourage that composition be used as an opportunity to plan and deliver speeches and debates so that the nonfiction message becomes an opportunity to present in front of an audience.

It is important to note that when presentation is not given the attention it deserves, barriers are formed between writers and readers, affecting comprehension and appreciation of the work. While we never want to communicate a stronger interest
in presentation than content, presenting work to others is a subject to be taken seriously, as careful handwriting, spelling, conventions, spacing, and visuals are an expectation of future schooling and the workplace.

In preparing to publish, we can help writers look closely at mentor texts, noticing spacing, visuals, fonts, and type sizes. As writing coaches, we can help intermediate-age writers tune into the needs of a reader and wonder, How will this look to a reader? Have I provided a reader with nonfiction writing that is attractive and visually appealing? Does the work include visuals and text features? Is it formatted for easy readability? Will I feel proud when a reader picks this up?

Good writers are aware of the importance of presentation. Final copy can serve as a welcome mat or as a barricade to the reader.

—RUTH CULHAM
USING PICTURE BOOKS TO TEACH WRITING WITH THE TRAITS, PAGE 135.

### Focused Minilessons to Support Publishing

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
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<th>LESSON SUGGESTION</th>
<th>SAMPLE THINK-ALOUD LANGUAGE</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Handwriting Is Important</td>
<td>Compare sloppy handwriting and copy that is neatly presented.</td>
<td>Writers, I have a problem. I was writing really fast and my draft is so messy that I know it isn’t my best. Since I am presenting this work, I need to recopy and focus on my handwriting. Watch as I write slowly and really think about the shape of each letter. I will use this handwriting guide (see handwriting guide on the Resources CD-ROM) to help me remember how to form each letter. When we publish our work, handwriting is important.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Page Layout Is Important</td>
<td>Model how to use space on the page.</td>
<td>Writers, I have noticed that our mentor books use space on the page in interesting ways. Sometimes they place illustrations at the side of the writing. Sometimes photographs are at the bottom of the page. When I look at my writing, I realize that I want to present my writing in a way that looks like our mentor books. I am getting ready to publish. Watch how I plan the space for a side illustration, a bottom picture—and then text boxes for my words. This will really look great!</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Electronic Presentation</td>
<td>Demonstrate how to convert paper drafts into electronic presentations.</td>
<td>As I prepare to publish and present this draft about the layers of the atmosphere, I am going to turn it into an electronic slideshow on the computer. Watch as I create the first slide in my slide show. This slide should include the title and my name, since I’m the author. I also want to include a photograph or illustration to grab the reader’s attention and make the slide pleasing to the eye. I think I’ll include this visual I found on the Internet. It shows the layers of the atmosphere in an interesting way.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
FOR ALL PHASES OF THE PROCESS: REREADING

Of the strategies and routines that cross phases of the process, rereading may be the one with the greatest power to lift and enhance writing quality while stimulating literacy development in third, fourth, and fifth grade readers and writers.

Writers need to learn that rereading is one of the most powerful tools we have as writers. Rereading is used to positively influence all phases of the process and is seen by some experts as the “glue” that binds the process together. Rereading sketches and notes while researching and planning reminds writers of their key questions and solidifies content understandings. Rereading during drafting helps a writer maintain the flow of a message and ensure that sentences make sense and flow smoothly. Rereading during revising and editing helps writers look deeply into their own work while considering craft and conventions. Rereading during publishing and presenting scaffolds fluent and expressive oral reading.

As coaches for nonfiction writers, one of our essential roles needs to be modeling and encouraging the continual use of rereading as a strategy that focuses research, enhances the quality of sentence structure, improves overall clarity of communication, and keeps nonfiction writers highly connected to their topic.

“Rereading is the glue that connects the stages of the writing process. Writers continually reread what they’ve written, and this rereading changes at each stage of the authoring cycle.” —RALPH FLETCHER, WHAT WRITERS NEED
As writers strive to consolidate their understanding of the writing process, nonfiction features, traits, and craft, as well as writing conferences and small-group writing instruction, become particularly important. These are times when we can be at our best—empowered by close observation and teaching for success.

FOCUS ON CONFERRING

A key method for coaching writers is the writing conference. Writing conferences are central to writer success as they provide one-on-one support, encouragement, and coaching that have enormous potential for lifting the achievement of nonfiction writers. While the focus and intent of each conference may be different, there are some understandings about conferring that provide predictability and consistency for writers while enhancing instruction and assessment opportunities for you.

TIPS FOR MANAGING EFFECTIVE WRITING CONFERENCES

- Create a conference management chart listing the names of your students down the side. Each time you confer with a writer, place the date of the conference next to the child’s name. Now, you have a tool that allows you to monitor at a glance to see how your conferring time is distributed across your students.

- Always sit next to a writer, with the work in the hands of the child. Sitting across from a learner is a position of opposition rather than partnership. Taking the work out of the writer’s hands transfers ownership away from the writer to you.

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“One way we help students become better writers is by teaching them strategies and techniques more experienced writers use to write well. The goal is to influence the rest of their writing lives . . . not just this piece of writing.”
—CARL ANDERSON, HOW’S IT GOING?

“The challenge in a conference is to extrapolate from this one instance something the child should do again and again as a writer.”
—LUCY CALKINS, AUTHOR OF THE CONFERRING HANDBOOK.
- Ask permission before writing on a child’s paper. As much as possible, leave the pencil in the hand of the child, and place your suggestions and comments on a sticky note.

- Keep conferences short and focused. Three to five minutes is plenty for most writers.

- Invite the writer to tell you about his or her work, including the illustration. This establishes a positive tone: *We are partners. I care about you and I want to listen.* See the chart on page 41 for ways to prompt writers to discuss their work. The writer should be doing at least as much talking as you, but don't let her read the whole work aloud to you if that will eat up all your conference time. Ask for a summary! As the writer explains the work, you will have a window into what the writer knows about the topic, the goal for the piece of writing, and how much support the writer needs in order to move forward.

- Notice and name what you see in the writing (Johnston, 2004). When you see a writer engaging in helpful writing behaviors, point them out. Tell the writer what you see and name it. This will help him know what to repeat in future writing experiences. An example: *I see that you drew a line through this word and inserted new thinking. That is a strategy that really helps writers while they are drafting. That is a strategy you will want to use again and again. Let’s add that to the “Some skills I Can Use” list in your writing folder.* Adding skills and understandings to the “Some skills I Can Use” list reminds both you and the writer of topics you have addressed in conferences and serves as an ongoing celebration of accumulated learning.

- Be prepared to model a bit. It is often helpful to have a pad of sticky notes, a white board, or simply blank paper in a conferring area so you can quickly model a sentence, a revision strategy, or a way to work with alternative spelling. When you model during a conference, writers can really tune in and attend to the instruction.

- Take notes. We like to keep a notebook with a tabbed section for each writer. Sometimes we write right in the notebook; other times we use it to organize the sticky notes about each child’s writing that we’ve written on the run. Keeping your observations and teaching notes in one place makes it easy to remind yourself about the content of previous conferences, monitor your ongoing conversations with this writer, and set goals for future conferences.
Conferring with Nonfiction Writers: Generating Reflective Conversations

**Starting the Conference**
- How is it going?
- Tell me about your writing.
- Please share the details in your picture. I would love to hear what you have learned.
- Please read your favorite part so we can celebrate together.
- Is there anything you hoped we could work on together today?
- What are you most proud of in this writing?

**Reflecting on the Writing or Picture**
- Tell me more about ______.
- What else have you learned?
- What is most interesting to you?
- What do you most want your reader to learn about ______?
- You just shared a fact that isn’t in your picture or your writing. Where do you think this new idea will go?
- As you look at this list of nonfiction text features, which ones are you planning to include in this piece of writing?

**Focusing Questions**
- Which part is most important?
- Would it help to add some headings?
- How might you put these parts together?
- Where could you put this new idea?
- How many of your sentences begin in the same way? Let’s talk about some other ways you might open those sentences.
- Can you turn your beginning sentence into a lead that really catches the attention of a reader? Can you think of a different way to say this?
- What are your thoughts about your ending? Did you end with the most important things you want your reader to know and feel?
- Let’s look and see how many action verbs we can find.
- How might you combine these two short sentences?
- Think about the setting for your subject. Does your writing help a reader visualize the setting?
- Which sentences do the best job of showing rather than telling?

**Reflecting and Growing as a Writer**
- What is the best part of this writing? What did you do in this writing that you will be sure to do again and again?
- How will you use the tip I gave you in our conference today? How will it improve your writing?
- Do you know what you will be doing tomorrow as a writer? Will you continue with this piece or do you have something else in mind?
- How does this writing compare with other writing that you have done?
• Be stingy with suggestions. Allow yourself only one teaching point per conference. While beginning writers are likely to present you with nonfiction writing that could use all kinds of instruction and coaching, the challenge is to consider the one tip you could offer that will most lift the future of this writer.

• Focus the conference on creating energy for more writing. The goal should be to send a writer back to her seat bursting with enthusiasm and ready to dive back into nonfiction writing.

• To close the conference, celebrate one feature of the writer’s work and restate the one suggestion you made for improvement so the writer leaves with those two points clearly reinforced.

GENERATING REFLECTIVE CONVERSATIONS
A one-to-one writing conference should be a conversation, not a correction session. Conversation prompts that require the writer to reflect on and talk about his work are an effective way both to see how he is thinking about his work and to identify a next step that will lift it to the next level.

SMALL-GROUP INSTRUCTION
Invariably, as you examine your students’ writing, confer with individuals, or consider standards, there will be clusters of learners with similar needs. These writers are perfect candidates for small-group writing instruction in which you either reteach understandings that you have shared during focused minilessons and modeled writing or teach writing strategies and processes that will advance these writers beyond what you have modeled for the whole class.

Small-group writing instruction might be a conversation about topic selection, a chance to display and analyze the work of mentors that will help these writers reach new heights with nonfiction, a moment where your modeling is very personal and within an arm’s length, or a time to say, “I have noticed something interesting in your writing.”

Small-group writing experiences challenge us as teachers to see writers as individuals and to meet their unique needs as explicitly as we can. They challenge writers to step up a little higher and reach for new competencies with nonfiction. These are moments to treasure, as they truly do make a difference.
Setting the Stage for Nonfiction Writing: Scaffolds for Success

The atmosphere you create for research, modeled writing, conferring, partner work, and access to resources has an enormous impact on the level of independence your nonfiction writers can attain. So it is well worth the time to give consideration to options for setting up the classroom and establishing an environment that invites independence while embracing a sense of community.

THE ENVIRONMENT

The following are key elements that scaffold a smoothly operating nonfiction writing environment, supporting writers as they craft nonfiction selections.

A COMMUNITY MEETING AREA

It is essential to create a gathering space where writers can come in close to an easel, a document camera, a mentor text, or an electronic white board. Third, fourth, and fifth graders are not too old to come together as a community to observe, think together, and consider possibilities for their own work as nonfiction writers. This means that you will need to plan for an open area with a carpet or other comfortable seating. The community meeting area should have an easel, preferably a low one so modeled writing is clearly visible. If you have an electronic white board, document camera, or other projection system that allows you to project from your computer screen, be sure the community meeting area has good visual access when you are using these electronic tools as part of your modeling. The community meeting area should also be equipped with a chair for you to sit in while sharing mentor texts with your writers.

A critical goal is to create a sense of intimacy in which kids are gathered close as you model, think aloud, and crack open the internal workings of nonfiction texts. This cannot be accomplished to the same degree when kids are spread across the room, seated at their
desks. So push those desks aside and create a special place where you and your students can gather closely together as you weave a tapestry of wonder around nonfiction writing.

**CLIPBOARDS AND WRITER’S NOTEBOOKS**

Since nonfiction writers need to experiment with language as they learn to infuse craft elements and writing traits as they construct nonfiction texts, it is helpful for them to have clipboards and/or writer’s notebooks in hand when they come to the meeting area. With these supportive tools, writers can work independently or in partnerships to experiment with varying sentence types introduced in modeled writing, explore eye-popping titles to add voice to writing, or experiment with leads that would be likely to attract reader attention.

**FURNITURE ARRANGEMENT**

Collaboration is essential in a nonfiction writing classroom, as students need to read together, research together, have conversations about ideas for their writing, and so on. When students work at tables or at desks arranged in clusters, this kind of collaboration is natural and effective. A quick look around a classroom that is organized around tables or clustered desks tells a story of shared thinking, partnership, and teamwork. This is the kind of classroom where students grow as nonfiction writers while they are developing collaborative team skills that will serve them in the workplace as well.
WALLS THAT TEACH

The walls of a classroom should be filled with modeled writing, lists of power verbs, collections of eye-popping titles, mentor sentences taken from high-quality nonfiction selections, and an array of content-specific word walls to stimulate the use of precise academic vocabulary. These resources are not created by a teacher in the quiet hours after students go home. They are constructed with students and treated as resources that fuel and support high-quality nonfiction writing. When the walls are designed to teach rather than decorate, nonfiction writers refer to them often, and the quality of the writing they produce continues to escalate.

“To create a culture in which writing is celebrated all day long, there should be lists of fabulous words, tips for writers, mentor texts, and academic vocabulary everywhere you look. Classroom environments and walls that teach are critical to the learning process for nonfiction writers.”

—CERETHA MITCHELL, EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR OF CURRICULUM AND INSTRUCTION, THOMASVILLE, NORTH CAROLINA.
CLASSROOM LIBRARY: LOTS OF BOOKS ON LOTS OF TOPICS

The classroom library is central to success with nonfiction research and writing. Each classroom should be brimming with nonfiction texts that both inform and invite readers into the magic of their pages. Building a robust classroom library may take a bit of effort, but it is worth the time, as this library will contribute significantly to the rich learning environment that shapes and lifts the nonfiction writing of your students.

Dr. Richard Allington, internationally acclaimed researcher, suggests that each classroom library should have a base of 1,500 books or more, plus another 150 books that rotate continuously from the school or community library. These books can be organized by topic, by genre, by text structure, by purpose—any number of ways. Some teachers find it helpful to group nonfiction books according to topic so writers can easily find collections of books on penguins, bears, solar energy, the Civil War, westward migration, and so on. Others find it helpful to identify books that are written with a purpose in mind: books that describe, instructions,
scientific explanation, persuasion, informational narratives such as biographies or *Bat Loves the Night* by Nicola Davies.

What is important is that the books offer a wide range of reading levels, are arranged in ways that attract students’ attention, and incorporate a variety of publishing formats such as magazines, newspapers, pamphlets, scientific resources, posters, public service announcements, and so on.

**INCLUDE STUDENT-AUTHORED SELECTIONS**

As you build your classroom library, be sure to incorporate a section for student-authored books, giving them the prestige of residing alongside books written by professional authors. This tells your writers that you value and respect their work, helps them develop a stronger sense of audience, and brings the self-esteem that comes from seeing themselves as published authors whose work is read and appreciated by others. How exciting it is when nonfiction writers even begin listing the work of their peers in lists of sources used as they compose nonfiction selections of their own.

**MULTILEVELED THEME SETS**

As we face increasing levels of diversity in our classrooms, it is critical that we provide students with opportunities to engage with books and resources that entice and bring a sense of wonder, but we also need to offer resources at their “just right reading level.” Multilevel theme sets are a support system that provides a variety of books on a focused topic while offering a range of difficulty levels for reading and inquiry (Hoyt, 2003).

If you use a crate with hanging folders inside, your multilevel theme set can easily include multiple copy sets of leveled selections, magazines, read-aloud selections, pages printed from the Internet, recorded books and CDs for listening, DVDs to play on the computer, and so on. Multilevel theme sets keep topics at the forefront while enabling you to better meet the literacy learning needs of your students by giving them resources that are accessible to them as readers.

As you build your multilevel theme sets, it is important to indicate reading level in such a way that it is not evident to your students. We would never want students to feel limited by a perception that they are a “level P” reader and can therefore only interact with level P books. The levels will assist you in matching children to books for instruction, but we also want to ensure that your writers can and should feel free to interact with books that intrigue them,
as there is much to be learned from pictures. And research suggests that when learners have multiple text experiences related to the same topic, the core academic vocabulary they build enables them to read increasingly more difficult texts related to the topic. With concepts and key vocabulary in hand, children who might normally be at that level can move quickly into more complex reading selections on the topic.

**WRITING WORKSHOP MANAGEMENT TOOLS**

All communities need agreements, expected routines, and clear understandings about how resources are used. Nonfiction writing time is no different. With a few simply stated expectations and easily used management tools, nonfiction writers learn as a community how they can best support themselves and their peers as they strive to improve their writing.

**WRITING WORKSHOP AGREEMENTS**

It can be really helpful to have a set of agreements for what students should be doing during writing workshops. If there are clear expectations about writing time and what writers should do, management and behaviors are more likely to offer the rhythms in which learning thrives. You might create this in poster format and add to it with time as you model one of the writing behaviors you want to encourage during the workshop time. So, in the fall, there might only be one or two items on the list, but by spring it will be filled with positive expectations for writing workshop.

Another benefit of having a posted list of expectations and agreements is that if the sound level gets a bit high, you could ask writers to pause and hold up the number of fingers that indicates the item on the chart that best identifies their focus. So a writer who is illustrating will hold up three fingers. A writer who is researching will hold up four fingers. At this moment of truth, writers who are not engaged in their writing or have slipped into the “Don’t” category must refocus on the list of agreements and get quickly back on task.
We encourage you to work with your students to collaboratively create a poster outlining what writers should and should not be doing during writing time. An example is shown on the previous page and also appears on the Resources CD-ROM.

**A WORKSHOP ORGANIZER**

Some teachers find it helpful to use a workshop organizer such as those shown below. In both formats, students are expected to display the stage of the process they are engaging with at any given time. This gives the teacher a very clear understanding of which writers are researching, which ones are revising, and so on. Differentiation also becomes easier because a teacher can easily pull the tongue depressors from a phase such as “planning and research” and call those students together for personalized coaching and support. Or pull the tongue depressors from a phase such as editing, and call those writers for individual editing conferences.

A workshop organizer reminds writers of the phases of the writing process while giving teachers a clear view of writers’ progress.
WRITING FOLDERS AND POWER WRITE COLLECTIONS

Writing folders are organizers for storing both in-process and completed drafts. With a two-folder system, writers can have one folder for storing drafts that have been completed and/or drafts that they have abandoned midstream. The second folder is for active writing projects that they are currently composing.

The Storage Folder: In this folder drafts are dated and stored chronologically. This provides a helpful case study of writer development that can be used in assessing writing growth, in conferring with a writer, or for parent conferences. These folders can be kept in a crate, filing cabinet, or other area for easy access.

The Folder of In-Process Work: Writers use this folder as they are actively researching, drafting, and utilizing phases of the writing process. A well-organized writing folder can provide an organizational boost, as it provides an easy-to-access place to keep in-process drafts, spelling reference lists, topic lists, research notebooks, and so on.

While an in-process writing folder can be as simple as a file folder, some teachers find it helpful to utilize a portfolio with pockets or to select specific support features that become a permanent part of the folder. Features that you might consider including in an in-process folder include:

- **Tools researchers use** is a simple list to remind writers of ways they can help themselves as they research. It can easily be adapted as you demonstrate new research strategies and add them to this flexible list. A copy of the list as seen here is available on the Resources CD-ROM.

- **A topic list** so writers can benefit from having a personal list of nonfiction topics they can write about in the future. As writers read, research, and draft, they will invariably discover additional topics for writing. With a topic list in their writing folder, it is quick and easy to add a topic they may want to research at a later date.
• A chart of tips about the writing process is a tool that may be helpful as your writers move toward independent application of the writing process. Some teachers like to print the chart provided on this page so each writer can have a personal copy.

• A chart of high-frequency words (from page 30 in this resource) can help writers get into the habit of checking a resource and confirming spelling without always having to access a full dictionary.

• A personal dictionary or Alphabox supports writers in targeting content-specific words that are unique to each subject they research.

• Research notebooks provide an organizational structure that helps notes stay organized, as each page in the notebook focuses on a different dimension of research for a given topic. When researching a particular Native American tribe, a research notebook might have pages labeled housing, customs, hunting and gathering patterns, native art, language, and so on. Because a new research notebook is used for each unit of study, they become a fascinating archive of facts and information. To make a research notebook, simply have writers fold four or five pieces of 8½” × 11” paper in half. Then they secure the collection with staples and launch their research.

• Research folders are designed as organizers for notes taken on strips of paper or note cards. For this organizer, students glue envelopes into a file folder and label each envelope with a subtopic they anticipate exploring in their research. When students are ready to write, the contents of each envelope are sorted and organized to fuel a well-connected paragraph.

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**Nonfiction Writing and the Writing Process**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Process</th>
<th>Planning and Organizing</th>
<th>Drafting and Revising</th>
<th>Publishing and Presenting</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Research</td>
<td>Choose a topic. Think about your facts. Write or draw your research facts.</td>
<td>Research folders. Get facts from pictures, books, the computer, videos, interviews, anywhere. Write or draw your research facts.</td>
<td>Research notebooks. Glue envelopes into a file folder.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

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**My Research Notebook about Saturn**

by Don Qin Goo

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© 2012 by Tony Stead and Linda Hoyt from A Guide to Teaching Nonfiction Writing, © 2012 by Tony Stead and Linda Hoyt from (Portsmouth, NH: Heinemann). This page may be reproduced for classroom use only.
As cross-curricular writing volume increases, many teachers find that it is helpful to have students use a spiral binder or portfolio with dividers for each subject area. Writers then become accustomed to opening their Power Write collection to the appropriate subject area when it is time to write in science, math, social studies, and so on. An added benefit is that the writing in each section of the collection reflects content studied, academic vocabulary use, depth of reflective thinking, and so on.
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