Explorations in Nonfiction Writing provides teaching tools and models the methodology for integrating nonfiction writing into your school day. As you roll up your sleeves and prepare to utilize Explorations with your students, you’ll want to become familiar with what it offers.

**THE RESOURCES**

Explorations in Nonfiction Writing provides four key resources:

- This book drives instruction with classroom-based teaching models.
- The Resources CD-ROM packaged with this book contains printable versions of support materials for students and teachers.
- The Book of Mentor Texts supports the sessions with exemplary writing models for students to emulate, six of which are full-size, four-color posters.
- A Guide to Teaching Nonfiction Writing, Grades 3–5, lays out the professional underpinnings of effective teaching of nonfiction writing with primary-grade writers.

**EXPLORATIONS IN NONFICTION WRITING LESSON BOOK**

In this tabbed, spiral-bound lesson book, you will find Extended Writing Units (EWUs) and Power Write lessons organized according to the major purposes for which nonfiction writing is created: Inform, Instruct, Narrate, Persuade, and Respond. Behind each purpose tab is an EWU (two EWUs in the narrative section) and a collection of Power Writes, all focused on writing a particular form to meet that writing purpose.

**Extended Writing Units**

Each Extended Writing Unit (EWU) outlines a two-week writing project during which students research, write, and publish a particular form for a given purpose. Each unit comprises ten 40- to 60-minute sessions. You may adapt EWUs to any topic for which you have resources or a curriculum need.

Every unit presented here follows the same gradual-release teaching model: each session is rich in teacher modeling and coaching as well as student-to-student collaboration, but students then work independently to apply what they’ve learned in the whole-class minilesson to their own writing projects. Throughout the EWU sessions, you will notice the familiar routines you expect to see in a writing workshop.
Power Writes

Following the EWU in each section is a collection of Power Writes. These brief cross-curricular writing experiences are designed to be taught in a single teaching session and linked to your curriculum in science and social studies, with a wide variety of text types. They serve as a springboard for using the target text type again and again as a tool for solidifying cross-curricular understandings.

At least two Power Writes in each purpose section highlight visual sources of communication—photographs, labeled diagrams, drawings, and the like—in the mentor texts and in the nonfiction writing that writers construct. Look for the visual text label in this lesson book’s organizing charts and table of contents to locate these important lessons.

Like EWUs, Power Writes gradually release responsibility to the student. They begin with explicit teacher modeling and think-alouds before moving to guided and then independent practice.

BOOK OF MENTOR TEXTS

This richly crafted collection of texts is used throughout the EWUs and Power Writes to show writers exemplary models of various text forms. The texts showcase beautiful visuals so your young writers can easily access high-quality linguistic features, text features, visuals, and nonfiction content. Six of these mentors are full-size, four-color posters. With these models, your writers will soon be writing like experts!
RESOURCES CD-ROM

All of the selections in the Book of Mentor Texts are on the Resources CD-ROM so you can easily print the selections for the enjoyment of your students both at school and at home. Stored on this disk you will also find a wide array of ready-to-use, printable writing tools like a personal R.A.N. chart, word lists, and editing and revising checklists, as well as teaching tools like Ongoing Monitoring Sheets and Self-Assessment forms.

A GUIDE TO TEACHING NONFICTION WRITING, GRADES 3–5

This guide is loaded with tips and tools for helping you launch an exciting adventure with nonfiction writing. You will find a rationale for why nonfiction writing is so important to the future of the students we serve, explanations of the unique features of nonfiction texts, help with setting up and managing a writing workshop, ideas for conducting effective writing conferences, and a vast array of additional information to make your class’s nonfiction writing experiences powerful.
THE LESSONS

As you take a look at the following pages from an Extended Writing Unit and a Power Write, you will notice the harmony in their routines. The three-part lesson structure is identical in both EWUs and Power Writes and follows the gradual release of responsibility model: Focused Minilesson (teacher-directed, student-engaged); Writing and Coaching (student-driven, teacher-guided); and Sharing and Reflecting (student-centered, teacher-supported).

1. Focused Minilesson

The lesson guides you to set the stage for your writers and focus attention on specific learning tasks. This may be done by interacting with the Book of Mentor Texts or the posters, by thinking aloud and creating a piece of modeled writing, or by engaging nonfiction writers more deeply with their research or writing strategies.

2. Writing and Coaching

There is no replacement for time to write. For our learners to become proficient writers, they need lots of writing time. During Writing and Coaching, children research, draw, write, meet with partners, confer, and join guided-writing or shared-writing sessions. They are active, engaged—and writing! And there is no replacement for your own time to circulate among your writers, observing, praising, questioning, giving hints, making notes for future minilessons, or calling small groups together. You will find many tips for management and conferring in A Guide to Teaching Nonfiction Writing, Grades 3–5.

3. Sharing and Reflecting

This is a time to consolidate the learning. Partners or individuals share the drawing, writing, and research they have done; consider the learning goals of the session; and consider how they can continue to move forward as nonfiction writers. You will want to take this opportunity to summarize and restate the teaching points in the lesson as well as ask partners to turn and talk about their work. In the Power Writes, a summary chart icon reminds you to create a chart of the text features (listed at the beginning of the lesson) that you have taught.

**TURN & TALK** EWUs and Power Writes also share abundant opportunities for partners to turn and talk. This is important. If you call on only one student, only one learner is thinking, using language, and taking responsibility for understanding. On the other hand, if you pose a question and ask all students to turn to a thinking partner, suddenly all writers are engaged—thinking, using language, and taking responsibility for understanding.
Extended Writing Units (EWUs)

An Extended Writing Unit is designed to be taught over approximately two weeks. It first guides writers through discovery of a specific text structure and its features and then models the writing process in minilessons that may focus on research strategies, writing traits and craft elements, mechanics, or presentation strategies. Then, the focus shifts to the students as they apply what the teacher has just taught and modeled to their own writing. An EWU can be planned to support any unit of study—in math, science, or social studies—that requires collecting and organizing information in order to convey it to an audience.

The overview to each EWU provides:

- A description of what this particular unit is about, a chart laying out the teaching and learning tasks in each three-part session, and suggestions on how to pre-assess students’ writing strengths and weaknesses
- Specific guidance for advance preparations: charts to make, research stations and notebooks to set up, a standards rubric to plan for, and the like
- Ways to make the unit most effective before, during, and after teaching

The afterward to each EWU provides:

- Suggestions for planning and implementing personal writing projects in which students cement their understandings from the model unit and apply them to their own writing lives through writing projects of personal interest that encourage greater independence
- Suggested topics and forms for personal writing projects
A SESSION FROM AN EXTENDED WRITING UNIT

Headers tell you where you are in the Extended Writing Unit.

The lesson title and a brief description let you know what happens in the session.

The Session Snapshot helps you focus your instruction on the stages of the writing process, writing traits, and the recommended mentor text.

At the beginning of every session, a teacher-directed Focused Minilesson invites writers to explore the features of a text and models some aspect of the writing process.

A mentor text from the Book of Mentor Texts provides the initial model for text features, language features, and conventions. Most minilessons begin with examination of the mentor text.

Suggested think-aloud language helps you model the steps in the writing process as you focus on key writing traits. See A Guide to Teaching Nonfiction Writing, Grades 3–5, for a full explanation of each stage and some sample lessons.

Teaching language in italics gives you a model for how you might think aloud, explain, or guide students’ participation.

SESSION 4

Turning Notes into Running Text

Writers turn research notes and sketches into a draft.

SESSION SNAPSHOT

Process Focus: Drafting

Trait(s): Organization, Voice

Mentor Text: “A Breathtaking Body System,” by Amy Gillett

BEFORE THE LESSON

Provide copies of the mentor explanations on the Resources CD-ROM and additional mentors that you have gathered. Give partners time to read several examples, noticing how they are written. Then, guide a conversation comparing and contrasting the explanations. Note: Copies of Explanations needed for CD ROM

FOCUSED MINILESSON

Review the learning goals from the previous session. If time allows, have students turn and talk about what they have learned so far.

Summarize the learning goals for today’s session: The focus today is on turning notes and the flow chart into an explanation by beginning to write in paragraph form.

Using the Mentor Text

■ Read the beginning of the mentor text. “Every cell in your body needs oxygen—but how does it get there? You take about 20,000 breaths a day, but you probably don’t think too much about how the oxygen finds its way to your cells. The answer is the respiratory system.”

■ Do you notice how the author began this piece? She started with a question that would get us actively thinking about her topic and also gave us a fascinating fact: that we take in 20,000 breaths a day. This powerful opening really makes me want to read more.

Modeling

■ To write my explanation on the heart, I also need a great lead. Watch as I write. Your heart is the most incredible pump ever created! Stay tuned, because I am going to explain how every minute of every day, your heart propels. . . .

TURN & TALK

Analyze my lead. Does it make you want to read more? Did I make it exciting and also make it clear that this is an explanation? Get ready to tell why this lead works or what we could do to make it better.

■ Now I am ready to take the first box on my flow chart and use it in my writing. It says, blood flows to the atrium. I want to be sure to start a new paragraph. I also want to be sure to use the heading that I inserted in my flow chart. Watch as I leave a line blank and then write my heading: The Journey Begins. I return to the left margin and here comes my next paragraph: The amazing story of how blood moves through our bodies begins when. . . .

■ Continue modeling how to take phrases from your flow chart and research notes and turn them into sentences. Emphasize words of sequence such as then, next, if, when, because, and so on. (See the Resources CD-ROM for a list of words and phrases that show sequence.)

■ Demonstrate how you use illustrations with labels to support your explanation.
Emphasize the understanding that this is a draft, so it is okay to draw lines through words, start over, insert new ideas in the margins, and so on. Discourage students from using erasers as they draft and revise.

**WRITING and COACHING**

- Support writers as they begin to draft using information from their flow charts, writer’s notebooks, and research notebooks. Guide them in being fearless as they experiment with language and invite their readers to join them in celebrating the information they are sharing. Be sure partners are aware that although they have researched together, they will each be creating their own drafts.
- As writers begin to draft, some may realize that they need more research and need to return to that phase of the writing process.
- Help writers remember that nonfiction writing needs to have visual supports. Even though this is just a draft, it can be a powerful time to consider where to include a heading, a labeled diagram, a boldfaced word, and so on.

**SHARING and REFLECTING**

- **TURN & TALK** Drafting is messy work. It is a time when notes, sketches, and graphic organizers fuel our thinking and help us create the final pieces of writing that will wow our readers. Find a partner and talk about your drafts. What went well? What challenges did you face today? How are you doing at converting your notes and flow charts into sentences?
- Lead a class discussion about converting research notes, graphic organizers, and sketches into powerful pieces of writing: What worked well? What was difficult? What can be done tomorrow to improve the process?
- Gather the drafts and analyze your students’ attempts to turn notes into running text. Identify writers who may need additional modeling as well as those who are ready for higher levels of sophistication.

Sample **Modeled Writing** is provided throughout, but you may want to customize the models to make them your own.

During **Writing and Coaching**, students research and write their own texts. Over time they collect, organize, write, revise, and edit information for the texts they are creating. During this independent work time, you confer with individuals and small groups as needed.

Teaching **Tips** provide explanations, advice, and ideas for managing and tailoring the session to all students.

At the close of each day’s lesson, the **Sharing and Reflecting** section prompts writers to discuss progress, lingering questions, and goals for the next step in the process. Facilitate this conversation, helping students consolidate knowledge and summing up important teaching points for the day.

Regular **Turn & Talks** give writers a chance to consolidate and share understandings.
CONSIDERATIONS FOR IMPLEMENTING EXTENDED WRITING UNITS

Teachers who have piloted the Extended Writing Units (EWUs) in their classrooms have shared valuable insights. Following is their advice for managing efficient, effective Extended Writing Units.

**Collaborate.**

- Where possible, team up with colleagues and implement the units at the same time. This will enable you to share resources as well as plan and evaluate the units together. Your students will also be able to share their class and individual projects with other classes that have explored similar text types and topics.
- Take advantage of the expertise of your school or town librarian. Alert your librarian in advance so he or she can assemble a cart of related books and periodicals—and perhaps videos and a website list—that can support your writers’ research.

**Plan ahead.**

- Read the entire series of sessions ahead of time so you know what’s coming up. This will assist you in assembling resources, choosing teaching priorities, and planning the timing of your sessions.
- Initially, there may be a lot of prep work with gathering resources, but once they are up and running, they will be a powerful means to have students locate information for themselves, rather than being spoon-fed facts. Give yourself a pep talk as you organize your learning environment: you are helping your students become curious, self-motivated learners. Inform your school librarian about topics you are exploring, and visit the local library/media center in your area to collect additional resources.
- If your EWU is centered on a science or social studies topic, be familiar with the content. This will enable you to help students gather relevant and accurate information.

**Teach routines.**

- If this is your students’ first time working with an Extended Writing Unit, they will need time to get used to the process of investigation. You may need extra sessions to assist them with researching, recording information, and using the writing process. Once students are familiar with the routine, you will find that the EWUs will run smoothly.
During every EWU session, there are many opportunities for students to turn and talk. To ensure this works successfully, make sure each writer has a learning partner, and guide partners to sit together during focused minilessons and sharing/reflection time. Demonstrate to students how to both share their thinking and listen to their partners.

Focus on teaching priorities.

- Remember that you are not trying to accomplish all of your writing goals in one EWU. Be selective about what you concentrate on, and go deep rather than trying to achieve too much.
- When using the mentor texts for writing instruction, keep the students focused on the strategy or feature you are teaching. Avoid getting lost in the content of the text. The posters and selections in the Book of Mentor Texts have been designed to represent the text structure and language features of specific text types. If you want to explore the content of the mentor texts further, use your reading and/or content time to achieve this.
- When students are writing, many may need assistance at one time. Throughout independent writing time, coach for independence. Teach writers strategies for working on their own instead of waiting for help. For example, when writers are unable to spell a word, show them how to write the letter for the beginning sound, then draw a blank line for the rest of the word, and keep going. This will keep writers writing and on the path toward success.
- When students are researching, make sure they are not spending all their time finding information. They need quality time to discuss and record their findings. Don’t skip the sharing and reflecting time at the end of each session. Often this is the most valuable opportunity for consolidating knowledge.

Be flexible.

- Although each EWU session is designed to be accomplished in forty to fifty minutes, it is likely that you’ll need to adjust the number of sessions or their duration to fit your students’ needs. Use the unit’s sessions as the foundation of your teaching, adjusting the time frames as necessary to give your students time to research, draft, revise, edit, and publish.
- If something suggested in an EWU doesn’t work well, ask yourself what adjustments you can make to ensure it works better next time.
- If you find your students are already knowledgeable about something suggested in an EWU, extend their understandings with deeper demonstrations and discussions.
- When students are publishing, don’t expect perfection. Celebrate their attempts, but also stretch them to produce their best and take pride in their work.
Integrate writing across the curriculum.

- The topics explored in these model EWUs are only suggestions. They are a vehicle for showing how to develop students’ skill with and understanding of different text types. Many other topics that suit your students and your curriculum can be substituted for what you see here. With this said, if you select an EWU on a topic from your science or social studies curriculum, you will also be able to develop key content understandings through the units.

- Although these are writing units, the emphasis on reading is strong. Integrating the reading/writing process is important. Use your shared, guided, and independent reading times to support your Extended Writing Units.

- You will find that each time you implement an EWU, you will become more confident and knowledgeable in providing a wonderful series of lessons that will help your students grow as nonfiction writers. Each year, it helps if you select some of the same topics as in past years but also do a couple of new ones based on the class’s interests or your curriculum. That way you begin creating another great set of explorations you can repeat in the future. This means you will gradually accumulate resources and become familiar with the supports and challenges of implementing a variety of units.
Power Writes

A Power Write is an introductory lesson designed to be taught in a single thirty- to forty-minute block. The lesson begins with your on-the-spot creation of a mentor text accompanied by a think-aloud narrating your thinking process as you write. This focused minilesson allows young writers to see and hear the process of writing a specific form and has the added potential to directly reflect something that is going on in their own school lives. It is easy to see how you might substitute a topic you just studied or an audience (the librarian in place of the principal?) or even a purpose (narrate instead of instruct?) in the lessons provided.

Power Writes are designed to slip into your day as a natural part of your curriculum. When students engage with manipulatives during math, with a multimedia experience in art, with the science experiment conducted as a group, or with the books and videos shown to help social studies come to life, they are engaging in research that can be turned immediately into a written form. The Power Writes give you ideas for following your curriculum activities with writing lessons that give students a chance to work in a meaningful way with the information they have just learned. Power Writes help you link to the content of your curriculum so that nonfiction writing can become a part of every subject, every day.

Some Power Writes in each section focus on creation of a visual text—a cross section, graph, map, table, labeled diagram, and so on. In addition, each section always includes investigations in which writers work with the layout of a magazine-like “spread” that requires pleasing, informative placement of pictures, captions, diagrams, and the like to develop students’ visual literacy as it develops their ability to create the form.
**A POWER WRITE**

The lesson title names the writing and relates the form to the purpose.

The Features list calls out the distinctive features of the form that you will want to emphasize for writers. Arrows indicate features not explored in the main lesson but addressed later in the Take It Forward section.

Brief opportunities to use Turn & Talk keep students on task, provide access to others’ ideas, and give them time to think about what they want to say or write.

The think-aloud model that begins every Power Write narrates the process of creating a Modeled Writing sample. This becomes the mentor text for the lesson.

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**Flowchart**

Use a flowchart to show how the body processes foods.

**FEATURES**
- Title
- Boxes with arrows to show time/order
- Caption
- Explanations
- Summative paragraph to explain the process
- Linking words to show time/order

**FOCUSED MINILESSON**

The parts of the digestive system move food through a sequence of events that nourish our bodies. Today I want to create an explanation of how our bodies process food. I am going to create a flowchart, a visual snapshot of a process. A flowchart is a great tool to show any sequence at a glance. Watch as I begin with a title so that my readers will know the purpose of the flowchart: How does the body process foods?

Now I can begin the flowchart. Watch as I draw a box on the far left side of the paper. I want to leave plenty of room for the rest of the events. In the box, I am writing the first part of the process: Saliva in the mouth breaks down food. Notice that my writing is pretty simple and straightforward. I want to create a visual that a reader can easily scan, so I am not focusing on rich description. Instead, I am making sure that each part of the process is accurate and that I put the boxes in the correct order from beginning to end. Now I am drawing another box, and then writing the next part of the explanation in the second box: Food moves down the esophagus to the stomach.

**TURN & TALK** Partners, think together. The next part of the process happens in the stomach, where the stomach breaks down the food into smaller pieces. Give me some advice! How should I reflect this part of the process in the flowchart?

Continue modeling and thinking aloud as you complete the flowchart. Demonstrate how you enclose each step in a box, writing it succinctly. You connect the boxes to show the order. You might show a revision after placing the box in the wrong order. Emphasize the importance of checking your work to be sure the steps in the process are in the correct order in your flowchart.

Writers, my flowchart captures the steps in food’s journey through the body! Now I want to write a paragraph to summarize the information. This process is sequential, so I am going to focus on using linking words that show time order to keep my writing organized. Right at the beginning, I am going to use a linking word: As food enters the mouth, . . .
Continue writing your paragraph, using a variety of linking words to show time order. Point out that, because you are writing a paragraph, your sentences are enriched with deeper description—the small boxes don’t confine you. Writers, I have a flowchart that gives an at-a-glance view of a process and a paragraph that sums up the flowchart with more detail. Together, these elements explain a process so that readers can understand it.

Writers, take a look at the paragraph and the flowchart. Do they reflect the same content? What features of a flowchart will you need to remember to create flowcharts of your own?

Summarize the Features: Have pairs work together to list the features of flowcharts in their writer’s notebooks. Check their lists to be sure they’ve included all the features. They can save their lists as they develop flowcharts in the future.

**WRITING and COACHING**

A flowchart can capture a variety of sequences and processes. Use a flowchart to show how another body system works. How does the skeletal system help the body move? How does the circulatory system bring oxygen to your blood? Don’t forget to put each step in a box and use arrows to show the flow of the steps. Then write a paragraph to explain the process.

As writers create flowcharts, confer with them to be sure they are writing concise sentences in each box. Distribute the “Linking Words to Show Time/Order” resource for students who need support as they write their summative paragraphs.

**SHARING and REFLECTING**

Sum It Up! Your flowcharts are visuals that offer a snapshot of a process from beginning to end. As you wrote your summative paragraphs, you masterfully chose linking words to explain how a process works.

Get ready to share your flowcharts with partners. First, review the flowchart and paragraph. Then you’ll be ready to talk with your partner about your work.

**TAKE IT FORWARD**

- Students can use flowcharts throughout the year to record various processes such as the steps in a science experiment, the events that happen to trigger an earthquake, important events in the life of a historical figure—any topic that flows in sequential order.
- Have students revisit other explanations they have written to revise for strong sequential order using linking words that reflect time. The lists of linking words from the Resources CD-ROM can serve as references as they write.

**ASSESS THE LEARNING**

Provide writers with the Self-Assessment Checklist from the Resources CD-ROM so they can review their work. Then have them record their flowcharts in their writer’s notebooks as a resource for other flowcharts they may create in the future.

**SELF-ASSESSMENT**

Check if your flowchart:

1. Title
2. Boxes with arrows to show time/ order
3. Captions
4. Explanations
5. Summative paragraph to explain the process
6. Linking words to show time/order

Hand over the writing to students as you provide guidance and, if needed, additional teaching during Writing and Coaching.

A summary chart icon reminds you to create a classroom chart of the text features in the lesson for writers to use as a resource.

Each Power Write ends with a distilled summary of the important teaching points for the day in Sharing and Reflecting. Think about giving children the last word here, too, with a Turn & Talk that lets them share what they have learned.

A Take It Forward feature with every Power Write nudges you to extend students’ experiences to include explorations of additional features and forms.