

Methods of Writing Instruction

Chapter Seven

I. The Basic Building Blocks of Writing

II. Instructional Contexts Along a Continuum of Teacher Directedness

III. The Writing Process: Pre-Writing, Drafting, Revising, Editing, and Publishing

Although we have artificially separated reading and writing instruction to clearly explain them both, we must start this chapter by reiterating that reading and writing are inextricably intertwined skills and processes. We cannot and should not separate the teaching of reading from the teaching of writing. As you will see, the component skills of reading and writing are most effectively taught in connection with one other. In fact, students achieve the greatest academic gains when their teachers effectively harness the synergy of the reading-writing partnership. As Marilyn Jager Adams notes, “Children’s achievements in reading and writing are quite strongly and positively related... an emphasis on writing activities results in gains in reading achievement.”¹⁶¹

Chapter Overview

We will approach the subject of writing instruction from three, overlapping angles:

Part I—The Basic Building Blocks of Writing

First, we will examine the basic building blocks of writing, such as spelling, grammar, and handwriting. Students become effective writers more quickly when we teach these fundamental mechanics explicitly and then ask students to put the building blocks into practice by writing with varying levels of teacher support.

Part II—Instructional Contexts Along a Continuum of Teacher Directedness

In Part II, we will explore a series of the most effective instructional contexts for writing that fall along a broad continuum of teacher-directedness. As you recall, a fundamental tenet of excellent literacy instruction is that the teacher leads students toward independence as active readers and writers by providing increasingly less guidance and support over time. While most of us will teach in ways that fall on several places on this continuum on any given day, as a general matter, successful teachers of writing are those that lead their students toward self-reliance in the writing process. To that end, we will survey five contexts in which to teach writing—Modeled Writing, Shared Writing, Interactive Writing, Guided Writing, and Independent Writing—each method more student-driven than the last.

Part III—The Writing Process: Pre-Writing, Drafting, Revising, Editing, and Publishing

In order for students to write independently, they need to know and be able to use the five-step writing process: pre-writing, drafting, revising, editing, and publishing. In Part III of this chapter, we will consider the writing process itself, looking closely at techniques teachers use to teach the its five steps. Of course, this framework is not meant to be an alternative to (and is not in tension with) the various methods discussed in Part II. In fact, all of the stages of the writing process can be taught through Modeled, Shared, Interactive, Guided, and Independent Writing.

¹⁶¹ Adams, Marilyn Jager. *Beginning to Read: Thinking and Learning about Print*. Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1990, p. 375.

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I. The Basic Building Blocks of Writing

Reading and writing are complex, interrelated processes. To read, we break apart a string of letters, decide which sounds those letters represent, and put the sounds back together to determine the word. To spell, we translate the sounds that we hear in speech into written letters. In this way, reading and spelling are opposite but related activities. For this reason, much of the information gleaned in Chapter Three, “The Building Blocks of Literacy,” will be useful as you guide your students toward writing proficiency. In this section, we will consider some guidelines for teaching spelling, grammar, and handwriting.

Invented and Conventional Spelling

Children proceed through a relatively predictable set of sequential stages in learning to write. They first scribble, and then make linear, repetitive drawings that might resemble cursive in English. Children in this emergent stage may use a few very familiar letters, primarily those contained in their names, to spell all words (you might be surprised that four-year old Dominic would write *MDNC* for *float*). Next, children begin to write letters that represent beginning and ending sounds in words (writing *ft* for *float*), and progress to include some consonant blends and vowels (*flot* for *float*). As they understand more of the patterns that influence spelling, children will be able to spell most single syllable words with phonetic accuracy (*flote* for *float*) but will have difficulty spelling across syllables (*confedent* for *confident*). In the final stage, children are able to spell most words correctly, though they may make small errors in the spelling of words containing silent letters or those derived from other languages (*inditement* for *indictment*).¹⁶³

Spelling and Handwriting?

“Adults may wince at painful childhood memories of penmanship lessons and spelling tests. A small but growing number of studies, though, suggest that systematically teaching handwriting and spelling might actually help some students write more and do it better.”¹⁶²

As children are motivated to write, their interest in communicating inevitably outpaces their knowledge of proper spelling. If we accept that students’ interest in communicating should take precedence over correct spelling, we are able to ensure that students’ interest in communicating does **not** outpace their ability to write. We simply have to allow young children to “write” in less conventional ways.

Kindergarten through second grade teachers in particular should keep in mind that “invented spelling” is a critical part of the literacy developmental process. Children who are using invented spelling are demonstrating that they are concentrating on the sound/symbol relationship and then trying to encode it themselves. At first this process doesn’t reflect all the patterns that apply to a language (mostly because the student simply hasn’t learned them all yet), so a teacher may see many words that are conventionally misspelled, but still reflect a growing knowledge of the sound/symbol relationship.

chrane → *train*

dwg → *dog*

fesh → *fish*

n → *and*

There is some controversy about when the transition from invented to conventional spelling should occur. Different students will reach the stage where they are consistently using conventional spelling at different times. Usually by upper elementary, students should not be encouraged to use invented spelling, but rather to use resources to find the correct or standard spelling of words.

¹⁶² Viadero, Debra. “Studies Back Lessons in Writing, Spelling.” *Educational Leadership*, November 20, 2002.

¹⁶³ Bear, Donald R. et al. *Words Their Way: Words Study for Phonics, Vocabulary, and Spelling Instruction*, 3rd Edition. New Jersey: Pearson Prentice Hall, 2004, pp. 11-20.

The bottom line is that invented spelling *should* be encouraged when it signals that students are using their knowledge of sound-symbol correspondences to reach beyond the spelling patterns they have been taught. We do not want inability to spell a word to stop students from writing. However, conventional spelling is the ultimate goal, and students should be held responsible for spelling words and word patterns that they have been taught.

Guidelines for Teaching Spelling

All students benefit from systematic spelling instruction and practice, and students who are experiencing difficulty in spelling need intensive instruction and practice tailored to match their individual levels of word knowledge.

No matter what grade, no matter what level, kids will ask you how to spell whichever word they want to use. Teach them spelling strategies (including to just sound it out if they don't have any clue), and then let them make mistakes. If you don't, they'll never become independent writers. Then you can use those mistakes that they make to guide your instruction to spelling objectives that they need help with.

Shannon Dingle, RGV '03

Strategically select spelling words. Depending on your school's curriculum, you may be handed lists of words that students must learn to spell each week that connect with the broader curriculum. If not, be sure that you select words that include the spelling patterns that you have taught and include words from the curriculum or other content areas. Always begin the year with more frequently used and regular word patterns before moving to less frequently used and less regular patterns.

Here are some other general guidelines for spelling instruction:

- **Review frequently.** Improving students' spelling accuracy requires that you review previously taught material often. For example, if you are teaching your first graders the *vowel consonant e* spelling pattern, you will ask them to spell words that contain that pattern *and* some sound-spelling relationships that they learned earlier in the year. When they blend and write *kite*, they'll be forced to consider why the /k/ sound is spelled with a *k* and not a *c*. Revisiting spelling patterns often keeps them fresh in students' minds. For the same reason, it is also useful to provide students with opportunities to analyze and sort words into categories to focus students' attention on the spelling and letter patterns that they have already learned.
- **Limit the number of words in one lesson.** Expect that students will need to read and work with words many times before they are able to spell them. To give enough practice with each word, do not make your lists too long.
- **Teach students the process of monitoring and checking their spelling.** Ask students to double-check their work for spelling and maintain high expectations for correct spelling of previously taught words.
- **Differentiate spelling instruction.** For students who experience spelling difficulty, provide individual or small group instruction to help them hear the sounds in words and connect those sounds to letters. With a small group of students, you might model how to stretch out a word and segment it into individual sounds, then use spelling cards or phonics charts to prompt students for the correct spelling of those sounds. Students with audioprocessing disorders will struggle to hear the component sounds in a word, so remind them to pay attention to their mouths as they say the word slowly.

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- **Provide immediate feedback.** As students transition from inventive to conventional spelling, be swift and consistent with correcting the spelling of the words that you have already taught. Do not let students reinforce errors once the word has been taught.
- **Connect it to their writing.** Especially in the upper elementary classroom, drawing a portion of their spelling words from trends you see in their writing can be very effective and relevant for them. Older students could even choose some of their own spelling words by scanning their portfolio for words with which they have trouble.
- **Don't carry spelling instruction over into their free writing or drafting.** This may only disrupt the flow of their writing and put undo pressure on them at a time when they should be concentrating on ideas.
- **Teach students to spell high frequency words correctly.** As mentioned previously, the 100 most common words make up about 50 percent of the material we read. Thus, we can significantly improve our students' literacy skills if we teach them to read and spell these words automatically. So, how does one teach these sight words? In a word, practice. You simply have to arrange for students to have many, many encounters with these words, both directly (flashcards, word walls) and indirectly (reading).

One well-established list of these “sight words” from which teachers might work, is the “Fry list” that we discussed in Chapter Three. You may find it beneficial to peruse those lists now and return to them in your classroom so that you can teach them to your students along-side spelling words. To examine the list, see “Fry’s 300 Instant Sight Words” in the **Elementary Literacy Toolkit** (pp. 34-35) found online at the Resource Exchange on TFA.Net. ✂

Grammar and Mechanics

Research continues to suggest that teaching students to use correct grammar in spoken and written language improves their literacy skills substantially. While you may not be teaching your Kindergarteners the parts of speech, you are—as part of your strategies to enhance students’ print awareness—modeling, teaching and reinforcing lessons

One book that was particularly engaging for my students was Punctuation Takes a Vacation. Our class was learning about punctuation in Communication Arts. All of my students also had punctuation as an IEP goal. After conducting a thorough, interactive read aloud (on three occasions), and creating several independent learning stations based on the material in the book, all of my students mastered punctuation. They met their IEP goals within a fraction of the time allotted.

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Letter Formation and Handwriting

Most literacy specialists recommend that lower elementary students have formal letter formation instruction as part of their daily routine, even if it is a relatively short exercise. Students, especially very young students, need the opportunity to think about their writing free of concern for content in order to focus attention on improving handwriting skills. Most curricula will have a particular method of teaching letter formation and handwriting.

about capitalization, punctuation, and other fundamental mechanics of the writing process. Younger students need to be taught when and how to leave space between sentences, for example. Older students need practice with more complicated mechanics such as paragraph structure. As students mature and develop the capacity to think about the various parts of speech in their writing, the mechanics lessons can become more complex. While it would certainly be unwise to completely divorce these mechanics lessons from the real writing that students are doing, most teachers find that regular “mini-lessons” on subjects such as capitalization, punctuation, or subject-verb agreement are an important means of learning the basic conventions of writing. Teachers will often connect a given mini-lesson to a subsequent writing project to allow students

to focus on the mechanics or grammar point in their writing. To plan your grammar and language mechanics instruction, consider the following grade-level benchmarks, from the Mid-continent Research for Education and Learning:¹⁶⁴

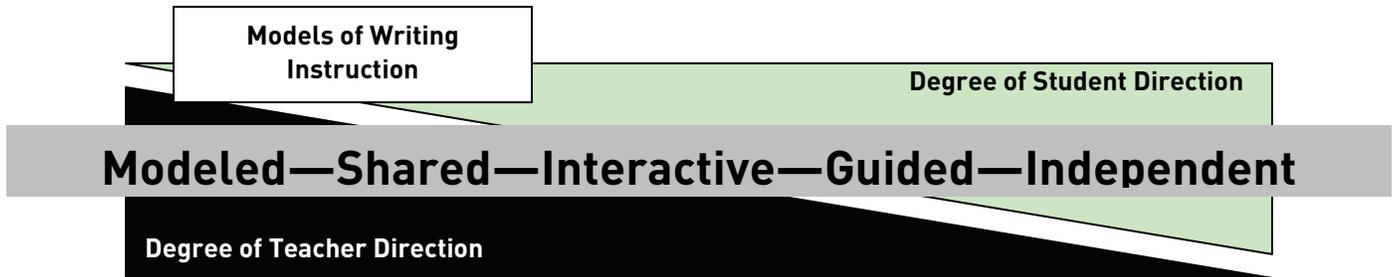
Level I (Kindergarten-Second Grades) Language Arts Benchmarks	Level II (Third-Fifth Grades) Language Arts Benchmarks
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Uses conventions of print in writing (e.g., forms letters in print, uses upper- and lowercase letters of the alphabet; spaces words and sentences; writes from left-to-write and top-to-bottom; includes margins) • Uses complete sentences in written compositions • Uses nouns in written compositions (e.g., nouns for simple objects, family members, community workers, and categories) • Uses verbs in written compositions (e.g., verbs for a variety of situations, action words) • Uses adjectives in written compositions (i.e., uses descriptive words) • Uses adverbs in written compositions (e.g., uses words that answer how, when, where, and why questions) • Uses conventions of capitalization in written compositions (e.g., first and last names, first word of a sentence) • Uses conventions of punctuation in written compositions (e.g., uses periods after declarative sentences, question marks after interrogative sentences, uses commas in a series of words) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Writes in cursive • Uses pronouns in written compositions (e.g., substitutes pronouns for nouns, uses pronoun agreement) • Uses nouns in written compositions (e.g., uses plural and singular forms of naming nouns, forms regular and irregular plural nouns, uses common and proper nouns, uses nouns as subjects) • Uses verbs in written compositions (e.g., uses a wide variety of action verbs, past and present verb tenses, forms of regular verbs, verbs that agree with the subject) • Uses adjectives in written compositions (i.e., indefinite, numerical, predicate adjectives) • Uses adverbs in written compositions (e.g., to make comparisons) • Uses coordinating conjunctions in written compositions (e.g., links ideas using connecting ideas) • Uses negatives in written compositions (e.g., avoids double negatives) • Uses conventions of capitalization in written compositions (e.g., titles of people; proper nouns [names of towns, cities, counties, and states; days of the week; months of the year; names of streets; names of countries, holidays]; first word of direct quotations; heading, salutation, and closing of a letter) • Uses conventions of punctuation in written compositions (e.g., uses periods after imperative sentences and in initials, abbreviations, and titles before names; uses commas in dates and addresses and after greetings and closings in a letter; uses apostrophes in contractions and possessive nouns; uses quotation marks around titles and with direct quotations; uses a colon between hour and minute)

II. Instructional Contexts Along a Continuum of Teacher Directedness

Spelling, grammar, and mechanics make up the building blocks of writing, much the same way phonemes, graphemes, and morphemes are the building blocks of reading, and dribbling, passing, and shooting are the building blocks of playing basketball. So when it comes time for students to put those building block skills to work in an actual “game” situation, you will move students through a continuum of instructional contexts that can be classified according to a gradual shift from teacher-driven writing to student-driven writing. Keeping in mind that (1) independent writing is the ultimate goal and (2) the path along this line for a class of students is anything but linear (as a teacher might use all of the methods in any given day), consider the following graphic representation of this continuum:

¹⁶⁴ <http://www.mcrel.org/compendium/standardDetails.asp?subjectID=7&standardID=3>, accessed 7/10/2010.

Methods of Writing Instruction



We will consider each of these five methods in turn.

Modeled Writing—teacher creates, writes, and thinks aloud

Under the modeled writing method, the most teacher-directed approach, the teacher writes in front of the students, creating the text, and controlling the pen. Even more importantly, the teacher constantly “thinks aloud” about writing strategies and skills.

This approach allows students to hear the thinking that accompanies the process of writing. Those thoughts may address choosing a topic, organizing your ideas, using a plan to write your rough draft, removing repetitive information, or proofreading to fix grammar or spelling mistakes, to name just a few. For beginning writers who are just developing familiarity with basic book and print awareness, the modeling teacher might think aloud in the following way:

Let’s see. First, I have to figure out where to start. Do I write from the top going down or from the bottom going up? I know that I write from the top going down. Now, do I write from left to right [as teacher makes motion across chalkboard from left to right], or do I write from right to left? [analogous motion] I know that when I read books, like *The Very Hungry Caterpillar* that we read this morning, I read from this side to this side, so I am going to write from left to right as well . . .

For slightly older students, the thinking aloud might sound more like:

OK. I’ve written in my notebook about the special Wednesday night dinners that my dad and I had when I was little—our dinner dates. My ideas are really good but they don’t sound like a story yet. I need to make a plan to help me write a story that other people will enjoy reading. Hmm... Oh! Now I’m remembering how we read one of Jerdine Nolen’s stories from *In My Momma’s Kitchen*. I’m thinking that one thing she did to make us really love her story was to have everything that happened build up to one really funny moment. Remember how we all laughed when Daddy sang ‘La Cucaracha’ as his corn pudding cooked? We called that the ‘hot spot’ in her story, and everything else led us to that point—the funniest part of all! I think that when I make the plan for my story, I’m going to tell what happened during our dinner dates and then, at the very end, I’ll share the best moment of all. My hot spot needs to be something really funny that happened during one of the dinners, something that will make you all laugh when you read it. Oh, I see some of you are remembering something funny from my writer’s notebook, and it looks like you have suggestions for what my hot spot should be... Good idea, guys! I think I’ll write my story so that all of the events lead up to my dad spilling spaghetti all over his tie and the waiter bringing him a bib! That’s a perfect hot spot.

Thus, by talking aloud about your literacy objectives as you complete the writing, you build your students' skills, habits, and understanding of a writer's thought process. As the "modeling teacher," your role in this approach as you think aloud is to:

- Use expressive language and actions to model critical writing-process concepts
- Think aloud about actions and choices in writing
- Show students the metacognitive strategies involved in reading and writing
- Use modeled writing as a mini-lesson to introduce new writing skills and genres
- Demonstrate the importance of composing a meaningful, coherent message for a particular audience and a specific purpose
- Demonstrate the correct use of print conventions such as capitalization, punctuation, and print directionality
- Demonstrate spelling strategies
- Connect spelling to phonics lessons
- Demonstrate re-reading as a process to help students to remember what they are writing about

During Modeled Writing, students are listening and watching, with the explicit expectation that they will be using these strategies on their own at some point soon. Although a standard Modeled Writing lesson will not last more than 15 minutes, this approach is appropriate for any type of grouping strategy, including whole class instruction. Many teachers use Modeled Writing exercises each time they introduce a new writing skill or genre and then transition to the more student-involved approaches explained below.

Shared Writing—teacher and students co-create; teacher writes and thinks aloud

Shared writing also has the teacher control the pen, but invites the teacher and the students to create the ideas for the text together. That is, the students and teacher plan out the writing and then the teacher actually scripts the words. Like in Modeled Writing, it is important that the teacher engage the students by thinking aloud about the processes that are happening as he or she writes. And, of course, the teacher may involve students in other ways as well, such as asking them to spell certain words or to decide when a new paragraph should begin.

This approach effectively reinforces the concepts of print, as the students' thoughts are transformed to written language as they watch. In addition to the process-related issues about which teachers might think aloud during modeled writing, the teacher in a shared writing session may think aloud and talk to the students more about the content of the writing. Thus, the role of the teacher in Shared Writing is to:

- Introduce the lesson or topic by modeling how to begin writing
- Plan the text and help students generate ideas for writing
- Record students' ideas
- Reinforce print conventions such as capitalization, punctuation, and print directionality

The student, meanwhile, is contributing ideas to the writing and will read and reread the composition with the teacher. This strategy is also useful for whole group or small group instruction.

Interactive Writing—teacher and students co-create and co-write

For Kindergarten and first grade students, one of the most educationally fruitful learning models is interactive writing. This approach brings the students into the writing process to create products that are well beyond the level of anything they could create on their own. The teacher and students share the pen (or chalk or marker) to do the writing. The teacher plays an active role in monitoring and guiding the process, talking students through various writing conventions that the group encounters while they write.

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The purposes of this approach are many. By having a two-way conversation around the creation of words, sentences, or paragraphs, teachers can negotiate the content of the text, construct words through the analysis of sound, and develop concepts of letter, word, and punctuation. Moreover, teachers are able to lead students to increase and reinforce letter knowledge, and gain familiarity with some frequently encountered words.

Consider the following play-by-play account of an interactive writing activity in a Kindergarten class:

Interactive Writing in Action

The following is a play-by-play description of an Interactive Writing session in the Kindergarten class of Heather Thompson (Rio Grande Valley '97) on January 29, 2003. This process took about 8 minutes.

We come back from the park and sit down to write in our class park journal. First, we reread our entries from previous days. Then, I ask students to think about something they saw or did at the park today. Several hands shoot up.

Ricky: We saw two dogs!

Vidal: A little dog and a big dog.

Tyler: There was two little dogs.

(An argument ensues about how many dogs there were. Finally it is decided that there were three.)

Teacher: OK, so we're going to write, wait, let me write the date first. [Writes and reads, "January 29, 2003."] OK, we're going to write, "We saw three dogs." How many words is that?

We...saw...three...dogs. [Teacher puts a dot on the paper to indicate each word.]

Evelyn: Four words.

Teacher: What do we need to put to start the word "we"?

(Various students chime in with the /w/ sound, some also say the name of the letter.)

Teacher: That's right! Christina, would you like to come write a capital "w" to start our sentence?

(The teacher similarly elicits the second sound of "we" from the students, and then discusses leaving a space between the words. Albert comes up to write the first sound of "saw" and writes the "s" backwards.)

Teacher: Oops.

Several students: Backwards!

Teacher: That's OK. Let's cover it up with correction tape and try again.

Albert: How, like this? [Writes s in the air, then on the paper.]

Teacher: Now, the sounds in the rest of the word "saw" are hard, but where could we look to find it?

Jenifer: Look on the other paper.

(Teacher and students look at the previous journal to find the word "saw," then the teacher demonstrates copying the rest of the word. The teacher then calls another student to write the number 3, and assists the students in stretching out the word "dogs" to hear and write the letters for all four sounds.)

Teacher: Are we finished?

Class: Yes!

Teacher: So, what do we need at the end?

Class: A period!

Teacher: Vanessa, would you like to put the period and draw the three dogs for us so we can remember what we wrote? Then we will read it one more time.

As you can see from the above description, in the interactive writing model, the teacher's role is to:

- Introduce the lesson by modeling how to begin writing
- Plan the text and help students generate ideas for writing
- Record students' ideas, reinforcing print conventions such as capitalization, punctuation, and print directionality
- Reinforce students' phonemic awareness through writing
- Make connections of unknown to known words, such as students' names
- Ask students to participate in the writing at strategic points by asking individuals to write known letters, words, pieces of punctuation, or phrases
- Move your students to independence by requiring them to accept more and more responsibility in this process
- Involve your students in repeatedly reading the products they have created during interactive writing sessions

As the students provide writing ideas in something like an apprentice role, they are actively engaging in the writing process, contributing known letters or words at the frontier of their knowledge. The teacher should be sure to read and reread the ultimate composition, reviewing the skills that have been highlighted in that process.

As you might imagine, this method is useful for whole class, small group, and individual instruction. Many Kindergarten and first grade teachers make interactive writing a part of their daily routine.

To summarize, the keys to effective interactive, shared, and modeled writing are that the teacher:

- Demonstrate the writing in a way that is large enough that all students in the class or small group can access it and be involved
- Think aloud constantly about what is being written
- Remind students to use the skills and strategies that you model when they write independently
- Involve ALL students (There is a risk with this model that one student will be participating while all others are off task.)

Guided Writing—students create and write in small groups while the teacher guides the process

In Guided Writing, the teacher works with the whole class or a small group of students who have similar needs and coaches them as they write a composition. Here, the students take on the actual drafting responsibilities as the teacher presents a structured lesson that guides the students through the writing process. The teacher closely supervises the students, an element that makes this model most appropriate for small groups. Guided writing gives each student the opportunity to produce his or her own writing, with a bit of teacher support. This approach is often used to teach a specific writing procedure, strategy, or skill.

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In this approach, the role of the teacher is to:

- Observe and assess students' writing
- Meet with individuals or small groups who have similar needs
- Actively prompt, coach, and guide individual students' writing skills
- Respond as a reader
- Ask open-ended questions
- Extend students' thinking in the process of composing
- Foster writing independence

Independent Writing—students create and write while the teacher confers and monitors progress

The student is in charge of the drafting under an independent writing model. Students use the writing process to write sentences, paragraphs, stories, or essays. The teacher monitors students' progress and intervenes appropriately. This model can be implemented in any number of ways, including writing centers, writing workshops, journal writing, and letter writing.

Do not misinterpret the name of this approach as implying that the teacher is not involved. The teacher continues to be involved—by creating opportunities to engage in authentic, purposeful writing, by responding to the content of students' writing, and by assisting students with the revision and editing process. The student's role does grow under this model, as he or she takes a larger ownership of both the process and the product. The student might select topics and content, or even genre in some cases. Eventually, the student should be responsible for his or her own revision and editing, as well.

Review of Part II

Method	Summary	Tips and Suggestions
Modeled Writing	Teacher creates, writes, and thinks aloud.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Think aloud constantly, explaining the strategies you use. • Use expressive language and actions to describe exactly what you're doing. • Use modeled writing as a mini-lesson to introduce new writing skills and genres.
Shared Writing	Teacher and students co-create; teacher writes and thinks aloud.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Have your students watch as you transform their thoughts into written words. • Contribute ideas to the writing, but help students generate ideas themselves.
Interactive Writing	Teacher and students co-create and co-write.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Talk, think aloud, and involve your students while one or more write. • Have a two-way conversation around the creation of words, sentences, or paragraphs. • Move your students to independence by not doing what they can do for themselves. • Demonstrate the writing in a way that is large enough that all students in the class can access it and be involved.
Guided Writing	Students create and write while teacher closely monitors and guides process.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Work with the whole class or a small group of students who have similar needs as they write a composition. • Observe and assess your students' writing, actively coaching their skills. • Ask open-ended questions to extend your students' thinking in the process.
Independent Writing	Students create and write while teacher monitors progress.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Intervene with the writing process only when appropriate. • Continue to be involved, but let the students' role grow. • Respond to the content of your students' writing. • Assist students with the revision and editing process.

III. The Writing Process: Pre-Writing, Drafting, Revising, Editing, and Publishing

The final way that we can think about the task of writing instruction is by considering how you might approach instructing students to create a particular written product. The most effective approach to writing any particular text, be it a paragraph, letter, essay, short story, or research project, requires the writer to break the process into five steps:

- (1) Pre-writing**
- (2) Drafting**
- (3) Revising**
- (4) Proofreading and Editing**
- (5) Publishing and Presentation**

As a strong literacy instructor, you will be teaching students both how to implement strategies for each of these steps, and the sequence of these steps themselves. That is, you want your students to associate the concept of writing with this complete process. It should be second nature to your students that there is a meaningful pre-writing stage of any writing project, and that there is a crucial revising stage to any writing project. At the same time, your students should have command of a range of strategies to use within each stage of the process. In this section, we will consider various strategies that you will teach your students to help them at each stage of the writing process.

At the beginning of the year, I read Amelia's Notebook (a story of a young girl who keeps her own journal) as a way of motivating my students to write. They then decorate their own notebooks that they will use all year. Inside these notebooks we complete our pre-writing steps for each project (our lists of seed ideas, quick writes, wonderings, etc.). We also have writing folders that hold work from each stage of the process (drafts, revisions, and final drafts) for each individual project.

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Note that our focus in this chapter will be on writing both as a *process* and a *product*. Traditionally, classroom writing instruction has focused on writing products (sentences, paragraphs, essays, research papers, etc.), with little regard for process. For example, students might be expected to write an essay based only on their review of models of an essay. In the last two decades, however, we have seen significant changes in the way schools approach writing instruction. The most effective approach involves more attention to instructional activities that lead students to think through and organize their thoughts before writing and to re-think and revise their initial drafts.¹⁶⁵ So, while today we still emphasize the importance of the final product, we recognize that we must also focus on the process itself, expressly teaching students the steps that go into writing. These trends have led to our focus on the five-step writing process of pre-writing, drafting, revising, editing and publishing.

Pre-Writing

Pre-writing is arguably the most consequential step in the writing process, and it's importance is often overlooked by teachers and students. Many elementary students think that "writing" a story or paper means sitting down and creating something that will not be altered. While it takes somewhat different forms depending on grade and developmental levels, pre-writing is both a discovery stage, when content and ideas are being collected and organized, and a rehearsal stage, when writers are mentally, verbally, and on paper "trying out" different topics about which they might write. Among the many forms that pre-writing can take are:

¹⁶⁵ Smith, Carl. "Writing Instruction: Changing Views over the Years," ERIC Clearinghouse on Reading, English, and Communication Digest, #155.

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- **Generating Words and Ideas Exercises.** Motivate students to start thinking about words and the subject that will be written about, such as:
 - Brainstorming
 - Listing
 - Observing/taking notes
 - Reading and conducting research/taking notes
 - Free writing
 - Sentence frames (My favorite place is...)
- **Organization.** All students need to be taught how to organize their ideas before they write a first draft. Graphic organizers and outlines are excellent tools for pre-writing, as they force students to think about connections and relationships between ideas. You can teach students to create a plan before they write, either by using a teacher-created organizer or a student-created outline. For some examples of graphic organizers, see the *Instructional Planning & Delivery* text.
- **Previewing Grammar and Mechanics.** Previewing a specific grammar skill that you want students to use in their writing will give them an immediate understanding of your expectations, as well as the necessary time to practice the skill in isolation. For example, if your students are about to write a narrative with dialogue, you could take that opportunity to teach a mini-lesson on the use of quotation marks.
- **Teaching Characteristics of Particular Forms/Genres.** A critical stage in the pre-writing process is instruction in the genre of writing students will be producing. As you can imagine, you cannot expect students to write a persuasive letter, a personal narrative, or an expository article with any success if they do not know the characteristics of a piece of writing in that genre and have not read or examined exemplary models. Just as when you are teaching any other skill, when teaching the skill of writing in a particular genre, explain the characteristics of the genre, look at several exemplary models to identify those characteristics, model the creation of a piece in the genre, and then have students apply the characteristics of the genre as they draft their own piece.

KWL Chart

A useful tool to help students pre-write an informational piece is the “KWL Plus Chart.” As you know from our previous discussions of this model, “KWL” stands for “know, want to know, learn.” Before beginning a project, students can record what they know about the topic and what they want to know. As they research, they write what they’ve learned. The “plus” feature allows students to sort all that they know about the topic into categories. Though students need a different structure (an outline, perhaps) to help them organize this information, KWL charts help them take notes as they research. For a sample KWL chart, see the **Elementary Literacy Toolkit** (p. 52) found online at the Resource Exchange on TFANet. ✖

For an example of student work in the pre-writing stage, see the **Elementary Literacy Toolkit** (pp. 53-54: “Sample Student Work: Pre-Writing”); this Toolkit can be found online at the Resource Exchange on TFANet. ✖

Drafting

Once students know the characteristics of the genre and have collected and organized their ideas, they are ready to work in the second stage of writing. Drafting refers to the time when the student is actually crafting language and translating an outline or plan into a more coherent piece. Part of your role as a teacher of literacy will be to disabuse your students of the idea that drafting *is* writing. Rather, drafting is one step in the writing process. The first draft is usually done relatively quickly to get ideas on paper. In fact, research indicates that writers who try to make the first draft “perfect” run the risk of missing opportunities to discover ideas that could be surfacing during the drafting process.¹⁶⁶

Young writers need quiet and focused atmospheres that will be conducive to drafting. Create routines that get all distractions (sharpening pencils, gathering materials, etc.) out of the way before writing time begins. Many teachers, for example, use a routine called Writers’ Workshop when students are working in the stages of the writing process and the teacher is having writing conferences with individual students about their progress. For an example of student work in the drafting stage, see “Sample Student Work: Drafting” in the online **Elementary Literacy Toolkit** (pp. 55-56). ✖

Revising

Revising refers to those substantive changes that are made after the rough draft. Primarily, this stage considers the effectiveness of a piece, both in terms of content and language. Revision does not focus on mechanics, a task that makes up the editing and proofreading stage. To help young students understand the difference, you might explain that writers focus on how their piece *sounds* during the revising stage and how it *looks* during editing. While this description is not perfect, it is often a helpful distinction for beginning writers.

Possible foci during the revision stage of writing are the ideas and content, the organization and “flow,” and the language choices made in the piece. Of course, the extent to which students revise a written piece depends partially on their developmental level. For example, while you might teach first graders simply to delete ideas that are off topic, you will probably expect upper elementary students to revise more extensively, perhaps by adding descriptive language, clarifying sections that are unclear, including transition words and sentences, or changing the order in which ideas are presented.

How Do I Choose (and Help Students Choose) Topics for Writing?

One of your goals is to help students learn to write for a variety of purposes and in a variety of forms. For example, students can write personal narratives, short stories, poetry, persuasive letters or essays, step-by-step directions, or informational pamphlets and reports. When you are choosing topics for students to write about, consider the following guidelines:

- Start with topics that are familiar and manageable for the students you are teaching. First graders will be able to write step-by-step directions for cooking a Thanksgiving turkey (though they may be less than accurate!) but will not have the requisite knowledge and skills to write an expository essay explaining the origins of common holiday traditions.
- Teach students to *write* the types of genres that they are *reading*. Kindergarteners who are reading and listening to classroom rules can “write” and illustrate rules for the cafeteria. Third graders engaged in a study of nonfiction can write an expository article for a class magazine (perhaps relating to a science unit). Fifth graders who are reading and listening to memoirs can create personal narratives.
- Provide opportunities for choice, in order to build ownership and motivate students. If you have decided that your third graders will create a magazine that gives other students information about Earth/Space science, allow them to choose a topic on which to write their particular article (erosion, fossils, or continental and oceanic features).

¹⁶⁶ Botel, M. and Susan Lytle. *Pennsylvania Comprehensive Reading/Communication Arts Plan II*. Harrisburg, PA: Pennsylvania Department of Education – Communications Division, 1998.

Methods of Writing Instruction

Elementary students find revising to be a particularly challenging step in the writing process. As with instruction in all stages, you should deliver a whole-group mini-lesson on a revision topic, and then model revising your own piece for your students. You might consider one of the following sample topics, depending on the skills that your students need to develop:

- **Varying sentence structure**
- **Elaborating on ideas**
- **Creating strong topic sentences**
- **Consistency of voice, character, or style**
- **Organization of ideas**
- **Improving introductions/story beginnings**
- **Adding sensory details**
- **Including time and transition words**
- **Using dialogue**
- **Choosing strong action verbs**
- **Crafting conclusions/story endings**

When students have a conference with me during the revising and editing stages, it's sort of a "DMV" system: a student takes a clothespin with a number on it and goes back to his or her desk to continue working on his or her story, or he or she can start a new story. I call a number, and whoever has that number gets to come to the back table with their story, and I can help him or her revise and edit it. This really cuts down on congestion around my table!

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Additionally, students need varying amounts of feedback from you and their peers as they attempt to revise their first drafts. Teachers of Kindergarten through third graders, as well as fourth and fifth teachers whose students are just beginning to use the writing process, need to provide a good deal of structure during the revision process. One way that you might provide structure is by literally "cutting and pasting" students' first drafts (mimicking the word processing function on a computer), opening up space for students to add details or helping them to rearrange the order in which they express their ideas.

Proofreading and Editing

During the proofreading and editing phase, the student-author does the nitty-gritty check on the mechanics of the writing, watching carefully for details such as punctuation, spelling, and grammar. These editing skills must be taught to even our youngest students. Children should leave your room not only commanding age-appropriate proofreading and editing skills, but believing that this stage is an integral part of writing that cannot be skipped.

Teaching this part of the writing process can be accomplished through presenting mini-lessons on capitalization, punctuation, etc. and through providing a checklist of language mechanics expectations for the text. It is also taught through teachers' modeling during modeled writing, shared writing, or interactive

Checklists are an excellent way of making your expectations clear and helping your students revise and edit their work. I make a checklist for each writing piece that we complete, and give it to the students during the revision part of the process. As they revise and edit, they can refer back to what I am looking for (which I've taught in mini-lessons). When I grade the assignment, I fill in the checklist and calculate the grade based on how many checks the child receives).

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writing. See "Age-Appropriate Proofreading Checklists" in the **Elementary Literacy Toolkit** (p. 57) found online at the Resource Exchange on TFANet. A table of "Proofreading Marks" that shows the grades in which various proofreading marks are first used is also provided in the Toolkit (p. 58). ✖

Publication and Presentation

This stage brings closure to the writing process by allowing students to share their best work with others, whether that sharing takes the form of a book that is sold at local bookstores or an oral presentation about a written project to the class. Many teachers report

that the possibility of publication, in its many forms, has a significant impact on a students' motivation to write and also focuses students' energy on revising and editing.

There are obviously many ways to publish students' writing. To spark your own thoughts, consider the following methods:

- read writing aloud
- submit to a contest
- create a class anthology
- record on a cassette tape
- send it to a pen pal
- submit it to a magazine
- read it at an assembly
- share in a reading party
- share with family
- hold an "author's tea"
- display on bulletin board
- make a hard-bound book
- make a big book
- share with younger students

The **Elementary Literacy Toolkit** (available online at the Resource Exchange on TFA.Net) contains directions for making bound books (p. 59: "Binding Books for the Classroom") and also an example of student work in the publishing stage (pp. 60-63: "Sample Student Work: Publishing"). ✖

Review of Part III

Thus, when we think carefully about the writing process itself—pre-writing, drafting, revising, editing, and publishing—we uncover a whole menu of activities and strategies that will help us improve our students' literacy skills. During pre-writing, for example, we can teach vocabulary and organizational techniques. During the editing process, we can focus students' attention on particular grammar skills. Combined with the various contexts for teaching writing that span the continuum of teacher-directedness, these strategies create powerful tools for literacy instruction.

Stage	Review	Tips and Suggestions
Pre-Writing	Teacher leads children to generate and organize content and ideas before beginning to write.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ask students to free write in a notebook to spur ideas. • Teach students to read and take notes. • Enable students to organize ideas through the use of graphic organizers. • Use exemplary models to teach characteristics of the genre. • Preview a grammar skill to make students comfortable with using it in their writing.
Drafting	Student crafts the language.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Teach your students that drafting is not writing, just one step of the writing process. • Provide a quiet and focused atmosphere with set routines and procedures.
Revising	Student (often with teacher's guidance) makes substantive changes to draft, including fixing content and style.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Note: this step does not focus on mechanics; that will be addressed in the next stage. • Encourage students to improve their word choice, change the organization of ideas, or ensure sufficient evidence is provided to support a claim.
Proofreading and Editing	Student checks the mechanics of the writing, watching carefully for punctuation, spelling and other mechanics.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Teach these editing skills, even to very young children. • Present mini-lessons on capitalization, punctuation, etc. • Provide a checklist of language mechanics expectations to your students during this stage.
Publishing and Presentation	Allow students to share their best work with others in various ways.	<p>A few ways to "publish" your students' writing:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Read the writing aloud. • Invite others to hear student-authors read their published work. • Submit the piece to a contest or magazine. • Make a book.

Methods of Writing Instruction

Conclusion

This chapter has focused on methods of writing instruction:

- In Part I, we considered some of the basic building blocks of writing that we know form a critically important foundation for literacy development.
- In Part II, we considered the various teacher- and student-centered modes of writing, including techniques such as Shared Writing and Interactive Writing.
- Finally, in Part III, we considered the various stages of the writing process that students use to create their own written products. As you read, each stage of the writing process—pre-writing, drafting, revising, editing, and publishing—offers a range of educational opportunities for teachers and students.