

Helping Struggling Writers Become Strategic at the Paragraph Level

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Disclosures

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Learning Objectives

- Describe factors contributing to the complex nature of writing
- List characteristics of skilled and struggling writers
- Explain features of evidenced-based writing instruction
- Describe ways to support struggling writers with the self-regulatory demands of paragraph composition

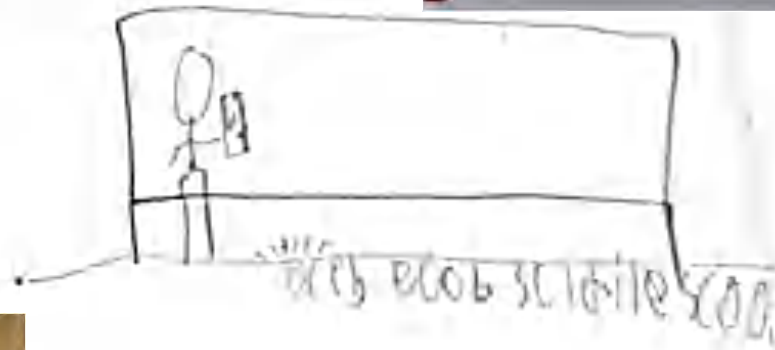
Importance of Writing

Dear Bren, thank you
for coming to my party.

I love the cool
circuits. Unfortunately
my dad likes it.
Fortunately I hid it
from him

thanks
Erin

You are the
best + pret-
tiest ever



**“I write because I don’t know what
I think until I read what I say.”**

– Flannery O’Connor

Link between Writing and Learning

- Supports ability to organize thoughts
 - Strengthens conceptual understanding
- Reading – Writing Connection
 - E.g., teaching writing improves reading comprehension
- Way to show knowledge
 - “Tool for acquiring and elaborating knowledge...across disciplines” (Boscolo, 2014)
 - Writing is main tool for assessing learning
 - Tests often weighted toward production

Challenging Instructional Target

- Need for improved outcomes
 - NAEP findings: ~75% of 4th and 8th graders below basic levels in writing
- Most common problem of 9-14 year-olds with LD (Berninger & Antmann, 2006)
- Widening gaps between struggling writers and peers (Lin, Monroe, & Troia, 2007)
- “Written language is considered by many to be the most challenging skill to teach and learn” (Hochman, 2011)
- Limitations in teacher preparation (Teacher self report- Brindle, Graham, & Harris, 2015)

Academic Writing Demands

CCSS Anchor Standards

Text Types and Purposes

- [CCSS.ELA-Literacy.CCRA.W.1](#)

Write **arguments** to support claims in an analysis of substantive topics or texts using valid reasoning and relevant and sufficient evidence.

- [CCSS.ELA-Literacy.CCRA.W.2](#)

Write **informative/explanatory texts** to examine and convey complex ideas and information clearly and accurately through the effective selection, organization, and analysis of content.

- [CCSS.ELA-Literacy.CCRA.W.3](#)

Write **narratives** to develop real or imagined experiences or events using effective technique, well-chosen details and well-structured event sequences.

CCSS Anchor Standards

Production and Distribution of Writing

- [CCSS.ELA-Literacy.CCRA.W.4](#)
Produce clear and coherent writing in which the development, organization, and style are appropriate to task, purpose, and audience.
- [CCSS.ELA-Literacy.CCRA.W.5](#)
Develop and strengthen writing as needed by **planning, revising, editing, rewriting**, or trying a new approach.
- [CCSS.ELA-Literacy.CCRA.W.6](#)
Use technology, including the Internet, to produce and publish writing and to **interact and collaborate** with others.

Writing Difficulty

Why is writing challenging to teach and learn?

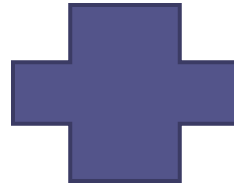
What are the characteristics of skilled and struggling writers?

Writing is Complex!

Cognitively
demanding



Translate ideas into
written language



Social action



Use language as a tool
for learning and
interacting

Written Product

An iceberg floating in a blue ocean under a blue sky with white clouds. The tip of the iceberg is above the water, and the much larger base is submerged. Five boxes containing text are placed on the iceberg, representing different components of writing.

Language Formulation

- Vocabulary
- Sentence construction
- Discourse structure
- Reading skill

Cognitive Resources

- Conceptual reasoning
- Attention
- Memory

Transcription

- Spelling
- Handwriting/Keyboarding
- Dictation

Contextual Factors

- Knowledge of the topic
- Writing task (job, type of text, audience)
- Affective state (prior experiences, self-efficacy, expectations)

Self-Regulatory Mechanisms

- Metalinguistic awareness
- Metacognitive strategies
 - Self-talk
- Executive Function (inhibitory control, working memory, cognitive flexibility)

Writing Process



Plan what to say and how to say it

- Set goals
- Generate ideas
- Organize ideas

Translate plans into written text

- Expressive language
- Memory
- Spelling, Punctuation
- Self-monitoring
- Handwriting/ keyboarding

Review to improve the text

- Reading
- Editing & Revising
- Proofing

What do We Know about Skilled Writing?

Good writers:

- Plan
- Revise
- Monitor
- Evaluate
- Regulate

- Consider the audience
- Are knowledgeable about the craft of writing and the content
- Are motivated to write
- Transcribe efficiently
- Possess effective sentence construction skills

Graham, MacArthur, & Fitzgerald, 2007, 2013

Common Characteristics of Struggling Writers

- Spend **less time**:
 - Planning
 - Generating coherent ideas
 - Revising for meaning and content
- Approach writing **less strategically**
 - As a single process
 - Treat revising and proofing as the same thing
- **Lack** coherence, clarity, purpose
- Hindered by **transcription** problems
- Have **negative** attitudes about writing

Gillespie & Graham (2014)

Key Recommendations from the EBP Literature on Teaching Writing

(See Graham, Harris & Chambers, 2016)

1. Have students write often and for variety of purposes
2. Establish a supportive writing environment that includes high expectations, adequate support, enthusiasm, and shows belief that students are capable
3. Utilize procedures that focus on fundamental writing skills, strategies for the writing process, knowledge of characteristics of good writing, and increasing self-efficacy

Key Recommendations from the EBP Literature on Teaching Writing

(See Graham, Harris & Chambers, 2016)

4. Provide feedback about writing and progress in learning; promote self-evaluation
5. Teach students how to use 21st century writing tools
6. Use writing as a tool for supporting student learning

Caveat: “think of these practices as ‘potentially’ effective.” Also bring to bear own knowledge, experience, context, and specific students.

Instruction Aimed at Supporting Independence

What are some ways can we help students become strategic to maximize the impact of our language and literacy intervention?

What do We Know about Skilled Writing?

Good writers:

Executive Function & Self Regulation

- Plan
- Revise
- Monitor
- Evaluate
- Regulate

- Consider the audience
- Are knowledgeable about the craft of writing and the content
- Are motivated to write
- Transcribe efficiently
- Possess effective sentence construction skills

Executive Function

- Umbrella term
- Complex cognitive processes that control:
 - Flexible, goal-directed behavior
 - Coordination of multiple sub-skills
- “Used to perform activities of self-regulation”
(Gordon-Pershey, 2014)
- Allow one to connect past experiences with present action

3 Key Processes

Inhibitory Control

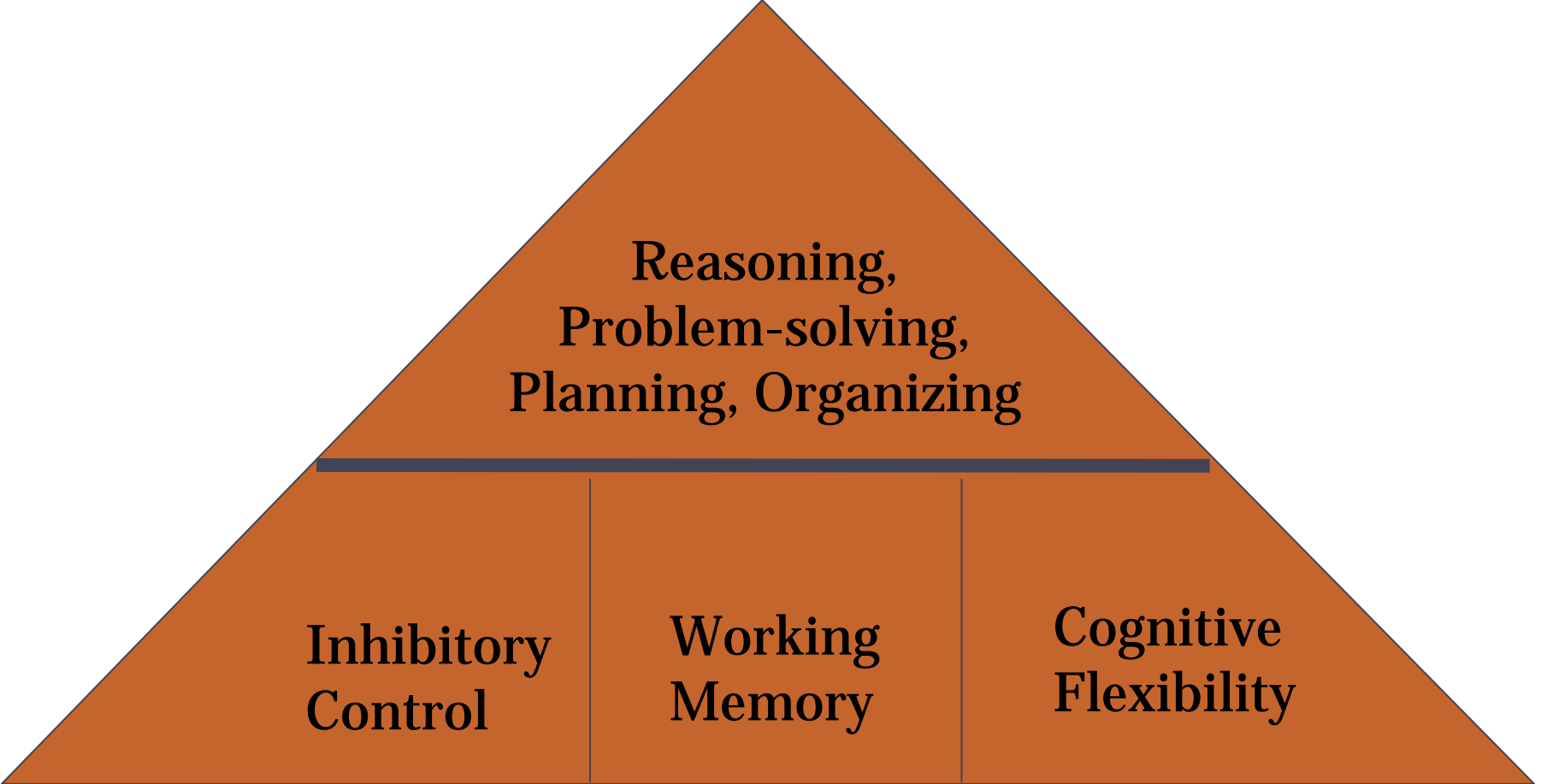
- Control one's attention, behavior, thoughts, emotions
- Inhibit distraction to do what is appropriate or necessary
- Self-regulation overlaps (but not completely)

Working Memory

- Mental multi-tasking/metal “sketchpad”
- Hold info in mind and work with it
- Necessary for reasoning and to see connections between things

Cognitive Flexibility

- Later developing
- Considering alternatives, ability to change perspective
- Changing our thinking
- Adjusting to changing demands or priorities



**Reasoning,
Problem-solving,
Planning, Organizing**

**Inhibitory
Control**

**Working
Memory**

**Cognitive
Flexibility**

- “Simply put, executive functioning refers to the thinking processes that govern how individuals choose *what* to do, *when* to do it, *how* to do it, and *why* to do it. Not so simply, however, the question then becomes *how do individuals get to the point of knowing what to do?*”

(Gordon-Pershey, 2014)

EF Demands of Writing

- Complex task
- Involves recruitment of multiple sub-skills simultaneously
- Requires self-regulation, goal-directed persistence, and flexibility




Role of Strategy Instruction

- Directly teaches the *process*; teaches students to learn how to learn
- “A strategy is a conscious, cognitive process for completing complex tasks.” (Philippakos, MacArthur, & Coker, 2015)
- Directly teach the cognitive processes that strategic learners use

In order to be strategic, students need to...

- Know themselves as learners
- Think about the learning process
- Plan and organize for learning
- Monitor learning
- Evaluate performance



What are the thinking steps?

Self-Regulated Learning

- “Self-directive processes and self-beliefs that enable learners to transform their mental abilities, such as verbal aptitude, into academic performance skill, such as writing.” (Zimmerman, 2008)
- Proactive processes
- Essential for transferring the learning to independent situations

Self-Regulated Learning

Motivation

(intrinsic
interest in
learning + self-
efficacy)

Cognitive Strategies

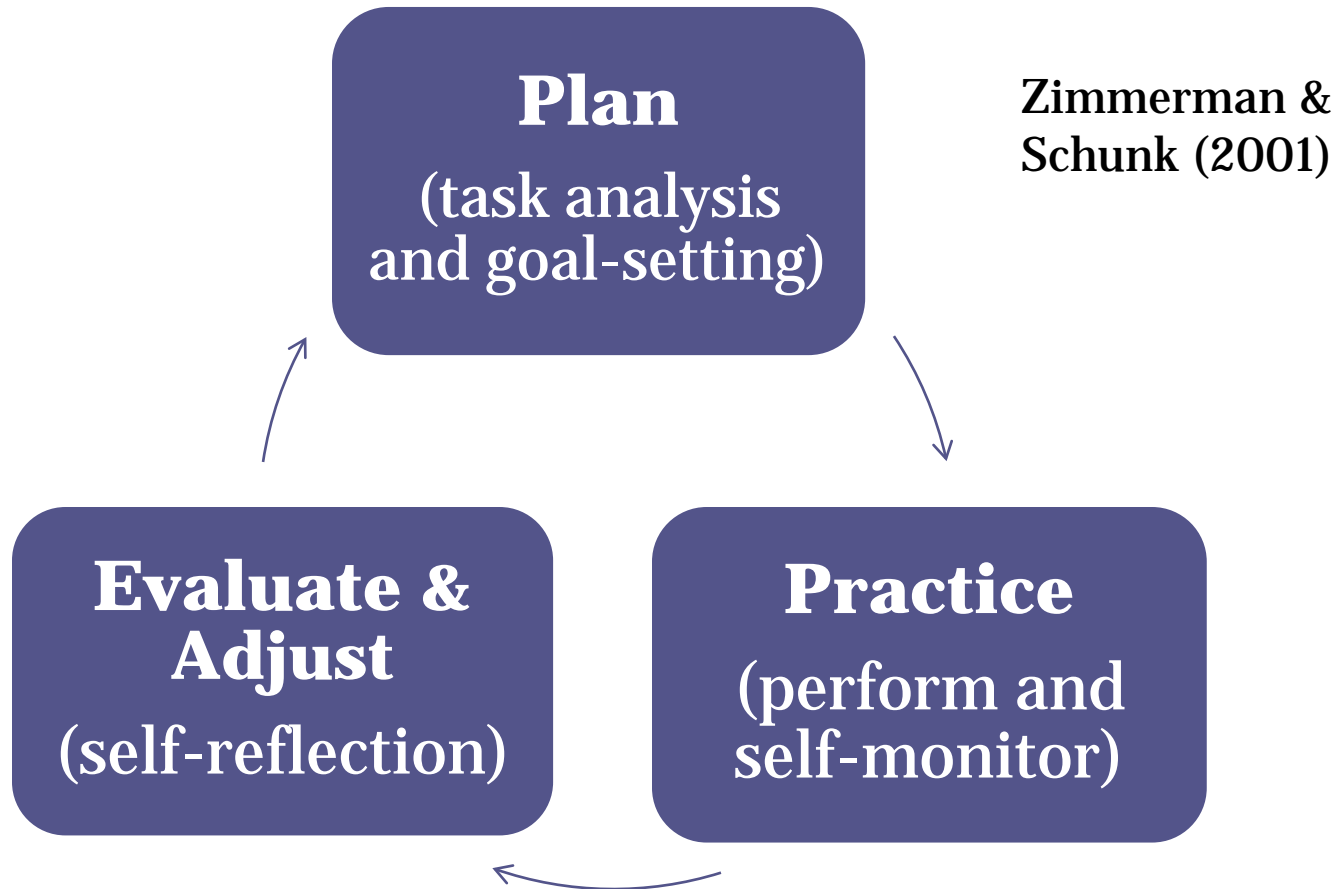
(select learning
strategies &
structure the
environment)

Meta- cognitive Strategies

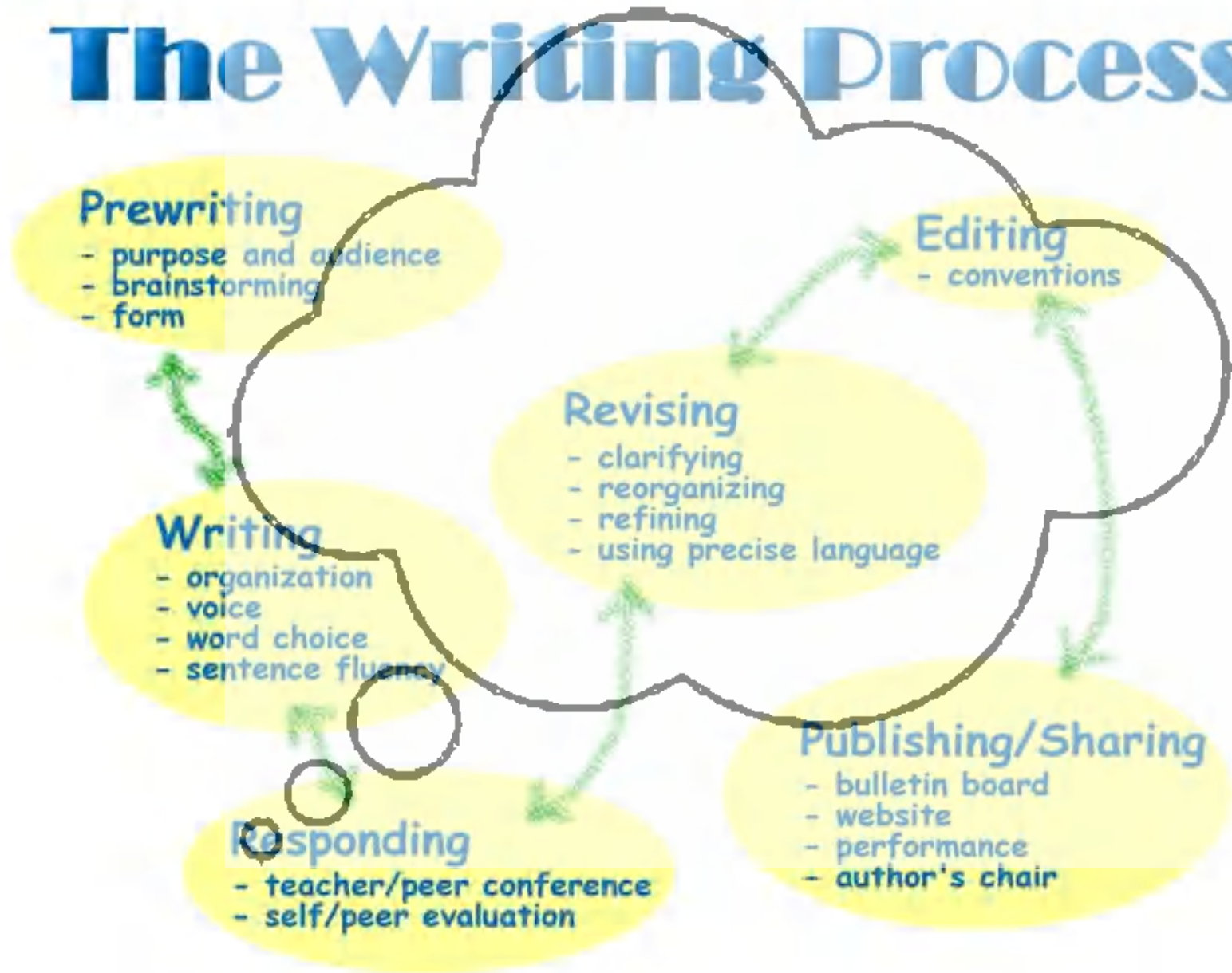
(plan & organize
learning
activities, set
goals, self-
evaluate)

Zimmerman, 1990; 2001; 2008

Self-Regulated Learning Cycle

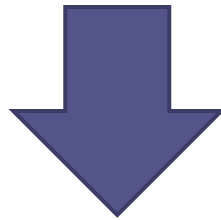


The Writing Process



Role of Language in Self-Regulation

- Verbal output can help us glimpse into management of executive skills
- Language can be used as a way to regulate and manage executive skills



- Can we teach students how to **verbalize** the thinking steps they need to employ?
- Can we help students use language to become **aware** of their own thinking?

Potential Guiding Principles

- Help students appreciate their own learning profile
- Develop background knowledge
- Explain strategies clearly, succinctly, explicitly
- Demonstrate and make cognitive process visible through 'think aloud'
- Directly teach the thinking steps (what are the actions and what do I say to myself?)
- Carefully guide use of strategies
- Make progress visible to students
- Provide ample practice and opportunities for students to experience success

Understanding Own Learning Profile

(Ex: 5th grade student)

Things that are Easier for Me:

- Problem solving
- Understanding what you hear
- Working quickly
- Remembering what you hear when it is repeated
- Paying attention
- Solving math problems
- Writing
- Working really hard



Things that are Harder for Me:

- Keeping more than one thing in your memory at a time
- Being flexible with your thinking, shifting your thinking
- Learning new vocabulary
- Finding the words you want to say when speaking
- Sounding out new words and reading smoothly
- Spelling
- Drawing conclusions when reading



Building Self-Reflection/Self-Awareness

(Ex: 7th grade student)

What Do I Already Know??

Working on writing will help me also get stronger with:

Describing
spelling
learning

What are the types of writing?

What are the steps involved in writing?

beginning
middle
end

Designing 'Thinking Steps'



Example
4th Grader with
significant self-
regulation
difficulties


Created in collaboration with:
Diane Nesman, MA, CCC-SLP

Examples of Writing Approaches that Focus on Self-Regulation

- EmPOWER
- Bonnie Singer & Anthony Bashir

Students and Parents

School Administrators and Teachers

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ABOUT US SERVICES SUCCESS STORIES

EmPOWER

EmPOWER is a systematic method for teaching academic writing. With EmPOWER, students talk themselves through six steps of the writing process and, within each step, use proven strategies to problem-solve. The EmPOWER steps include:

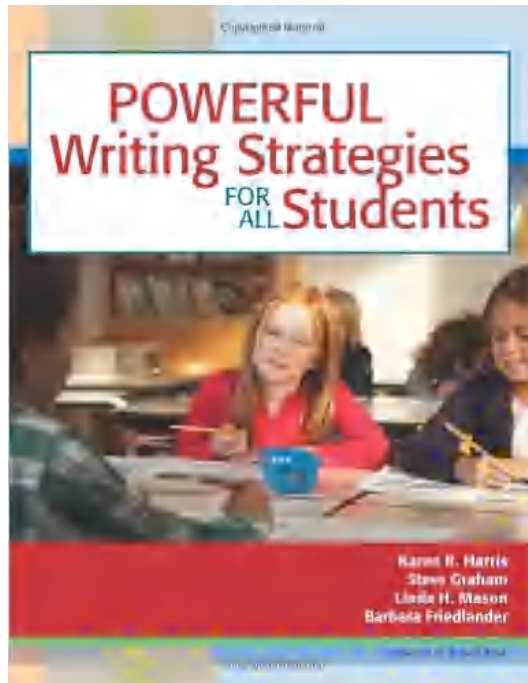
E valuate:	break down the task to determine what I have to do
m ake a	
P lan:	identify my purpose for writing and select strategies
O rganize:	show my thinking and organize my ideas
W ork:	work my ideas into well-structured text
E valuate:	assess my work
R e-work:	make necessary changes

Students can use the EmPOWER method for any writing assignment in any grade level and any subject area.

See also:
www.architectsforlearning.com

Examples of Writing Approaches that Focus on Self-Regulation

- Self-Regulated Strategy Development (SRSD)
- Karen Harris & Steve Graham



See also:
www.thinkSRSD.com

Supporting Paragraph-level Composition

Considerations for promoting students' strategic approach to writing

Reflections from tricky cases

1. Gather Baseline

- Analyze writing sample(s) in the target text type
- Assess students' prior knowledge of the discourse features in the text type
- Gather insights into the process they use, perception of competence, and feelings about writing

Common Core Descriptions for Informative Writing

Purposes	Actions across Disciplines
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Increase readers' knowledge of a subject• Help readers better understand a procedure or process• Provide readers with enhanced comprehension of a concept	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Develop a controlling idea and a coherent focus on a topic• Select and incorporate relevant examples, facts, and details• Name, define, describe, differentiate, compare-contrast ideas• Cite anecdotes/scenarios to illustrate points• Ex: literary analyses, scientific and historical reports, summaries, instructions, manuals, memos, reports, applications, résumés.

Common Core Descriptions for Narrative Writing

Purposes	Actions across Disciplines
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Convey experiences, either real or imaginary• Inform, instruct, persuade, or entertain using time as its deep structure	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Provide visual details of scenes, objects, or people and depict specific actions• Use dialogue and interior monologue• Highlight significance of events and create tension and suspense.• Write narrative accounts about individuals.• Write descriptions of the step-by-step procedures followed in scientific investigations

http://www.corestandards.org/assets/Appendix_A.pdf

Common Core Descriptions for Persuasive/Argumentative Writing

Purposes	Actions across Disciplines
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Influence reader's point of view• Present a reasoned, logical way of demonstrating that the writer's position, belief, or conclusion is valid.	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Make claims (e.g., about worth or meaning of a literary works; to answer scientific questions)• Defend interpretations with evidence• Analyze evidence from multiple sources to advance a claim• Argue for a historically or empirically situated interpretation.

http://www.corestandards.org/assets/Appendix_A.pdf

Some schools sell unhealthy food to children. Decide whether you agree that schools should or should not do this and write an essay to convince your reader of your opinion.

“Should it be a paragraph?”

Pre-assessment; 6th grader

Schools should not serve unhealthy food to people because the unhealthy food is not good for your brain and that is not good for school. Also, since some kids can't pack their own lunch so they need to buy it. The food should not only be healthy but it should also taste good because if the food does not taste good then the kids would not eat it. That could lead to an eating problem. Another reason school should not serve unhealthy food is because in school you need to be alert listening to the teacher and if you don't eat your food then you won't be able to pay attention. Unhealthy food is also bad for the school district because if more kids are out sick, the less parents would want to send kids to that school. In conclusion, it is best for everyone to be happy and healthy with good food.

Writing time: 4 min

“I just said what came to my mind but it is not my best work”



Thoughts about
the process

[What do you think is missing?] “Well it’s really jumpy and it’s not really focused on one topic. Well it is one topic but it’s not really one topic.”

[I noticed you used transition words like *also* and *in conclusion*. Why did you put those in the paragraph:] “That is what I’m used to doing.”

[Do you think you have all parts of a strong paragraph?] “Nope”

[What do you need help with?] “Not being lazy and organizing my work. Actually trying.”

2. Increase Awareness of Text Type

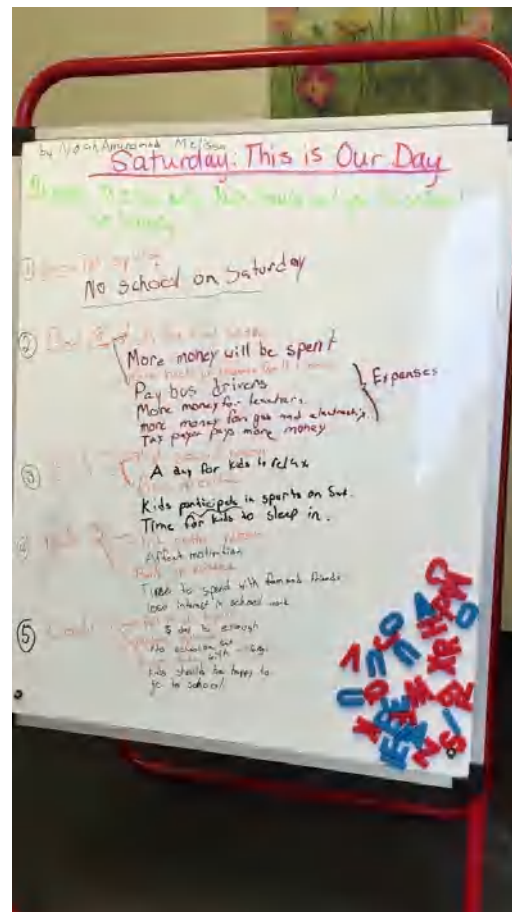
- Bring awareness to organizational structure and promote perspective shifting (writer vs. audience)
- Ex: Model by ‘thinking aloud’
 - I noticed the author...
 - The topic sentence shows the author’s opinion about...
 - I could tell from the first sentence that the author wants us to agree that...
 - The word “similarly” made me see that the author was showing us how _____ is like _____
 - The story began with a description of the setting...

COMPARE and CONTRAST WRITING

JOB: talk about similarities and differences

Rasheeda Williams and Rachel Greene are both excellent teachers. They are intelligent individuals who are sensitive to the needs of their students. Although both women are hard-working, dedicated professionals, their approaches differ. Ms. Williams prefers to lecture to her classes, and her style tends to be formal. Her presentations are well-organized and prepared. In contrast, Ms. Greene asks many questions during her classes and uses humorous anecdotes to make her points. Her lectures do not always adhere to a precise format. Students enjoy both of these teachers and always learn a great deal from them.

Video Example (4th grader)



2. Promote Identification of Features

- **For example:**
 - Model labeling of the parts
 - Label collaboratively and discuss
 - Unscramble paragraph/text parts
 - Match missing parts given foils
 - Select appropriate transition words/cohesive ties from limited set of choices
 - Distinguish weak vs. strong text examples
- **Continue to make thinking visible**



The sentence that
tells the main thing
the writer is talking
about

The writer's opinion
about the topic

The first reason the
writer gives for
their opinion (usually)

The second reason
the writer has for their
opinion

The third reason the
writer has for their
opinion

The says the opinion
again but with
different words
(same but different)

EXAMPLE PARAGRAPH

What it looks/sounds like: Gives examples of things.

Unscramble the sentences to show what an organized
EXAMPLE PARAGRAPH looks and sounds like:

Topic Sentence	Many things can be recycled.	Big Idea
	In school, we put used papers in a separate bin.	Detail
	At home, we save aluminum cans.	Detail
	Many plastic containers can also be recycled.	Detail
Wrap up	I try to recycle whenever I can.	Conclusion

My Favorite Places

Topic
Sentence

There are several places that I enjoy visiting.

lake

In the summer we go to the lake.

The ~~winter~~ ^{summer} is great for swimming.

My mother and I like to fish.

Museum

I like to go to the museum in the city.

There is a giant bubble maker there.

There are also new computers that are fun to play with.

Zoo

I also like to go to the zoo, which is not far from my house.

There is a big cage with many kinds of colorful birds.

Our zoo has a place where you can watch the polar bears swimming under water.

Wrap
up

All these places are special to me, and I learn something new every time I go there.

Content from: *Writing Skills*
(Diana Hanbury King)

3. Move toward Production

For example:

- Fill in missing components
- Revise weak sentences
- Rewrite adequate/strong sentences with different sentence construction, word choice, etc. to increase flexibility
- Fill in story/expository paragraph templates

Take the writer's perspective

→ Exercise 2

Read the topic sentences and supporting sentences below. Then write a concluding sentence for each one.

1. T.S. I like to visit my grandfather.

S.S. He takes me to the movies.

S.S. He tells funny jokes.

S.S. He likes to play games.

c.s. I Love my grandfather and he's fun to visit.

2. T.S. I did not sleep well last night.

S.S. The dogs next door were barking.

S.S. My alarm clock went off in the middle of the night.

S.S. The rain made a lot of noise on the roof.

c.s. I really don't like when I don't get very much sleep.

3. T.S. There are plenty of things to do in winter.

S.S. I'll go sledding on the hill.

S.S. I'll build a snowman.

S.S. I'll play in the snow with my friends.

c.s. I think winter is the best season.

CONCLUDING SENTENCES



A paragraph needs a topic sentence and supporting sentences. It also needs a concluding sentence at the end.

A **concluding sentence** gives one final idea about your topic. It can tell how you feel or what you think about your topic. It should not simply repeat your topic sentence.

Here is a topic sentence and four supporting sentences.

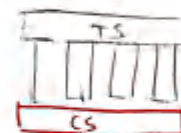
T.S. There are many things you can do at the library.

S.S. You can read new magazines.

S.S. You can borrow books and movies.

S.S. You can join a reading club.

S.S. You can browse the Web.



Here are **two concluding sentences** to fit this paragraph.

1. These are the things you can do at the library.

2. I always look forward to going to the library.

Which of these do you think is a better concluding sentence? Why?

2. I think the reason is that the first one is the topic sentence just added different

'and the second one adds a new feeling or idea'

Question: In what ways are vampire bats interesting?

Topic Sentence:
(Restate the question)

^{how/what}
Vampire Bats are interesting in many ways!

^{therefore, it is good to know}
~~First of all,~~ is that they carry diseases like rabies.

Fact:

Secondly,

they suck blood by making a incisor or a cut to suck animals blood.

Fact:

Thirdly,

they live in South America so North America you don't have to worry about them.

Fact:

Concluding Sentence:

Vampire bats are cool but dangerous creatures

Paragraph Template from: *From Talking to Writing* (Haynes & Jennings)

4. Beyond

- Increasing independence with additional parts of the full writing process (planning, translating, revising)
 - For example, analyzing prompts and linking writing job to discourse structure (see Self-Regulated Strategy Development stages described in Santangelo, Harris, & Graham, 2008)
- Move towards expansion and elaboration (e.g., see “Detail Circle” and elaboration strategies in *From Talking to Writing* (Haynes & Jennings, 2002; 2nd edition in press))

Example: Analyzing the Task Demands

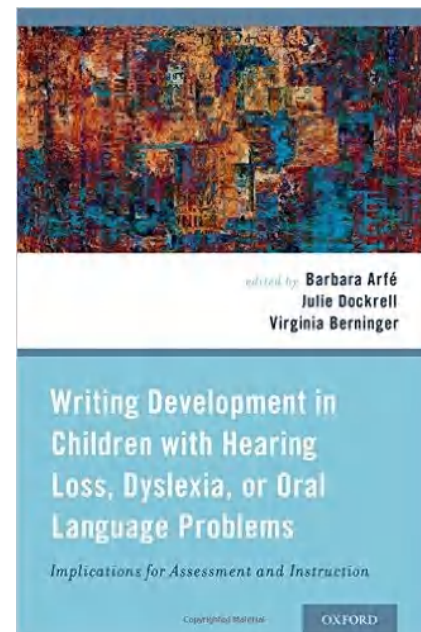
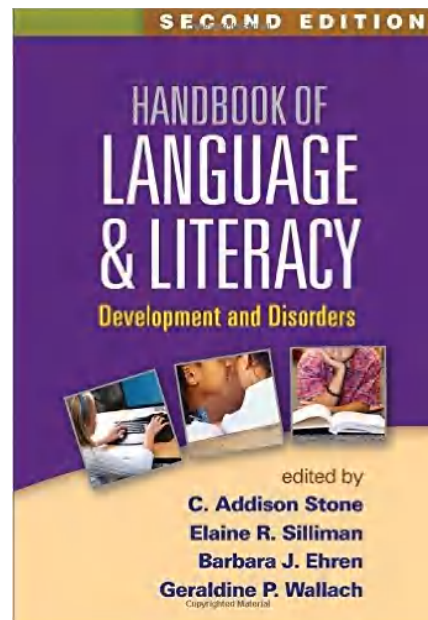
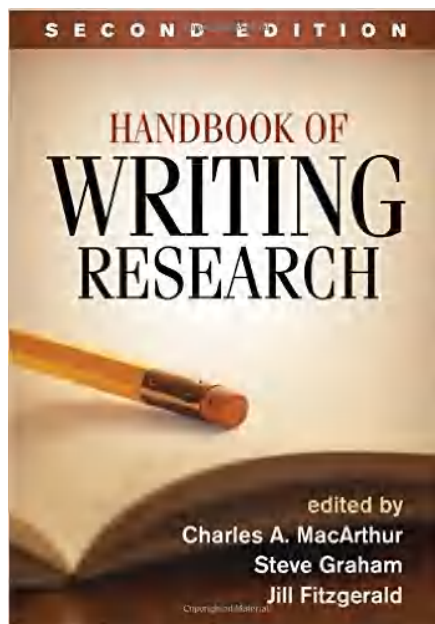
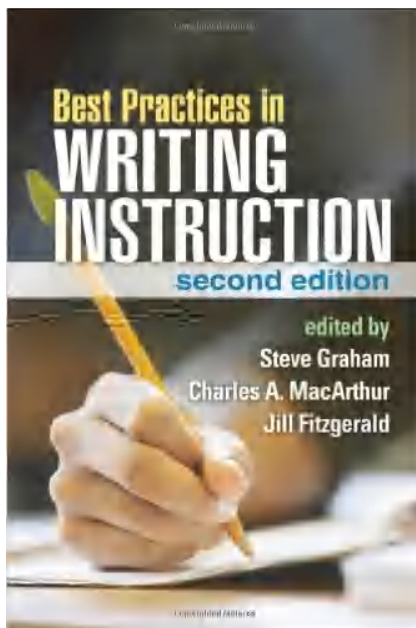


What's my writing job?

Imagine you are out at recess playing, when oobleck starts falling from the sky. You realize that all of the teachers have already gone inside the school and the doors are covered in oobleck and cannot open. Tell what would happen next and describe how you would solve this problem.

Who is my audience?

Recommended Reading

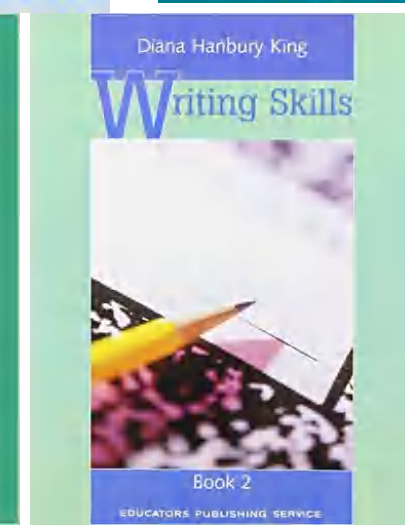
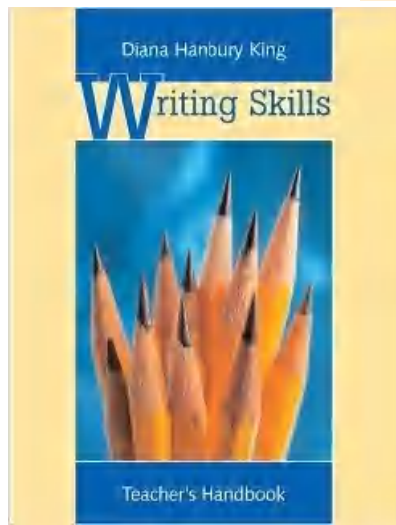
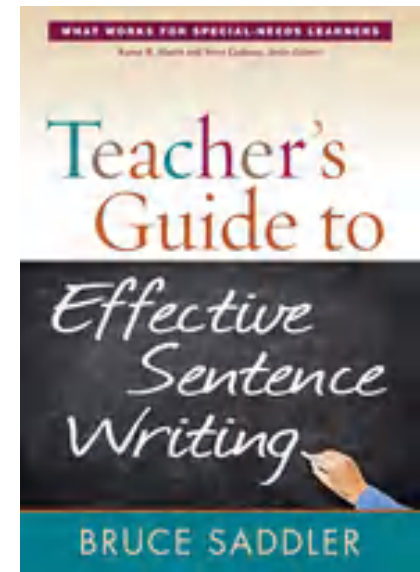
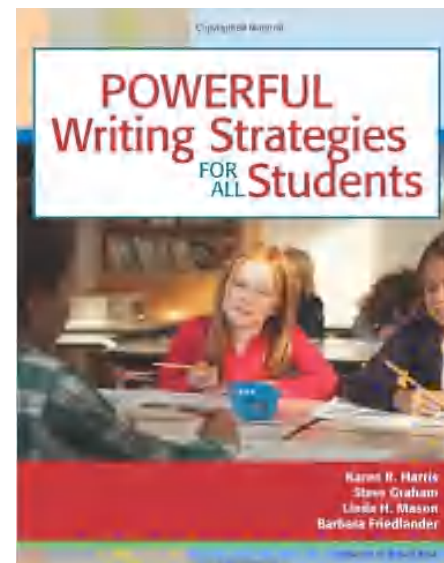
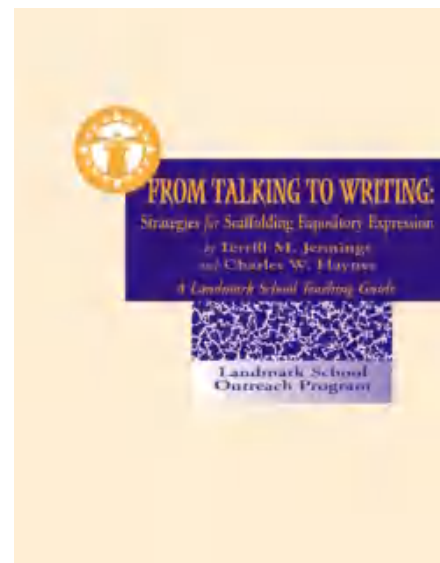
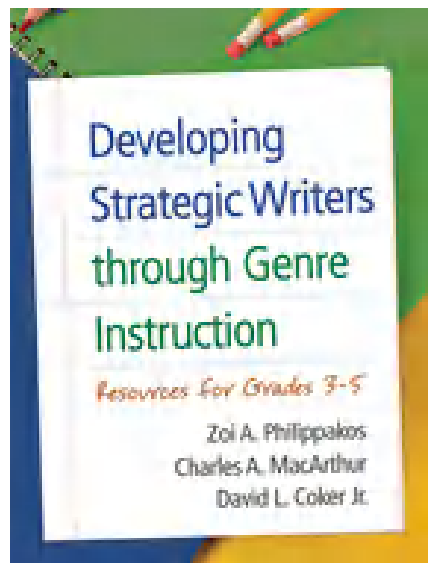


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Helpful Instructional Resources





Thank you!

Contact:

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