Writing

Teaching-Learning Strategies		
Teacher-Guided	**Student Empowerment**	**Specific Strategies**
Before • Discovering what to say about a particular topic • Considering the variables of purpose, audience, and form • Planning	***Before*** • What is my topic? My purpose? • Who is my audience? • What should I say? • What form should I use? • How should I organize my ideas?	***Before*** • Talking, Interviewing, Reading, Researching • Brainstorming, Listing, Clustering, Mapping, Webbing, Flowcharting, Outlining • Focused Free Writing • Heuristics (Questions/Prompts/Leads) • Reading and Examining Models • Viewing, Visualization, Guided Imagery • Journal Writing
During • Saying what is meant as directly and clearly as possible • Finding an appropriate voice and point of view • Telling the reader about the topic	***During*** • How can I introduce my topic? • How can I develop each part? • How can I conclude my topic?	***During*** • Mapping Thoughts • Writing-off a Lead • Fast or Free Writing • Personal Letter • Conferencing • Reflecting and Questioning Self
Revising • Editing for ideas and organization • Proofreading for conventions other than content	***Revising*** • Have I edited and proofread? • Have I practised a variety of editing and proofreading methods? Which work best for me?	***Revising*** • Reading Aloud to Another • Using Revision Checklists • Check and Question Marks • Using a "Pass" Strategy • Self-monitoring • Peer Conferencing

Development of Writing Abilities

Writing is a powerful instrument of thinking because it provides students with a way of gaining control over their thoughts. Writing shapes their perceptions of themselves and the world. It aids in their personal growth and in their effecting change on the environment. Students are often unaware of the power of the written word, yet the written word:

... enables the writer, perhaps for the first time, to sense the power of ... language to affect another. Through using, selecting and rejecting, arranging and rearranging language, the student comes to understand how language is used (Greenberg & Rath, 1985, p. 12).

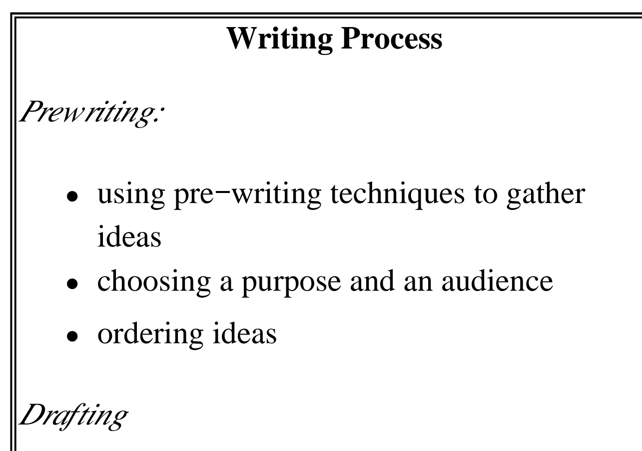
Adolescents' writing abilities develop gradually with incremental and uneven progress. In order to become empowered in writing, students need concentration, instruction, practice, and patience.

The teacher's mandate is to assist adolescents to gain control over the written word. Students should:

- develop an explicit knowledge of phases of the writing process
- write frequently on a variety of topics for a variety of purposes and audiences
- develop an understanding of the structures and conventions of language.

Writing as Process

Writing is a messy process. It is not linear; it is recursive, "a loop rather than a straight line", where the writer writes, then plans or revises, and then writes again (Emig, 1971). Teachers can help students write more effectively by getting them to examine their own creative processes. Although the process of writing is essentially idiosyncratic, writers usually work through a few basic phases. Students can be shown the different stages in the production of a piece of writing and be encouraged to discover what works best for them. Students can be shown the basic phases of the writing process: pre−writing, drafting, revising (editing and proofreading), and presenting. The "writing process is the thinking processes that go on during writing" (Crowhurst, 1988, p. 7). The writing process can be summarized as follows.



Writing Process

Prewriting:

- using pre−writing techniques to gather ideas
- choosing a purpose and an audience
- ordering ideas

Drafting

- putting ideas down on paper
- exploring new ideas during writing

Revising

- Editing: considering ideas and organization
- Proofreading: correcting errors including sentence structure, usage, spelling, punctuation, and capitalization
- Polishing

Presenting

- Sharing writing

Pre−writing

Pre−writing centres on engaging students in the writing process and helps them discover what is important or true for them about any subject at a particular time. Unfortunately, no one has found the perfect system for teaching the writing process. What is certain, however, is that if students are to become capable writers they must develop pre−drafting skills. Experienced writers have their own methods, but inexperienced writers need motivation to write and assistance in uncovering concepts, experiences, and ideas about which to write.

During the pre−writing phase, students need direction−−a topic or something to discuss in writing. Topics can come from teachers but students also need to develop the skill of using their own insights and experiences (and those of others) as writing material. Most often, the potential of possible topics is revealed through pre−drafting experiences such as the following:

- talking with and interviewing people who know something about a topic
- brainstorming
- focused free writing (i.e., nonstop writing on an intended subject to crystallize ideas and feelings)
- mapping and webbing (i.e., drawing thought webs or graphic representations of the topic)
- writing "leads" (i.e., creating three or more opening sentences as a way of determining the shape and scope of the topic)
- listing
- using reporters’ questions (i.e., Who? What? When? Where? Why? How?)
- making similes and metaphors (i.e., asking "What is it like?")
- finding similarities and differences by comparing and contrasting concepts, pictures, and objects
- reading and examining written models to gather information about the topic or to notice genre, style, or tone

- viewing pictures, paintings, television, films, CD−ROMs, or slides
- using visualization and guided imagery
- listening to CDs, tapes, and records
- debating, role playing, and improvising
- exploring ideas in a journal.

Writers must not only think about what they are going to say, but also about how they are going to say it. During the pre−drafting stage students need to establish, at least tentatively, their **purpose, audience, and form**. Although experienced writers often say that content dictates form (i.e., that their ideas tell them which form to use), inexperienced writers need to realize that audience and purpose can help determine form. Students need to achieve competency in a variety of forms and consider a range of purposes and audiences such as the following.

Purposes

- to reflect, clarify, and explore ideas
- to express understanding
- to explain, inform, instruct, or report
- to describe
- to retell and narrate
- to state an opinion, evaluate, or convince
- to experiment.

Audiences

- specific person (e.g., self, teacher, friend, older person, younger person, parent)
- specific group (e.g., class, team/club, grade, age group, special interest group)
- general audience (e.g., school, community, adults, peers, students, unspecified).

Writing Forms

The ability to shape and organize ideas requires choosing a form that is appropriate to the audience and purpose. Students need experiences with a range of forms. Some examples include:

- personal experience narratives
- autobiographies
- biographies
- fictional narratives (e.g., short stories and novellas)
- diary entries
- journal entries
- learning logs
- poetry (e.g., ballads, acrostics, counted−syllable formats, free verse, song lyrics, other formats)

- parodies
- essays
- research reports
- reviews
- news stories
- editorials and opinions
- advertisements
- correspondence (e.g., friendly letters; invitations; letters of thanks, complaint, application, sympathy, inquiry, protest, congratulation, apology)
- scripts (e.g., skits, plays, radio plays, TV commercials)
- oral histories
- eulogies and last will and testaments
- speeches
- memoranda and messages
- instructions and advice
- rules and regulations
- minutes and forms
- pamphlets
- résumés and cover letters.

Through an appropriate balance of experiences with the previous purposes, audiences, and forms, students can become competent in a range of writing tasks.

As teachers plan their writing assignments, they should identify and define the appropriate learning objectives, address the elements of effective communication (subject, purpose, audience, and form), and establish guidelines or criteria to evaluate the outcome of the students' work.

Organizing and Developing Ideas

Writers not only need to think about what they are going to say but also about how they are going to say it. Pre-composing plans help students approach the blank page. During the pre-writing phase, students should also give some attention to how they might organize and develop their thoughts (Olson, 1992). Although these plans will be tentative, they are useful for getting started.

Students need to organize their ideas in logical sequences. Several ways of developing and organizing ideas are possible depending on purpose and form. Some different ways of development and organization include:

Chronological order

- a chronological or step-by-step arrangement of ideas by time or order of occurrence

Spatial order

- spatial, geometrical, or geographical arrangement of ideas according to their position in space--

left to right, top to bottom, or circular

Common logic

- definitive (e.g., is called, is made up of)
- classification and division (e.g., parts and relationships)
- order of importance (e.g., first, second)
- comparison and contrast (e.g., compared to, differs from)
- cause-effect (e.g., consequently, the reason for)
- problem-solution (e.g., problem, alternatives, decisions)
- pros and cons (e.g., strongly support, against)
- inductive and deductive (e.g., specific to general, broad to specific)
- dialectic (e.g., thesis/antithesis/synthesis).

Students could consider constructing a map, a chart, an outline, a visual organizer, or a ladder diagram to organize their main ideas and supporting details.

Drafting

During this phase, writers produce a first draft. Momentum is the important issue as students focus their attention on the development of meaning and the flow of thought in their writing. The mechanics are secondary to the flow of ideas.

At this point, students should try to say what they mean quickly. Additional drafts can be written that further shape, organize, and clarify the work. As students mentally step back from their work, they can develop more objectivity and give more consideration to the reader. They should be encouraged to share drafts to confirm or adjust the direction of their writing.

During drafting, teachers should encourage students to:

- say what they mean as directly as they can
- be themselves; write from their own point of view or assume a new persona or voice from which to write
- write as though they were "telling" the reader about the topic.

Committing their thoughts to paper or computer screen is not an easy task for all students. Strategies such as the following may facilitate the translating of ideas into first and successive drafts.

- *Mapping.* Creating a map of additional ideas and reconceptualizing ways to order them as they write sometimes helps students capture their ideas before they are lost.
- *"Writing-off" leads.* Creating several first lines and then using the key words and direction suggested by one of these leads sometimes gets drafts underway for students.
- *Fast or free writing.* Writing an entire first draft as quickly as possible without rereading or pausing to attend to mechanics sometimes helps students create their first draft.
- *Personal letters.* Writing a first draft as if it were a personal letter to one specific person such as a friend sometimes frees students to create their first draft.

- *Conferencing.* Talking about ideas with a teacher or peer sometimes helps students see how they can start and develop their first draft.
- *Reflecting and questioning.* Pausing to ask themselves what they are saying and if they need to say more or to say it differently sometimes helps students move their drafts forward.

Drafting is rarely completed in one sitting. Students usually need to let the work sit for a bit and then write a series of successive drafts if they wish to produce polished compositions. Discussing drafts with others (including peers and teacher) can help move each of their drafts closer to the final version. The drafting needs of students, however, will vary.

Revising--Editing and Proofreading

Drafts reflect the struggle to get words down on paper and, as such, they are usually rough and incomplete. Revising brings a work to completion. It is a complex process of deciding what should be **changed, deleted, added,** or **retained**. Revising is the general post-writing procedure which involves editing (revising for ideas and form) and proofreading (revising for sentence structure, spelling, punctuation, and capitalization).

Teachers should give students the language to discuss editing and proofreading as well as the strategies to reshape and polish their writing.

Revising strategies require time and practice; therefore, they are best introduced a few at a time. Different strategies may be required for different kinds of writing.

Useful strategies for revising ideas and form include:

- Students can read compositions aloud and possibly tape them.
- Students can examine compositions in relation to specific questions or guidelines. (E.g., Is my composition clear? Is there something that I can do to make it clearer or more appealing? Do my ideas and form address the needs of my audience?)
- Students can use a revision process which involves them in working through various "passes" (Perrin, 1992). The following is an example.

  Pass 1: Edit for truth and accuracy .
  (E.g., Did the governor really say his opponent had a face like a ferret? Why correct the spelling at this point if you might change the sentence?)

  Pass 2: Edit for organization.
  (E.g., Is each paragraph appropriately placed?)

  Pass 3: Edit for paragraph structure.
  (E.g., Does each paragraph have a topic sentence?)

  Pass 4: Edit for sentence structure.
  (E.g., Does each sentence have a verb? Is there variation in sentence length?)

  Pass 5: Edit for word choice.
  (E.g., Have you used "less" when you mean "fewer"?)

  Pass 6: Edit for spelling and punctuation.

  Pass 7: Edit for conciseness and clarity.

(E.g., Is there anything else that should be removed? Added?)

Proofreading involves reading for conventions rather than content. Proofreading and editing are not mutually exclusive. During the editing process, some proofreading may occur and during proofreading, further editing may occur. Proofreading is the process of checking a draft to make sure that the following conventions are correct and appropriate:

- paragraph structure
- sentence structure (syntax)
- word choice (diction)
- usage
- spelling
- capitalization
- punctuation
- appearance (e.g., spacing, indentation, page numbers).

A checklist for students to refer to when revising follows.

Questions for Editing and Proofreading

Ideas/Content:
1. Do my ideas work together to make my message clear?
2. Do I have enough information?

Organization:
1. Does my paper have an effective introduction and conclusion?
2. Do my words, phrases, and sentences tie my ideas together logically (i.e., transitions)?
3. Are my ideas written in order of importance?

Voice/Tone/Flavour:
1. Is there evidence that I am sincere and concerned about my audience?
2. Is my paper an example of my best effort?

Word Choice:
1. Are my words accurate, concise, and well chosen?
2. Do I feel the need to experiment with any new words?
3. Is my paper enjoyable to read?

Syntax/Sentences:
1. Are my sentences varied?
2. Does my writing flow naturally?

Writing Conventions:
1. Are my paragraphs effective?
2. Does my punctuation enhance the meaning?
3. Have I checked my spelling?
4. Are my capitals where they belong?
5. Do I have subject/verb agreement?

(Spandel & Stiggins, 1990, p. 130. Used with permission of Addison−Wesley Educational Publishers

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With experience, most students can develop a personal revision checklist.

Conferences

Conferences can take numerous forms and the teacher does not always need to be directly involved. In fact, students should be encouraged to discuss their writing with their classmates. Students can meet with one or two classmates to ask for advice, share a piece of writing, or revise a composition.

In **peer conferences,** students need to know how to maintain a helpful and supportive relationship. Alvermann and Phelps (1994) suggest that collaboration among student writers does not occur spontaneously. Teachers need to take time to model good responses and set some ground rules such as the following:

- Be positive. Respond to what the writer is trying to say and what the writer does well. Tearing down another person's work will only result in discouragement and hurt feelings.
- Be helpful. Do your best to make comments that will be useful to the writer.
- Be specific. Talk about specific words, phrases, or paragraphs (Alvermann & Phelps, 1994, p. 212).

Students can be encouraged to use the PQP method of peer response:

P (Praise) What do you like about my paper?
Q (Question) What questions do you have about my paper?
P (Polish) What specific improvements could I make?

(Lyons, 1981, p. 42)

Peer conference guides such as the following can also be used.

Sample Peer Conference Guide

Writer:
Reader:
Date:
Written Work:

Discuss the following:

1. What I liked most:

2. The main idea seems to be:

3. Your organization is:

4. Questions I have are:

5. An idea to try is:

6. Additional comments:

In any **teacher−student conference**, the key to success lies in asking questions that teach−−questions that lead students to discover what they have to say and want to communicate, and that encourage them to talk about the work. The teacher can, for example, ask:

> How is it going?
> Where are you now in your draft?
> Can you tell me more about that?
> Can you say more about ...?
> What do you think you will do next?
> Where do you want this piece to go?
> If you put that idea in, where could it go?
>
> (Graves, 1983, p. 245)

The value of revision is that students learn to "re−see" and rethink their writing. Ideally, students should go beyond concern for just the product of writing and become equally concerned with the process of writing.

Learning to Write by Writing

The best way to encourage students to become practiced writers is to have them write often and experience first hand the phases of the writing process. By preparing for composing, actually composing, and revising, students learn the phases of the writing process.

The gains of a process approach to writing can only be realized if teachers have an understanding of the various roles they play in helping students to become more proficient writers. The teacher is no longer simply a setter and corrector of assignments. The teacher is a writer along with the students, as well as an instructor, responder, coach, diagnostician, and supporter.

Students need someone to encourage them, to support them during each phase of their writing, to read and respond to their writing, and to provide direct instruction in the mechanics of writing. While students focus on the writing process, the teacher provides appropriate support:

Stage	Writer's Focus	Teacher's Focus
Pre−writing	Exploring ideas	Encouraging, probing
Drafting	Developing ideas	Suggesting
Revising	Clarifying, revising text	Questioning, coaching
Presenting	Sharing text	Responding

Although the writing process need not be followed in its entirety with all pieces of writing, students should be given a rationale for using the process and should be shown how a writer can craft a composition. Graves (1983) recommends that teachers begin writing instruction by **modelling** the writing cycle, and then continue by participating as writers themselves throughout the year. Some steps teachers might take in order to show students how to produce and craft a composition follow.

Teachers might:

1. Draw up a list of five topics they really want to write about, choosing topics that will interest their students (for example, a camping trip, a pet's death, an embarrassing school memory).

2. List their topics on the board, discuss each briefly, and tell how they came to choose one of them to write about at this time.

3. Begin a very rough draft on a transparency at the overhead projector so that students can see their writing begin to take shape. While teachers write, they should talk about their thoughts, word choices, and changes in focus or direction as they occur.

4. Begin revising on the transparency, using arrows to move or add parts, crossing out some parts and substituting others, making marginal notes, and asking students for suggestions. As in step 3, teachers should think aloud as they work.

5. At this point they can ask students to begin producing their own lists of possible topics, choose one, and begin a rough draft. A few days later, as students get ready for further revisions, teachers can return to their transparency and revise and edit further as in step four.

(Temple & Gillet, 1983, p. 238)

Mini−lessons

Students need varied writing experiences combined with direct instruction in context. Mini−lessons (5−15 minutes) can be designed to help students learn "how to do" something (e.g., write an effective descriptive paragraph) or they can address a language concept needed for a task (e.g., how to write a concise sentence). These focused lessons can occur during any phase of the writing process. They can be taught to the whole class, to a small group, or to an individual.

Sample Mini−lesson

A mini−lesson on writing an effective introduction might include the following information:

An introduction usually serves two purposes. It catches the reader's attention and it suggests or states the main idea of a paper. Stating your main idea in your introduction makes it easy for the reader to understand what you are trying to narrate, describe, explain, or prove. (Not every piece of writing, however, needs a formal introduction. Often narration begins in the middle of the action with an introduction designed to capture the reader's attention.)

Experienced writers often catch their reader's interest using one of the following methods.

- Taking a stand on a controversial issue: *Communication with extraterrestrials is possible.*

- Presenting (retelling) a short anecdote: *The car lurched across the field, alternately chasing and being chased by a huge, brown bull.*

- Beginning with a quotation: "*You can do it", they said. "There's nothing to it. Skiing is as easy*

as walking."

- Asking a question: *What do twelve years of schooling do to your mind?*
- Address the reader directly: *Imagine standing on the prairies 20,000 years ago.*
- Providing a vivid description: *The low sky was like a sheet of metal; the fields faded in the distance, but the presence of the wolves was still felt.*
- Beginning with a startling or interesting fact: *It happened quickly. Sixty million buffalo once roamed the prairies and plains of North America. By 1889, there were estimated to be only a few scattered herds.*

Each opener presents a vivid but incomplete glimpse of what is to follow. The reader wants to read on to see the rest of the picture.

Writer's Workshop

Many teachers use a writer's workshop approach that involves students in three types of activities:

- Mini−lessons (5−15 minutes) on a writing concept or skill that all or certain students can use in their writing.
- Writing time (30−40 minutes) where students start new compositions, research, revise, or work with other students.
- Sharing time (10 minutes) where, during the last ten minutes of the workshop, students share their writing in small groups and discuss writing problems they are having.

The primary focus during each workshop class period is to provide students with blocks of time to write. The teacher serves as a workshop facilitator who monitors and gives feedback to individual students and ensures that each student's progress is charted. The teacher also ensures that important skills are taught, and that conferencing with individual students and among peers occurs.

Presenting and Publishing

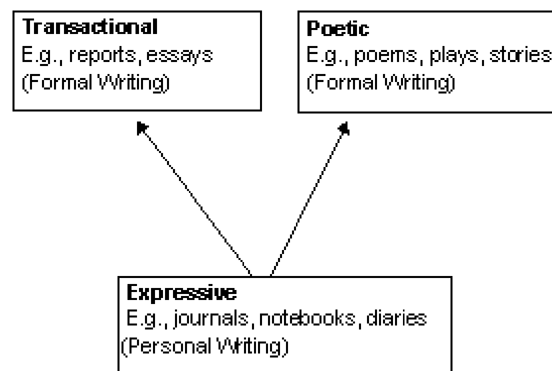
The writing process usually culminates in sharing and presenting. Publishing in its broadest sense, means "making public" or sharing with others. Students should be given the opportunity to choose pieces of writing they wish to have presented. Any piece that the teacher might select for presentation should be the result of a discussion with the student. The ways of presenting student writing are numerous: shared reading, bulletin board, individual books, class/school/city newspapers, student anthologies, or literary contests. Having a wider audience often will lead students to take more care and pride in their writing. However, teachers should keep in mind that some writing is private and some students will be reluctant to make their writing public. Teachers should be sensitive to individual student needs, while at the same time encouraging them to share some of their best work.

A Variety of Writing Experiences

Although the writing process is the starting point for developing students' writing abilities, teachers

must recognize that students need a range of writing experiences to develop as writers. Moffett and Wagner (1983), Britton, Burgess, Martin, McLeod, and Rosen (1975), and others have noted that writing practice and instruction must occur in at least three modes−−the expressive, transactional, and poetic. Students use the **expressive mode** to explore and explain their own thoughts and feelings informally. They use the **transactional mode** to report, inform, explain, and persuade. They use the **poetic mode** to create a literary work. Each has a place in a balanced writing program.

Traditionally, high school English courses have focused on the transactional and poetic modes to the exclusion of the expressive. Britton et al. (1975) argue that the expressive mode is the base for the other two and, therefore, deserves a higher profile in secondary school classrooms. Young (1982) captures this in the following diagram.



(Young, 1982, p. 80)

Informal writing can easily be incorporated into language arts courses. Just as silent sustained reading (SSR) is a familiar practice in many classrooms, silent sustained writing (SSW) can be similarly incorporated. To this end, students can use the following:

- Response journals, which encourage them to reflect and respond to what they are reading, hearing, or viewing.
- Writers' notebooks, which encourage them to explore and record their ideas for subsequent compositions.
- Memorandums, which encourage students to respond personally to an issue. (E.g., "Write one page per week on an issue about which you feel strongly. Choose your format. This will not be graded except for effort. It must be original and will be responded to in one of two ways−− either hand it in for written comments or share it with the class.")
- Fast writes, which encourage students to increase their fluency through timed writing on a given topic. By putting down whatever comes to mind, writing as quickly as they can, students can begin to see their initial ideas and discover others that can be expanded and developed in subsequent writing.
- Dialogue journals, which encourage students to interact with teachers as both make written responses to each other's entries.
- Learning logs, which encourage students to reflect on what they have learned in any subject

area. Logs explore questions such as the following: What did you learn today? What confused you? What questions do you still have? What was the point of the lesson?

In many instances, informal writing need not necessarily be assessed. Depending upon purposes, however, informal writing in journals or logs can be assessed and evaluated. For example, the following three−point scale can be used:

0 = no entry attempted
1 = a limited entry attempted; incomplete or unclear
2 = a clear, complete, and thoughtful entry.

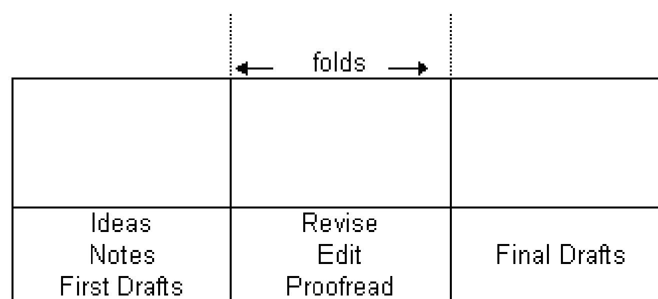
Whatever form of assessment or evaluation is used, teachers need to set expectations. Mechanical errors will not be the focus of the teacher's responses but recurrent technical weaknesses will be noted for diagnostic purposes and future teaching. Each journal or log entry should be dated and labelled. The journal or log should be accessible to the student. The time when students write in their journal or log may vary−−at the beginning of a lesson, during a lesson, for closure, once a week, twice a week, three times a week. As students work with the various modes−−expressive, transactional, and poetic−−they gain experience with the types of writing that are outlined in the learning objectives and that are carried out in daily living.

Writing Folders and Portfolios

Students' writing folders are collections of the students' in−process writing. During an English language arts course, students will produce a number of compositions. Some will reflect the entire writing process but some will reflect only parts of it. For example, a student might begin five different writing pieces. The student might complete the pre−writing for all five, but terminate three of them after completing a first draft. Two other pieces might reflect the complete revision process. One of these might be selected for presentation and/or grading.

A simple letter−size file folder or a manilla folder can be used to store the various compositions as well as checklists, editors' comments, and student and teacher evaluations. Writing folders can be made from Bristol board or a similar light cardboard. Separate sections can be kept for ideas, notes, and first drafts; for work in progress; and for final drafts.

Sample Writing Folder



Writing folders play an important role in the language arts classroom. They are places to sift, sort, and store students' pre−writing notes, drafts, checklists, and feedback. The feedback includes graded compositions.

Writing portfolios are also places where students can store their writing. They are similar to artists' portfolios−−collections of drafts and of exemplary and polished work. At term−end or course−end, students can select from their writing folders those compositions that they feel best represent their writing abilities and progress to include in their portfolios.

One of the major values of writing portfolios is the invitation they offer to students to assess themselves.

Self−assessment prompts such as the following can help focus the task:

- I want to show this to ... because ...
- I like this because it shows that I can ...
- The strongest aspect of this writing is ...
- I spent a lot of time ...
- This shows that I am getting better at ...
- If I could change something, I would ...
- I would now like to ...
- A specific improvement over past writing is ...
- A skill to work on in future assignments is ...

When portfolios are used as a means of evaluation, a guide should be given to the students so they can understand how they are being judged. A sample set of guidelines follows.

Sample Guidelines for Writing Portfolios

1. Select the best public and informal writing you have. (Public writing is intended for an audience beyond self.)

2. Place the public writing, all of the drafts, the pre−writing activity (e.g., taped discussion of small group brainstorming), and your best informal writing in the front of your portfolio.

3. Write a one−page explanation of why you selected those particular pieces and what the selections say about you as a writer. Consider weaknesses, strengths, areas that have improved, and areas that still require improvement.

Assessment of Writing

It is important that learning experiences in the classroom be assessed in an authentic manner. The traditional grading of papers still has a legitimate place in the English language arts classroom but should not be the sole means of assessing writing. Rather, continuous assessment should mirror instruction and be interwoven with it. Continuous assessment is vital in order that teachers gain a clear, reliable picture of how students are progressing and how well the methods of instruction address students' needs.

Writing assessment can take many forms and should take into account both product and process. In process assessment, teachers monitor the process students go through as they write. In product assessment, teachers evaluate students' finished compositions. In both types of assessment, the goal is to help students become better and more confident writers.

Process Assessment

Teachers watch students as they engage in writing in order to determine strengths, abilities, and needs. Teachers observe in order to learn about students' attitudes and interests in writing, the writing strategies that they use, and how students interact with classmates during conferencing. While observing, teachers may ask students questions such as: How is it going? What are you writing about? Where do you want this piece to go? This type of informal observation enables teachers to make informed instructional decisions and demonstrates to students that teachers are supportive of their efforts during the writing process.

Conferencing is a central means of assessing the writing process. A student−teacher conference is a meeting to discuss work−in−progress. As teachers listen to students talk about writing, they can learn how to help students work through the process. A conference can occur at various points of the writing process. Teachers' questions can lead students to discuss what they know, what they are doing, what they find confusing, or of what they are proud. Teachers should balance the amount of their talk with the students' talk and allow the students to take responsibility for discussing and thinking about their own writing.

The key to success in any conference lies in asking **questions that teach.** The following are examples:

As students begin to write:

- What will your topic be?
- How did you choose (or narrow) your topic?
- What pre−writing activities are you doing?
- How are you gathering ideas for writing?
- How might you organize your writing?
- How might you start writing your rough draft?
- What form might your writing take?
- Who might be your audience?
- What do you plan to do next?

As students are drafting:

- How is your writing going?
- Are you having any problems?
- What do you plan to do next?

As students revise their writing:

- How do you plan to revise your writing?

- What kinds of revisions did you make?
- Are you ready to make your final copy?
- What kinds of mechanical errors have you located?
- How has your editor helped you proofread?
- How can I help you identify (or correct) mechanical errors?
- What do you plan to do next?

After students have completed their compositions:

- With what audience will you share your writing?
- What did your audience say about your writing?
- What do you like best about your writing?
- If you were writing the composition again, what changes would you make?
- How did you engage in the phases of the writing process in writing this composition?

(Adapted from Tompkins, 1994, p. 375)

Using **anecdotal records** and **checklists**, teachers can chart students' development and gather information that will help them determine grades and quality. Anecdotal records provide teachers with details about students' writing. Over time, these records provide comprehensive pictures of the students as writers. Teachers can use or adapt the checklist on page 97 to assess students during the phases of the writing process.

When students assess their own writing and writing processes, they develop a sense of responsibility. In **self−assessment**, students assess their own writing and decide which pieces will be shared or evaluated. As students work through the writing process, they may address the quality and effectiveness of the writing. They may also judge if they have met the requirements for the given assignment. Early in the course, teachers can introduce students to the concept of self−assessment by creating a handout with questions such as the following:

Sample Self−assessment

Does my composition make sense?
Does it say what I want it to say?
Does it say it clearly?
Can the reader follow my thinking (i.e., my organization)?
Are there any details that need to be deleted? Added?
Am I happy with this composition?
What makes this piece of writing strong? Weak?

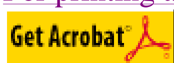
Students' reflections and insights are an important element of evaluation. Most classes, with practice, are capable of assisting the teacher in establishing evaluative criteria. Teachers should clearly communicate to students their expectations regarding evaluation. An example follows:

Choose five compositions from your writing folder/portfolio that you wish to submit for evaluation. Each composition should have gone through the following steps:

Step 1: Pre−writing plans
Step 2: Rough draft(s)
Step 3: Edited, proofread, and initialled by a peer or other person
Step 4: Revised and rewritten.

Work from each step must be submitted. You will be assigned/may choose a submission date.

For printing and copying this template Require Acrobat Reader



Sample Writing Process Checklist

Student: ______________________________	Dates					
Pre−writing Can the student identify the specific audience to whom he/she will write?						
Does this awareness affect the choices the student makes as he/she writes?						
Can the student identify the purpose of the writing activity?						
Does the student write on a topic that grows out of his/her own experience?						
Does the student engage in pre−writing activities before writing?						
Drafting Does the student write rough drafts?						
Does the student place a greater emphasis on content than on mechanics in the rough drafts?						
Revising Does the student share his/her writing in conferences?						
Does the student participate in discussions about classmates' writing?						
Does the student make changes to reflect the reactions and comments of both teacher and classmates? If the student chooses not to incorporate suggestions, can he/she explain why not?						
Between first and final drafts, does the student make substantive or only minor changes?						
Does the student proofread his/her own papers?						
Does the student help proofread classmates' papers?						
Does the student increasingly identify his/her own mechanical errors?						
Publishing						

Does the student publish writing in an appropriate form?						
Does the student share this finished writing with an appropriate audience?						

Comments:

(McKenzie & Tompkins, 1984, p. 211. Used with permission of Indiana University−Purdue University at Indianapolis.)

Product Assessment

Assessment of the process students use when writing is of great importance in assisting students to improve their writing; however, the finished composition or product is also important as an indication of writing achievement.

Product assessment should be based on many different criteria, rather than on mechanics only. "Teachers, raised and educated in the old tradition, do not easily let go of the belief that they must correct and grade each piece of writing that their students do" (Crowhurst, 1988, p. 8). This overriding obsession with correction, can undermine the more fundamental aspects of composing−− content and clarity. Intensively marked papers give too many details, overwhelming and demoralizing the students. Researchers have found that constructive, encouraging, and frequent feedback, as well as responses that emphasize content and process rather than just conventions, lead to improved competency and positive attitudes to writing. Praising what students do well improves their writing more than does mere correction of what they do badly. Teachers should focus students' attention on one or two areas for concentration and improvement.

When students use the writing process, intensive correction is not as likely to be required. As students work through several revisions, they develop a more thorough understanding of the assignment's nature. Students require, then, a thoughtful response from teachers.

Comments such as the following can help students grow and can validate them as writers.

General

- Strong writing voice. I can hear someone behind those words.
- I can picture this.
- I know just what you mean. I've felt this way too.
- You are losing my attention. Make this part a little more specific.

Beginnings and Endings

- Strong introduction. It makes me want to read this paper.
- Your ending came so quickly that I felt I missed something.
- Your wrap−up really captured the whole mood of the paper.
- The conclusions seemed a little weak. I felt let down.

Organization

- This was very well organized. I could follow it easily.
- I am confused about how this fits.
- I am not sure what the focus of the paper is.
- How is this connected to the sentence or idea before it?
- This sentence or paragraph seems overloaded. Too much happens too fast and I cannot follow.

Clarity

- Can you add detail here? I cannot see the whole picture.
- Good description. I could make a movie of this.
- Adding some physical description would help me see this more clearly.
- Tell me more about this. I need more information.
- An example here would help us support your case more willingly.
- The use of dialogue here would help me see this person more vividly.
- I am not sure what you mean. Let's talk.

Structure and Language

- Notice that you have a number of short sentences here. Can you combine them to improve the flow?
- This sentence is a whopper! Break it up, please.
- Good word choice. It really captures the essence of what you are saying.
- Your language seems a bit overblown. I do not hear you talking and that distracts me.

Usage and Mechanics

- Oops−−you changed tenses and confused me.
- You switched from the third person to the first. I can understand it, but it does distract.
- You capitalize words randomly. Let me sit down with you in workshop and show you some things.
- Break your work into sentences so I can more clearly see which ideas are related.

(Tchudi & Mitchell, 1989, pp. 231−232. Used with permission of Addison−Wesley Educational Publishers Inc.)

It is common practice for teachers to assign a grade or score to students' writing products. Forms of scoring include both holistic and analytic.

Holistic Scoring

Teachers read the compositions for a general impression and, according to this impression, award a numerical score or letter grade. All aspects of the composition−−content and conventions−−affect the teacher's response, but none of them is specifically identified or directly addressed using a checklist. This approach is rapid and efficient in judging overall performance. It may, however, be inappropriate

for judging how well students applied a specific criterion or developed a particular form. A sample holistic scoring rubric follows, with scores ranging from 5 to 1.

Sample Holistic Writing Rubric

5/5 Ideas are insightful and well considered. This writing has a strong central focus and is well organized. The organizational pattern is interesting, perhaps original, and provides the piece with an introduction which hooks the reader and carries the piece through to a satisfying conclusion. The writer has chosen appropriate details and established a definite point of view. Sentences are clear and varied. Word choices are vivid. The writer's voice and tone consistently sustain the reader's interest. If there are errors in mechanics, they are the result of the student taking a risk with more complex or original aspects of writing.

4/5 Ideas are thoughtful and clear. This writing has a clear and recognizable focus. A standard organizational pattern is used, with clear introduction, transitions, and conclusion. A point of view is established and a sense of audience is clear. The writer has used appropriate details, clear and correct sentence structures, and specific word choices. The writer's voice and tone maintain the reader's interest. The few errors in mechanics do not impede communication or annoy the reader unduly.

3/5 Ideas are straightforward and clear. This piece of writing has a recognizable focus, though there may be superfluous information provided. The organizational pattern used is clear and includes a basic introduction and conclusion though it may be formulaic or repetitive. The point of view is clear and consistent. The word choices and sentence structures are clear but not imaginative. The writer's voice and tone establish, but may not maintain, the reader's interest. The mechanics show less effort and attention to proofreading than needed.

2/5 Ideas are limited and overgeneralized but discernible. This piece of writing has an inconsistent or meandering focus. It is underdeveloped and lacks clear organization. Incorrect or missing transitions make it difficult to follow. There may be an introduction without a conclusion, or the reverse, a conclusion with no introduction. The point of view is unclear and there are frequent shifts in tense and person. The writer exhibits superficial and/or minimal awareness of the reader. Mechanical errors interfere with the reader's understanding and pleasure.

1/5 Ideas are elementary and may not be clear. This piece of writing lacks focus and coherence. The organizational pattern and development of the topic are confusing. Point of view may shift in a confusing way. Mechanical errors are abundant and interfere with understanding. The piece must be read several times to make sense of it. Awareness of the reader is not apparent.

It is important for students to be given evaluation criteria before they begin writing. A covering letter and résumé could be evaluated using the following criteria.

Sample Holistic Rubric for Letter and Résumé

5/5 Letter and résumé are complete, succinct, neat, free of mechanical errors, and properly formatted.

4/5 Letter and résumé are generally complete but wording and formatting could be improved. There may be details missing and a mechanical error or two.

3/5 Letter and résumé are adequate but appearance could be improved. There may be several mechanical errors. Information may be missing or unnecessary information may be included.

2/5

Letter and résumé do not make a good impression on the reader. Important facts have been

left out or are disorganized. There are a number of mechanical errors.

1/5 Back to the drawing board. The letter and résumé are incomplete, unclear, and contain numerous mistakes.

Analytic Scoring

In analytic scoring, teachers read compositions focusing on a pre−determined list of criteria. Compositions can be compared to a set standard and teachers can diagnose to determine needed instruction. Although this type of analysis is more time consuming than other measures, it does provide detailed feedback. Diederich's Scale (1974) is the most widely used analytic measure but it must be used cautiously in order to reflect the instructional focus. It is easy to adapt the scale for specific purposes. The following is an example:

Sample Analytic Scoring Criteria

1−Poor 2−Weak 3−Average 4−Good 5−Excellent

Writer: ____________ Reader: ____________

Quality and development of ideas	1	2	3	4	5
Organization, relevance, movement	1	2	3	4	5
Style, flavour, individuality	1	2	3	4	5
Wording and Phrasing	1	2	3	4	5
Grammar, sentence structure	1	2	3	4	5
Punctuation	1	2	3	4	5
Spelling	1	2	3	4	5
Manuscript form, legibility	1	2	3	4	5
Total score ___________					

(Diederich, 1974, p. 54. Adapted from *Measuring Growth in English,* copyright 1974 by the National Council of Teachers of English. All rights reserved.)

A sample analytic scoring guide for measuring specific aspects of a multi−paragraph composition is shown below.

Sample Analytic Scoring Guide

Quality and Development of Ideas (10/25)

When marking the quality and development of ideas the marker should consider how thoughtfully and effectively, within the context of the writing situation, the writer:

- communicates and integrates ideas (information, events, emotions, opinions, perspective, etc.)
- includes details (evidence, anecdotes, examples, descriptions, characteristics, etc.) to support, develop, and/or illustrate ideas.

9–10 Ideas are insightful and well considered. This writing has a strong central focus and exhibits unique comprehension and insight that is supported by carefully chosen evidence.

Sophisticated reasoning and literary appreciation are evident.

7–8 Ideas are thoughtful and clear. This writing has a clear and recognizable focus and exhibits a comprehensive and intimate knowledge of the subject matter. Literary interpretation is more logical/sensible than insightful.

5–6 Ideas are straightforward and clear. This writing has a recognizable focus and exhibits adequate development of content, although interpretation is more common place and predictable.

3–4 Ideas are limited and overgeneralized but discernible. This writing has an inconsistent or wandering focus and, although it exhibits some development of topic, ideas are often superficial and supporting evidence is vague or weak.

1–2 Ideas are elementary and may not be clear. This writing lacks focus and coherence and shows little or no development of topic. What is there is generalized and unsupported, so that there is little evidence of understanding.

Organization (5/25)

When marking organization the marker should consider how effectively, within the context of the writing situation, the writer:

- creates an introduction
- establishes and maintains focus
- orders and arranges events, ideas, and/or details
- establishes relationships between events, ideas, and/or details
- provides closure.

5 The introduction clearly states the direction the essay will take and invites further reading. Ideas are clearly and coherently developed and show evidence of critical thinking. The conclusion logically and thoughtfully completes the essay.

4 The introduction provides direction for the reader and the ideas generally focus and sustain the topic. Ideas are developed clearly and the conclusion effectively completes the essay.

3 The introduction provides some direction for the reader and the ideas are usually focussed but show little imagination. Ideas are clear but may lack coherence. The conclusion offers little insight.

2 The introduction is weak and relates only marginally to the body of the essay. There is no focus and the ideas are not clearly developed. The conclusion provides no real purpose.

1 The introduction, if there is one, does not contribute to a discernible controlling idea. Development of the topic is meagre or superficial. The conclusion, where present, is unclear or unrelated to the development provided.

Style (5/25)

When marking style the marker should consider how clearly and effectively, within the context of the writing situation, the writer:

- makes use of diction
- uses syntactical structures (such as parallelism, balance, etc.)

- makes choices that contribute to the creation of voice.

5 The writer has chosen appropriate details and established a definite point of view that enhances the writing. Diction is clear, vivid, and precise. Syntax is varied, effective, and polished. The writer's voice and tone consistently sustain the reader's interest.

4 The writer has established a point of view and a sense of audience, and shows awareness of language and structure. Diction is effective. Syntax is generally effective. The writer's voice and tone maintain the reader's interest.

3 The writer's point of view is clear and consistent and shows a basic understanding. Diction is adequate but somewhat generalized. Syntax is straightforward. The writer's voice and tone establish, but may not maintain, the reader's interest.

2 The writer's point of view is unclear and the choice of diction is imprecise and/or inappropriate. Control of syntax is limited and results in lack of clarity. The writing exhibits superficial and/or minimal awareness of the reader.

1 The writer's point of view may shift in a confusing way. Diction is inappropriate and unclear. Syntax is confusing and results in unclear writing. Awareness of the reader is not apparent.

Mechanics (5/25)

When marking mechanics the marker should consider how clearly and effectively, within the context of the writing situation, the writer communicates by applying the conventions of:

- sentence structure
- vocabulary and spelling
- grammar, including subject−verb agreement, pronoun−antecedent agreement, correct and consistent verb tenses
- punctuation and capitalization.

5 Sentences are correct. Any mechanical errors are the result of taking a risk with more complex or original aspects of writing. The writing demonstrates a strong command of the conventions of language.

4 Sentences are substantially correct, with errors only in attempts at more complicated constructions. The few mechanical errors do not impede communication. The writing demonstrates a solid control of the conventions of language.

3 Common and simple constructions and patterns are correct. Errors in more complex or unusual constructions do not unduly impede understanding. Information is clear despite a faltering in mechanics. The writing demonstrates a general control of the conventions of language.

2 Sentences having uncomplicated structures are usually clear, but attempts at more difficult structures result in awkwardness and/or obscured communication. The writing demonstrates a limited and/or inconsistent grasp of the conventions of language.

1 The writing exhibits a lack of knowledge in the use of sentence structure, usage, grammar and mechanics. The profusion of structural and mechanical errors make communication very difficult. The writing demonstrates only an elementary grasp of the conventions of language.

Some Final Considerations

Students need to know exactly what will be evaluated and how. Teachers should communicate their expectations or develop the expectations with the class, considering the following:

- Teachers should not feel that they must mark everything but they should provide some kind of feedback for most of the students' writing. Using the folder/portfolio system, students should choose what they will submit for evaluation. Teachers set the minimum guidelines (e.g., five public compositions/three informal compositions/several journal entries).
- Teachers should communicate their assessment guidelines as well as the methods (e.g., holistic, analytic) very clearly at the beginning of the course to all concerned−−students, parents, school administration.
- Teachers should clearly communicate the mark allocation (e.g., the percentage assigned to each of product and process). For some assignments, students may have the option to weight the process or product more heavily within a pre−determined range of marks.
- Teachers must balance the marks assigned to writing with the other language strands.

Growth in writing is slow and highly individualistic. Effective evaluation depends on teachers clearly understanding what students can do, assessing students' growth, and giving meaningful feedback and encouragement.

The Conventions of Writing

Good writing requires a host of skills in content, organization, and style (including the conventions of written English). The conventions of writing are the generally accepted mechanics of language. They make communication possible. While writers are always consciously or unconsciously attending to the mechanics, they are most often focusing on them in the revision stage, particularly during proofreading. During this stage, students attend to the following:

- form (e.g., paragraph, essay)
- sentence structure (syntax)
- word choice (diction)
- usage
- spelling
- punctuation and capitalization
- appearance (e.g., spacing, indentation, page numbers, quality of handwriting).

Students need to understand that readers expect certain conventions in writing. Surface errors distract the reader. A good revision guide, one that includes editing and proofreading criteria, is a start. Students need to understand how the guide can assist them.

Sometimes, students will need to learn about a particular convention. Instruction is most effective when it is provided at this point. Some instruction can be given in mini-lessons to groups of students who have a common need. Some instruction can also be given in individual conferences as teachers help students with their writing.

Form

Form is basic to all writing. During writing, ideas are given shape and structure. Students need to understand the various formats available to them and understand that purpose dictates the format of each composition. Clear, practical instruction and practice with many models help students understand the range of writing forms available to them.

Prose Forms

The following list illustrates the range of prose forms:

Description:
paragraph, essay, character portrait, or sketch

Narration:
paragraph, essay, anecdote, short story, diary, journal, biography, autobiography, fable, parable, myth, legend, personal letter

Exposition:
paragraph, essay, report, article, character study, research paper, news story, newspaper column, business letter, review, memo

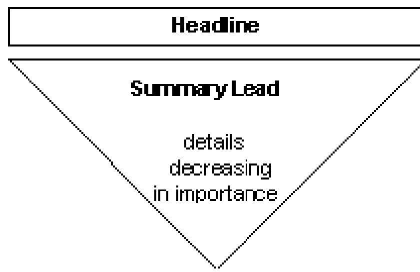
Persuasion:
paragraph, essay, brief, editorial, letter to the editor, review, column.

In prose forms, the basic unit of organization is the paragraph. Paragraph structure varies with the type of material. For example, journalistic publications such as newspapers use a particular format with very few sentences in each paragraph. Dialogue in narrative text dictates another format. The beginning and ending paragraphs of an essay call for yet another format. Although there is no absolute standard for paragraphs, prose has one essential quality--all sentences in a paragraph must have some meaningful relationship with one another.

Students should learn the basic elements of a paragraph (i.e., topic sentence/main idea, supporting details, and concluding sentence) and the different methods of development. These include chronological, spatial, and logical order (including listing, comparison-contrast, cause-effect, definition, and problem-solution). Students should be capable of organizing their ideas in each of the various patterns.

Students should also understand that purpose can dictate the organization of paragraphs. For example, the journalistic "inverted pyramid" differs from the usual expository pattern. The next page contains illustrations of several paragraph types.

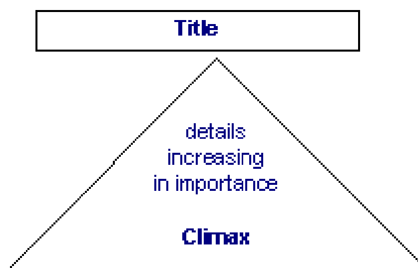
News Story Paragraph Form



Descriptive Paragraph

Topic Sentence:	Gives the main impression of the scene, object, or person.
Supporting Details:	Give the sensory details that lead to the main impression. These details are usually arranged in a logical, spatial sequence (e.g., top to bottom, left to right).
Concluding Sentence:	Summarizes or emphasizes the overall impression.

Narrative Paragraph



Narration differs from description (although description may be embedded in narration).

Paragraphs can be used for special purposes.

A paragraph, consisting of only two or three sentences, may be used at the beginning of a longer essay to introduce the topic.

In narration, the direct speech of a character should occupy a paragraph by itself.

Expository Paragraph

Topic Sentence:	Gives the main idea of what you are explaining
Supporting Details:	Support the main idea and are usually arranged in a chronological order or in order of importance.
Concluding Sentence:	Restates the main idea, summarizes the details, or emphasizes the important idea.

Persuasive Paragraph

Topic Sentence:	States what the reader should do or believe.
Supporting Details:	Give the reasons for doing or believing the topic sentence. These details are usually arranged in a "persuasive" order (e.g., leaving the most persuasive reason until last).
Concluding Sentence:	Restates or summarizes the argument.

Essays

The essay is a prose form with which all students should become practiced. An essay usually begins

with an opening paragraph which states the topic or thesis, a body of one or more paragraphs which provides evidence or proof, and a concluding paragraph which sums up arguments and relates to the thesis. The following describes one essay format:

Paragraph 1 (Introductory Paragraph): This contains an introduction to the problem or issue and a statement of the thesis. The first paragraph also makes mention of the key supporting points to be developed in order to prove the thesis.

Paragraph 2: The second paragraph explores and develops the supporting point mentioned first in the introductory paragraph.

Paragraph 3: This paragraph explores and develops the supporting point mentioned second in the introductory paragraph.

Paragraph 4: This paragraph explores and develops the supporting point mentioned third in the introductory paragraph.

Paragraph 5 (Concluding Paragraph): This is a conclusion that sums up the evidence presented in the body of the essay and reaffirms the thesis.

Students may wish to expand the body of the essay to include more than three paragraphs. Each additional paragraph should logically follow and develop the thesis under consideration. Students should use transitional devices to show the correlation between paragraphs.

Poems

Besides prose, students may write poems. The following are examples:

- lyrical poems including free verse, songs, cinquains, haiku, tankas, odes, elegies, sonnets
- narrative poems including limericks, ballads, episodes of epics
- dramatic poems including monologues, soliloquies, dialogue.

Plays

Students might also wish to try dramatic writing. The following are examples:

- monologues and dialogues
- scenes from a play
- one−act or full−length plays.

Sentence Structure

The study of language, its elements, and its nature is an important component of a language arts program. Grammar and usage cause endless controversy both inside and outside the classroom. Much of this controversy stems from the misunderstanding of terms and their associated concepts. Grammar is perhaps the least understood term. Grammar is not so−called good English, nor is it the abstract study of parts of speech. Certainly grammar is not the mechanical aspects of composition (i.e., punctuation, capitalization, and spelling). Grammar, in its broadest sense, is the study of the way language works. Two aspects of the grammar of English that students need to understand are sentence structure (syntax) and usage.

"Language continues to develop through the use of language, not through exercises in naming of parts" (Sanborn, 1986, p. 74). Diagramming sentences and learning the names of the parts of speech do not improve students' writing or reading but do steal instructional time from meaningful language activities.

Secondary school students should have a good understanding of English syntax−−the principles of sentence formation. If students lack this understanding, it is important to take time to teach the essentials.

Discussing and modelling sentence structures can:

- make students aware of the sentence patterns that exist in the English language
- give students a vocabulary for talking about elements of language and for talking about their specific writing problems
- help students use word order patterns to make meaning as they read even if they do not understand all of the vocabulary (e.g.,"Jabberwocky")
- expose students to the many possibilities of English syntax beyond the basic structures.

Sentence Concepts

Secondary Level students should understand that English language sentences are based on common "kernel" sentences. There are three basic sentence patterns (common kernels) in English:

- S−V (Subject−Verb): Subject and intransitive verb

  Trevor drives. He works.

- S−V−O (Subject−Verb−Object): Subject, transitive verb, and direct object
  The driver delivered the pizza.

This pattern is sometimes complicated by the insertion of an indirect object (e.g., *Trevor told his boss a story.*) and by object complements (e.g., *The pizza made Trevor famous.*).

- S−LV−C (Subject−Linking Verb−Complement): Subject, linking verb, and predicate noun or predicate adjective

  Pizzas are Italian. Pizzas are nutritious.

About thirty percent of English sentences can be classified as S−V; 40−45 percent as S−V−O; and about 25 percent as S−LV−C (Hook & Evans, 1982, pp. 251−252).

The basic English sentence patterns can be expanded by adding qualifiers/modifiers (words, phrases, or clauses). For example,

Basic sentence: *The pizza cooks.*

Qualifiers:
What kind? large, pepperoni

How? quickly, to a crisp
Where? in the oven
Why? so it can be delivered

Expanded sentence:	*So it can be delivered, the large pepperoni pizza cooks quickly to a crisp in the oven.*

Basic English sentences can also be transformed. Simple transformations include:

- Negative ("not" or "n't" and an auxiliary verb are inserted)

  Pizzas are not junk food.

- Imperative ("you" becomes the subject)

  Eat the pizza.

- Question

  Type 1: Yes−No; subject and auxiliary verb are switched

  Did the pizza get delivered?

  Type 2: "Wh" word (who, what, which, when, where, why) or "how" and an auxiliary verb are inserted

  Why do people like pepperoni pizza?

- There ("there" and linking verb are inserted)
  There are nutritious pizzas.

- Passive (the subject and direct object are switched and the main verb is changed to the past participle)

  Pizzas are delivered daily by drivers.

Complex transformations include:

- Joining (two sentences are joined using conjunctions such as "and", "but", "or")

  Anchovy pizzas are popular. Pepperoni pizzas are popular. Anchovy and pepperoni pizzas are popular.

- Embedding (two or more sentences are combined by embedding one into the other)

  Pizzas are food. Pizzas are nutritious. Pizzas are a nutritious food.

Sentence Combining

Sentences can be combined for variety. Mellon (1967), O'Hare (1973), and Strong (1986) found that students could increase their syntactic fluency and writing ability when introduced to sentence combining activities. Studies show that sentence combining can "lead to fewer excessively short sentences, to a reduction in the number of 'and' sentences, and, perhaps most importantly, to a clearer indication of how ideas are related" (Hook & Evans, 1982, p. 254). In addition, sentence combining involves a minimal use of terminology. Some examples follow:

Tom found a wallet. The wallet was old and tattered.

Tom found a wallet that was old and tattered.

John is a fireman. John fights fires.

John who is a fireman fights fires.
OR
John, a fireman, fights fires.

However, teachers using sentence combining need to be careful that students do not always equate longer, often extraordinarily complicated, sentences with"better" sentences. Students need to examine their ideas and not just the number of words in a sentence.

"A basic aim of intelligent sentence combining is to make good sentences, not merely long ones. It follows that 'decombining' may be at least as important as putting sentences together" (Strong, 1986, p. 18).

Using students' own sentences as much as possible, teachers can explain the rationale behind sentence combining and the appropriate punctuation for combined sentences.

Sentence Errors

Writing requires an understanding of certain sentence conventions. It demands that students consolidate ideas through co−ordination and subordination, and generally state their ideas as clearly and succinctly as possible in an appropriate order. Maxwell and Meiser (1997) identify the major sentence problems of Secondary Level students as:

- trying to say too much in one structure, thus creating a tangled, confused sentence
- writing a series of short, choppy sentences which are unconnected and often redundant
- including more than one main idea, thus making the relationship between ideas unclear
- writing non−sentences or fragments.

Other common sentence errors that cause students problems include:

- vague pronoun reference
- wrong or missing preposition
- comma splice
- tense shift
- unnecessary shift in person
- wrong tense or verb form

- lack of subject−verb agreement
- pronoun agreement error
- dangling or misplaced modifier (Connors & Lunsford, 1988).

Additional errors are related to punctuation (e.g., no comma after an introductory element; no comma in a compound sentence; no comma in a non−restrictive element; possessive apostrophe error; lack of comma in series; unnecessary comma with restrictive element) or word choice (e.g., wrong word, its/it's).

Most errors can be talked about, understood, and corrected with a minimum amount of terminology. For example, a sentence fragment is lacking a key element; to change a sentence fragment into a complete sentence, add whatever is missing−−a subject, a verb, or both.

The important thing to remember is that teachers should address the specific errors that each student is making. Teachers can use student samples to explain and clarify common student problems with sentence structures.

Sentence Style

Finally, students should learn to attend to stylistic elements of a sentence (Parker, 1982, 1990; Larock, Tressler, & Lewis, 1980). For example,

Conciseness

- Avoid wordy sentences. Eliminate unnecessary words and expressions.
- Avoid over−using "to be", "which", "who", "whom", "that", "it", "this", and "there".
- Always use precise and concrete words.

Forcefulness (Emphasis)

- The strongest positions in a sentence are the beginning and the end.
- Single words and short phrases can also be effective in mid−sentence; sometimes they are set off by punctuation, and sometimes not.
- An existing single word or phrase can often be repositioned for greater emphasis.

Variety
There are a number of ways of adding variety to sentences, including:

- length (short, long; avoid too many short, choppy "baby" sentences)
- structure (simple, compound, complex, and compound−complex)
- purpose (declarative, interrogative, exclamatory, or imperative)
- arrangement (loose, periodic, parallel, balanced, and inverted).

Style is a difficult writing quality to define and is, to a large degree, idiosyncratic. For experienced writers the connection between style and "voice" might dictate that a certain type of sentence be used−−a preponderance of short sentences, for example. However, teachers should help students to

develop their individual styles in various ways including working on sentence variety––a critical element in writing style.

Word Choice

Effective writers can communicate clearly with a careful choice of words. Although good word choice is partly a matter of preference, and therefore style, students should understand that certain choices will help them communicate their ideas to their readers.

The tools for this search for words include a good dictionary and a thesaurus. Students should be encouraged to consider context as well as the following:

- whether they have chosen the precise word to convey their meaning (ambling, striding, walking)
- whether they want to use concrete descriptions or abstract concepts (a specific example of beauty or the abstract term "beauty")
- whether they want to use vivid imagery or plain, straightforward descriptions
- whether they want to use words figuratively or symbolically.

In addition, students should learn to recognize clichés and triteness, and to avoid them.

Usage

Language usage is another important aspect of grammar. It refers to a person's form of expression–– choices of words and structures in both speaking and writing. In different social situations, a person adjusts usage so that language varies according to purpose, context, and intended audience. Usage is what is acceptable in a particular situation. There are no hard and fast rules of language usage but there are ranges of uses appropriate to varying situations. Students should be sensitive to these situations and be comfortable and confident in determining their audience, purpose, and situation, as well as the appropriate style for these variables.

Some suggestions for student activities follow:

- Give students situations to explore. For example:

    1. *Your family car has coasted across the dock and into the lake. You were in charge of it when the accident happened. Three different audiences are very interested in your short, written account of the incident:*
        - *a parent*
        - *the insurance company*
        - *your friend who left a new CD player in the car.*

    Write an explanation for each interested party. Use appropriate language (Toronto Board of Education, n.d., p. 95).

2. *Describe a possible audience for each of the following sentences. What particular words in each sentence suit the audience you chose?*

   - *"My landlord, Harold P. Jones, demands that I pay my rent immediately or face eviction."*
   - *"Old Jones told me to cough up or ship out."*
   - *"Mr. Jones wants his rent money now; otherwise he'll force me to leave."* (Toronto Board of Education, n.d., p. 96).

- Help students understand the range of "appropriateness" found in the language. Language differs in register according to the writer, the purpose, the audience, and the subject matter. For example:

  Casual: a conversation, a diary entry
  Informal: a class discussion, a personal diary
  Fairly formal: a news report, a formal essay
  Very formal: a lecture, a technical report.

- Help students explore the varieties of usage found within a classroom, community, or region. It should be pointed out that speech dialects differ according to region and social group, and that even "standard" English allows for a variety of acceptable speech. Spoken and written language are somewhat like fashion. They are a matter of style.

  If we spoke as we write, we should find no one to listen, and if we wrote as we speak, we should find no one to read. The spoken and the written language should not be too near together as they must not be too far apart (T. S. Eliot).

- Help students learn standard usage. Hook and Evans (1982) summarize the most common usage items on which a teacher might focus:
  - verb agreement in number (chiefly the forms of "be" and "have")
  - past tense and past participle forms (about 40 pairs such as "saw−seen" and "took−taken")
  - compound subjects involving pronouns (e.g., "She and I were"; "He and Judy were")
  - pronouns as objects of verbs, prepositions, and verbals (e.g., "saw Lois and him", "for her and me")
  - adjective wrongly used as a modifier of an action verb (e.g., "The engine runs good.")
  - double subject and double negatives (e.g., "Bill he doesn't have none.") (p. 292).

  Other "abusages" for consideration might be: alot, anyways, could of, irregardless, off of, real (as an adverb), reason is because, and youse. These problems should be addressed when they occur in real contexts rather than addressed through memorization of rules, drill, or discrete exercises. A school staff might decide those items that need to be stressed.

- Capture students' interest in language by discussing such variations as slang, jargon, adspeak, miligab, bureaugab, technogab, and poligab. These forms fascinate students because of their deliberate distortions. Teachers do not need to teach these language variations directly, but can show students the uses and limitations of these various forms. Students can also discover that some people, often teenagers, deliberately choose not to use standard English to distance

themselves from mainstream society.

Spelling

Spelling plays an important role in communicating through the written word. Students need to realize that spelling errors detract from their overall message and that society, in general, is less tolerant of poor spelling than of any other problems with language.

When students are uncertain about a correct spelling, they need to be aware of the options that they have, including:

- checking a word visually
- using a dictionary
- using a spell−check program on a computer
- asking a good speller.

By far the most effective way of learning to spell is proofreading one's writing. Students can become more effective spellers by:

- checking their own and others' writing carefully for spelling
- analyzing their own spelling problems, grouping them in patterns (e.g., pneumonia, pneumatic), and describing their own spelling rules
- keeping a list of their own demons and periodically having a peer dictate this list
- noting sound−alikes (e.g., their/there/they're) and look−alikes (e.g., then/than) but learning them within an appropriate context
- learning at least three basic spelling rules:
Rule l: dropping the final "e"
Rule 2: doubling the final consonant
Rule 3: learning about "ie" and "ei"
- carefully pronouncing words (e.g., accept/except)
- using mnemonic devices (e.g., "station**e**ry" where the "e" stands for envelope)
- developing a way of studying new words (e.g., examine, pronounce, make associations, cover, write, check).

Punctuation and Capitalization

The purpose of **punctuation** is to help the reader understand the writer's meaning. For example, "I left him convinced he was a fool" is not the same as "I left him, convinced he was a fool". A different intent is conveyed by each of "She is there now", "She is there now?" and "She is there now!"

Variations in punctuation may result in differences in meaning, lack of meaning, or different emphasis.

Most punctuation marks are written substitutes for intonation--visual symbols that have developed as substitutes. Some punctuation marks, such as those found in the business letter, are dictated by custom. Students need to know the basic function of punctuation marks and their "customary" uses in writing.

Marland (1977) recommends that punctuation be taught by function, including:

- the seven ways of marking off a "sense group": the comma, the semicolon, parentheses, the period followed by a space and upper-case letter, the paragraph indentation, the space or signs for section divisions, the chapter-ending space
- the three ways of marking interruptions: a pair of commas, a pair of dashes, a set of parentheses
- the different ways of showing that a word has been borrowed or is being used in a special way: underline, quotation marks, italics, or boldface.

Capitalization is closely related to punctuation. It is also a signal to the reader. A capital letter, for example, announces to the reader the beginning of a new sentence, a title, a name, a day, a month, a place, a holiday season, a direction, a school subject, or a language.

Students can learn to punctuate and capitalize by:

- editing and proofreading carefully their own and their peers' compositions
- learning during mini-lessons the purpose and history of the punctuation marks (e.g., the teacher places text on a transparency, omitting all punctuation and capitalization marks, for students to discuss and punctuate)
- referring to a handbook
- working on trouble spots with the teacher or a peer (e.g., the semi-colon is equal in value to the comma plus co-ordinate conjunction: ; = , + and)
- preparing a punctuation and capitalization rules chart
- writing "la dictée" (i.e., transcribing accurately a dictated selection using correct spelling and punctuation).

A variation of this last strategy would have the teacher distributing unpunctuated and uncapitalized copies of a composition. Students correct their copy as they listen to the dictation and then compare their copy to the original.

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