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Research Base

Learning Design and Research Base for Writing A-Z

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INTRODUCTION

Education is changing. Today's teachers are expected to adapt their literacy instruction to include scientifically based practices such as the Science of Reading (SoR). However, literacy is not achieved through reading alone. Research shows that students' reading comprehension improves when they also spend more time writing. This does not mean writing should be taught only in response to reading a text, however. Students need explicit instruction in foundational writing skills and strategies in order to communicate their ideas as well as to understand a text. The future path of learning must include explicit, evidence-based writing instruction.

The most undervalued skill of our time is the ability to write.

In an analog world, talking was the main currency of communication and connection. In a digital world, there's a growing premium on the capacity to convey thoughts in text.

The pen is mightier than the spoken word (Grant, n.d.).

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If students receive the kinds of instruction that enable them to develop strong writing skills, the evidence consistently indicates that writing can be used to bolster reading achievement (Graham & Hebert, 2010).

WHY TEACH WRITING

Instruction that improves writing skills also improves reading skills. Writing and reading are complementary skills, but reading does not automatically turn students into better writers. Writing, on the other hand, has the potential to make students better readers, because writing about information presented in a text facilitates comprehension and improves retention (Graham & Hebert, 2010). Additionally, because reading and writing share similar cognitive processes and are communicative activities, students gain insights about reading when they compose their texts (Graham, 2019) Students who struggle with writing are at a disadvantage, especially as writing becomes a vehicle for learning.

Strong writing skills are also necessary for career success. In addition to boosting comprehension, deepening understanding, and demonstrating knowledge, writing allows students to gather and organize information, share and expand on their thoughts, and communicate ideas, opinions, and information. In “Self-Regulated Strategy Development in Writing: Policy Implications of an Evidence-Based Practice” (2016, p. 78), Harris and Graham note that “more than 90% of white-collar and 80% of blue-collar workers’ jobs involve writing.” Jobs that pay a living wage will require higher literacy levels than they did just ten years ago.

Sadly, assessments show many students have not developed the necessary skills to communicate effectively in writing. In 2011, the National Center for Education Statistics (NCES, 2012, p. 1) evaluated students’ ability to write effectively for “situations common to both academic and workplace settings and asked students to write for several purposes and communicate to different audiences.” Only 27% of students performed at or above a proficient level (NCES, 2011).

Two-thirds of students in grades 4–12 are low-achieving writers. According to Graham and Perin (2007a, p. 445):

Despite the importance of writing, too many youngsters do not learn to write well enough to meet the demands of school or the workplace. Findings from the most recent National Assessment of Educational Progress revealed that many youngsters do not develop the competence in writing needed at their respective grade levels. Despite small improvements since the previous assessment, two-thirds or more of students’ writing in 4th, 8th, and 12th grade, was below grade-level proficiency. In their 2003 report, the National Commission on Writing bluntly concluded that the writing of students in the United States “is not what it should be.” Likewise, college instructors estimated that 50% of high school graduates are not prepared for college-level writing demands, whereas American businesses spend \$3.1 billion annually for writing remediation.

Percentage of Students Scoring at NAEP Achievement Level

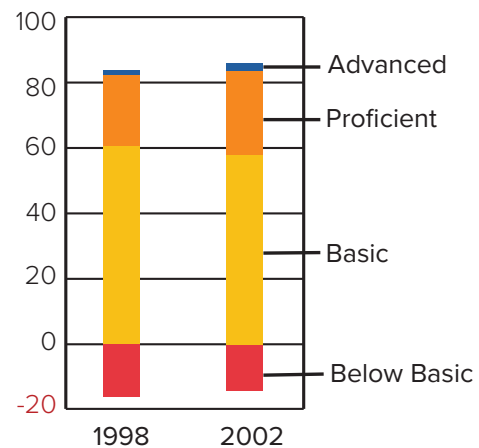
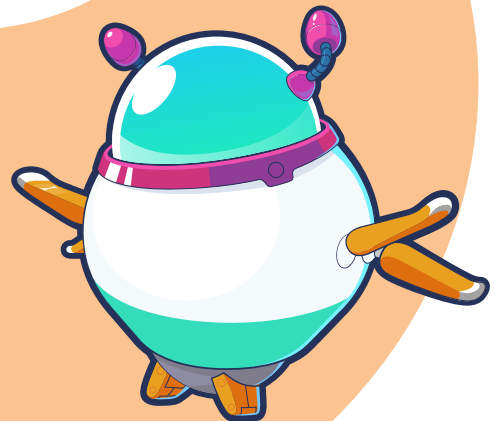


Figure 1. Writing Achievement of Fourth Graders (National Assessment of Education Progress, 2022)

By the Numbers

Research shows that the majority of students in the United States are not capable writers. As Harris and Graham (2016) note:

- Data show that writing performance has remained stagnant for decades.
- In 2011, only 27% of grade 8 and 12 students scored at or above proficient on the writing portion of the NAEP; 20% of grade 8 and 21% of grade 12 students scored “below basic,” meaning they are unable to perform at even the minimum standard for their grade level.
- Students with disabilities and English language learners show even lower performance—only 5% perform at the proficient level and only 1% perform above the proficient level, respectively.
- Students with LD (learning disabilities) score meaningfully lower than their peers on critical aspects of writing: quality, ideation, organization, vocabulary, voice, sentence fluency, conventions (spelling, grammar, and handwriting), genre elements, output, motivation, self-regulation, and knowledge.
- Almost one in every five first-year college students requires a remedial writing class, and more than one-half of new college students are unable to write a paper relatively free of errors.
- Businesses spend \$3.1 billion annually to remediate workers whose writing skills are lacking.



CHALLENGES TO EFFECTIVE WRITING INSTRUCTION

While much has been said in education about approaches to reading instruction, the development of instruction, practice, and resources related to writing have not been given the same attention. This is surprising, considering the degree to which writing skills are connected to the development of reading skills—and to success at school and in life. Researchers agree that writing is a complex activity requiring explicit instruction. Curriculum developers must understand the challenges of writing instruction before creating an effective program.

» Learning to write is hard.

Writers juggle the complexities of written English as they translate their ideas into an organized structure. At the same time, they must consider the genre, purpose, task, and audience of their writing. All of this requires motivation, topic knowledge, stamina, and persistence (Harris & Graham, 2016). In the Simple View of Writing (Berninger & Winn, 2006), proficient writing is the product of foundational writing skills (transcription) and composition skills (translation). Although we understand the role foundational writing skills play and how the different stages of writing (planning, drafting, revising, editing) present it as a linear process, writing also requires writers to set goals and make decisions as they write. This “simple view” does not illustrate the complex cognitive process that occurs.



Figure 2. The Simple View of Writing (Berninger et al., 2002)

The Not-So-Simple View of Writing diagram below (Berninger & Winn, 2006) illustrates the four primary components necessary for successful writing. Text generation requires higher-order cognitive processes, whereas transcription skills require lower-order cognitive processes. Executive functions include the self-regulatory abilities that manage the writing process. Working memory represents the cognitive complexity of the writing process. Working memory activates both long- and short-term memory. Long-term memory is activated during all stages of the writing process. Short-term memory is activated during the evaluation, revising, and editing stages. Working memory, which has limited capacity, is where the major cognitive activity occurs. In working memory, the following come together to produce written text:

- Knowledge of the task, audience, topic, genre, and linguistics
- External information about the writing assignment
- New content knowledge that has not yet made its way into long-term memory

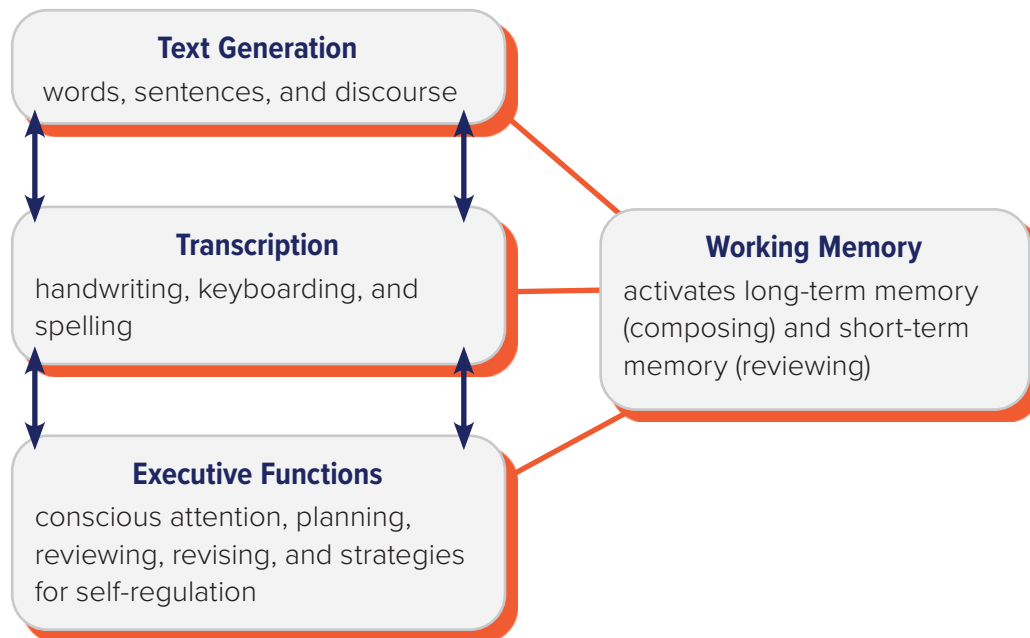


Figure 3. The Not-So-Simple View of Writing (Berninger & Winn, 2006)

» **There is a lack of research on writing compared to reading and math.**

Research in evidence-based writing practices is not prioritized and does not receive the same funding as research in the areas of reading, math, or STEM. There is no established developmental scope and sequence for writing. The Common Core State Standards (National Governors Association Center for Best Practices & Council of Chief State School Officers, 2012) make an educated guess about what to emphasize and when to teach specific skills, but the lack of research on evidence-based best practices and teaching methods leaves the vague CCSS as the only roadmap for teaching how to write—and leaves teachers, districts, and curriculum developers guessing.

» **There is inadequate teacher preparation.**

Although teachers do their best with the most helpful information and tools available, their efforts do not translate into sustained growth or increased student performance. Inadequate teacher preparation, including pre-service courses and professional development, contributes to the lack of knowledge about evidence-based practices in writing instruction. According to Harris and Graham (2016, p. 79), “Elementary school teachers report being significantly less prepared to teach writing than reading, math, and science.” Teachers who feel less prepared in writing instruction spend less time teaching it. Writing is a complex skill that requires time, yet teachers report that students rarely receive more than 15–25 minutes of writing instruction a day. Whether this is due to scheduling conflicts, teacher attitudes, or lack of materials, effective writing instruction by qualified teachers is not the norm.

“

The available evidence indicates that this objective is met for some students but not all . . . approximately two-thirds of 8th- and 12th-grade students scored at or below the basic level on the most recent Writing Test administered by the National Assessment of Educational Progress (National Center for Educational Statistics, 2012). The relatively poor performance over time on this and other indicators of students’ writing skills led the National Commission on Writing (NCOW, 2003) to label writing a neglected skill in American schools (Graham, 2019, p. 277).

”

» **Current practices do not work for all students.**

Many approaches to writing instruction in elementary schools today are based on theory, not evidence. Whole language and some process writing instruction are based on the theory that learning to write and read occurs naturally when students are developmentally ready and do not propose explicit instruction of skills and strategies. Harris and Graham (2016, pg. 80) report that “although these approaches have done much to help us think about improving our approach to writing instruction, research indicates their effects on writing development have been relatively small, and that many typically achieving students do not thrive in writing, or reading, in these approaches.” Finally, programs that emphasize grammar and mechanics over the process of writing create a disconnect between writing and communication.

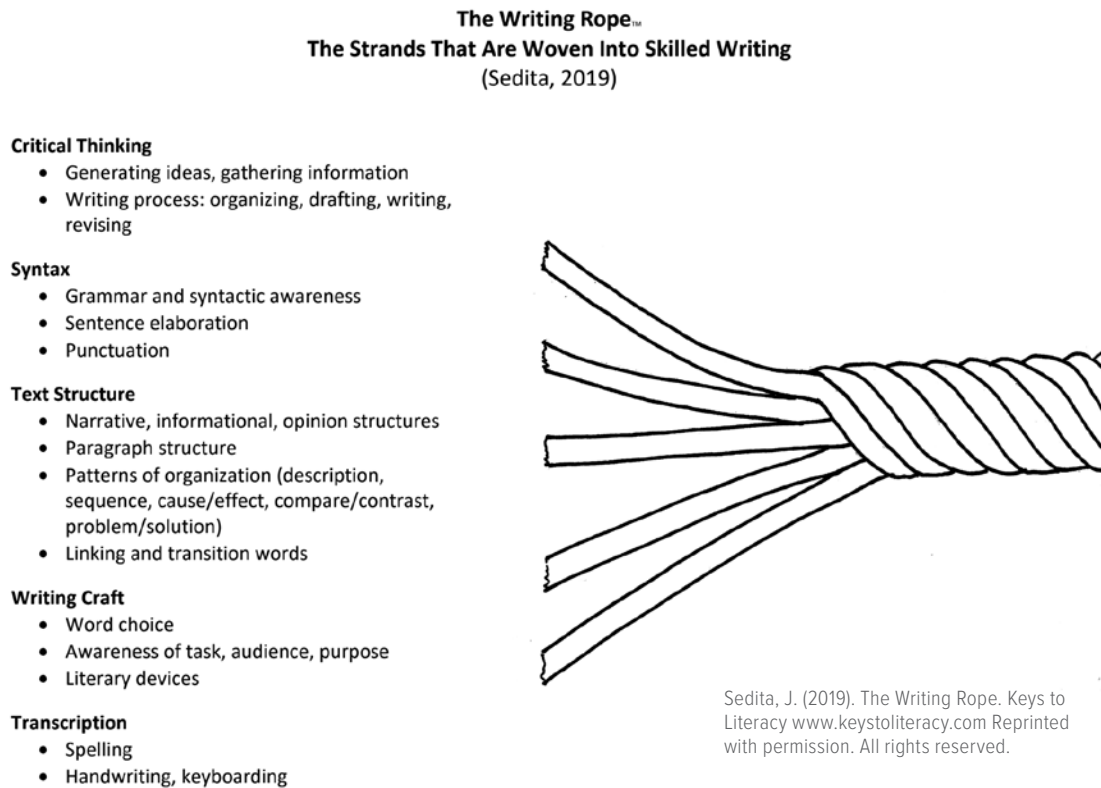
Writing is both difficult to teach and difficult to learn. The teacher’s competency, the resources available, the curriculum implemented, and the understanding of the complexity of writing all contribute to the success of writing instruction. However, these factors vary so greatly that attempting to pinpoint the exact conditions for failure or success is nearly impossible.

BECOMING A SKILLED WRITER

The Writing Rope™

It takes work to become a skilled writer. Students must juggle many cognitive tasks and skills to write proficiently. They must orchestrate the processes of writing, each of which is recursive and requires generating and organizing ideas, setting goals, retrieving information from long-term memory, planning, translating ideas into writing, self-evaluating, and self-monitoring. Instruction needs to be explicit for all students.

Joan Sedita, founder and president of Keys to Literacy, developed a model that identifies five components necessary for skilled writing. Similar to Scarborough's Reading Rope—which identifies components of word recognition and language comprehension as strands that, when strategically woven together, produce fluent readers—Sedita's Writing Rope™ illustrates the skills needed to create adept writers.



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Figure 4. Sedita's Writing Rope

Critical Thinking

The **critical thinking strand** requires a significant amount of executive functioning as students think about what they want to communicate to their audience through their writing. To do this, students must understand the writing task, tap into background knowledge, and decide if they need to gather information. This strand also includes understanding the steps in the writing process (planning, drafting, evaluating, revising, and editing) and that the steps are recursive. Students need explicit instruction in metacognition and self-regulation, as well as planning, revising, and editing strategies to reach their writing potential.

The **syntax strand** acknowledges the importance of grammar in writing. Students need to be able to construct sentences that build to make meaning and communicate clearly. Knowing syntax structures helps students share their ideas effectively and understand ideas when reading or listening. Students’ understanding of syntax affects the drafting, revising, and editing stages, and their ability to provide feedback and evaluate their writing. Students must understand text structure to “produce clear and coherent writing in which the development, organization, and style are appropriate to task, purpose, and audience” (National Governors Association Center for Best Practices & Council of Chief State School Officers, 2010, p. 18).

The **text structure strand** endorses explicit instruction about the structure of text types (opinion/argument, informative, and narrative) and paragraphs, patterns of organization, and the words/phrases associated with each text structure. This strand supports writing and reading.

The **writing craft strand** focuses on the techniques writers use to meet the needs of their audience through the decisions they make regarding word choice, use of literary devices and figurative language, perspective and point of view, and writing voice or style.

The **transcription strand** represents spelling, handwriting, and keyboarding skills. Mastery of these lower-order cognitive tasks frees students’ ability to focus on other strands of the rope. Lack of fluency in these skills interferes with the ability to write effectively. Foundational skills (phonics) must be taught explicitly and reinforced during writing instruction.

Self-Regulated Strategy Development

Self-Regulated Strategy Development (SRSD) is an approach to writing instruction developed by Dr. Karen R. Harris in the early 1980s for students with learning disabilities. In response to the complex demands of both teaching and learning how to write, studies of SRSD have been conducted with typical learners across grades 2–12. Although SRSD does not represent a complete writing program, meta-analyses have shown that SRSD significantly improves the process of learning how to write for students who represent the full range of writing ability in a typical class, as well as struggling writers and students with varying disabilities.

SRSD incorporates the following:

- Explicit learning about genres
- Strategies for genre-specific and general writing
- Strategies that support self-regulation (setting goals, self-assessment, self-instruction, and self-reinforcement)
- Implementation of flexible and recursive steps that gradually release responsibility to students
- Environment and strategies that motivate students, foster positive attitudes toward writing, and encourage students to believe in themselves as capable writers
- Time for feedback and experience with the knowledge and skills needed to make the strategies their own

THE WRITING A-Z SOLUTION

Research-Based Intentional Instruction

Research supports the design and implementation of writing programs rooted in explicit instruction, self-regulation, and deliberate practice of essential skills. Researchers know that effective instruction relies on teacher ingenuity and instructional craft to address students' needs. All of these considerations factored into developing the Writing A-Z solution.



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A thoughtfully designed program blends instructional best practices with research-based evidence. Writing A-Z helps teachers establish a safe writing community, teach the writing process, promote self-regulation, and provide a regular time for students to write for various purposes and audiences.

Furthermore, the skills are not taught in isolation. A gradual release approach—in which students first receive explicit instruction, then are supported through guided practice before independently applying the skills they've learned—provides scaffolded support through repetition (Duke & Pearson, 2002). Giving teachers the tools to engage students in guided practice, make their thinking visible, provide opportunities for actionable feedback, and flexibly plan instruction allows them to meet their students' needs.

A Continuum of Skills

Developed by teachers and rooted in evidence-based recommendations for improving elementary students' writing, Writing A–Z offers explicit, systematic writing instruction from kindergarten through grade 5. The scope and sequence present a continuum of writing and grammar skills aligned to national and state standards. Two scientifically based best practices for acquiring information about specific genres or the characteristics of good writing include teaching students about the characteristics of specific types of texts, and providing them with good models for the type of writing they are expected to create (Graham et al., 2015; Graham & Harris, 2019; Graham & Perin, 2007a). Each unit of study integrates genre and process writing, starting with a module that introduces students to a genre (opinion, informative, narrative). The next three modules spiral in complexity and provide opportunities to plan, draft, revise, and edit a piece of writing for different audiences and purposes. Each genre unit culminates with a module requiring students to self-reflect on their learning and choose a piece to publish and present. All units incorporate recommendations from the Institute of Education Sciences (IES) What Works Clearinghouse (WWC, 2018) for improving elementary students' writing and evidence-based practices based on SRSD.

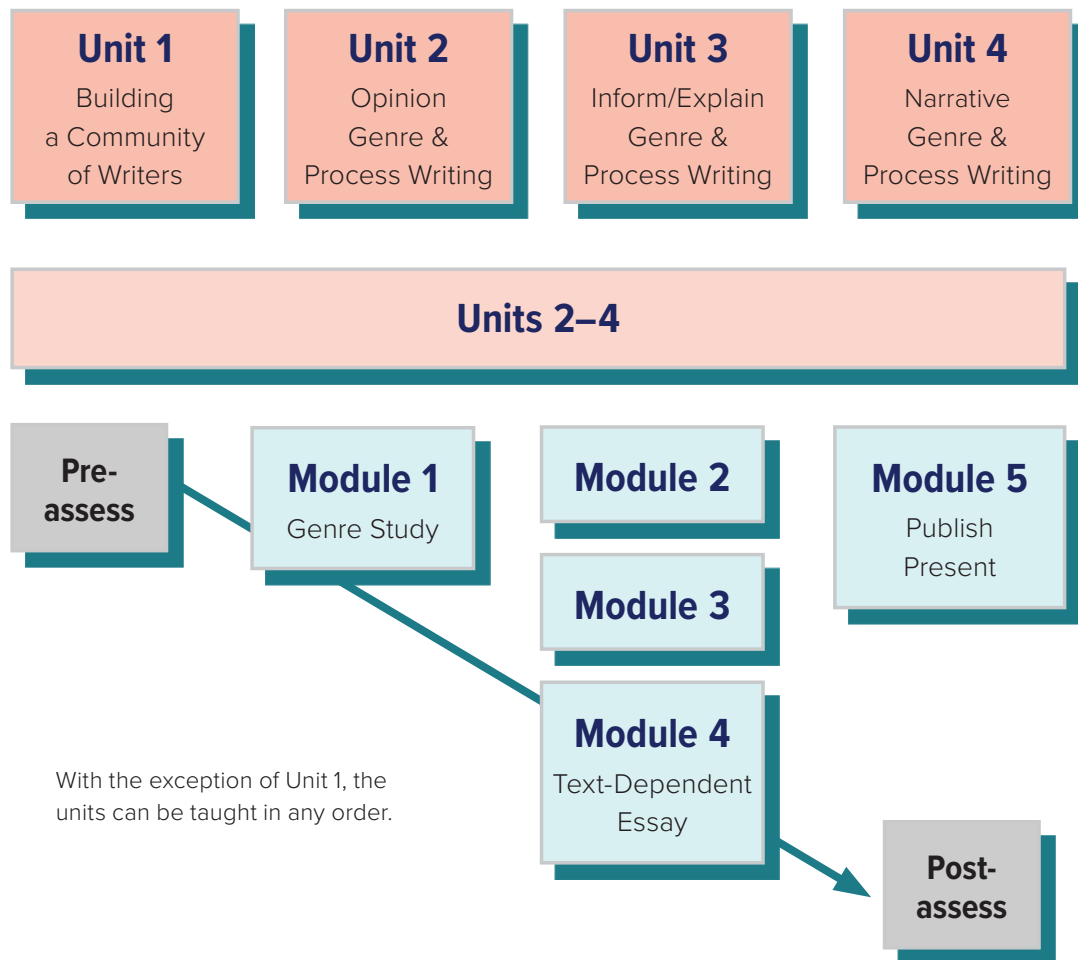


Figure 5. Unit and Module Structure

Varied Ongoing Assessments

Formative and summative assessments ensure teachers can respond promptly and effectively to students' needs. Writing A–Z provides multiple opportunities for students to demonstrate success and for teachers to regularly monitor student progress using data from interactive practice, rubric scores, and teacher observations.

The assessment opportunities below inform and strengthen instructional decisions throughout the program.

Writing A–Z Assessment Components		
Ongoing Formative Assessment	Implementation Frequency	Description
Observation “Look Fors” Checklists (digital and print formats)	Daily (within the lesson plans)	Observation checklists, or “Look Fors,” are a formative assessment embedded in each lesson. Observations help teachers provide actionable and timely feedback so that all students receive instruction that meets their needs.
Practice Interactivities (digital format only)	Daily (within the lesson plans)	Interactive online activities allow students to practice skills and teachers to monitor progress. Students watch a video that reviews skills, strategies, and concepts. Interactivities follow the video and require students to apply what they learned in the video. Results are available for teacher review and, like the “Look Fors,” help teachers tailor activities based on student performance.
Module Assessments (digital and print formats)	Three times per genre unit, after the fifth lesson in Modules 2–4.	At the end of the fifth lesson in Modules 2–4, students will have completed a written piece that teachers can assess using a rubric. Module assessments assess students' knowledge of the skills taught within the module.
Unit Assessments (digital and print formats)	Three times per year per genre unit, after the completion of Module 5.	At the end of the fifth lesson in Module 5, students will have completed a written piece that teachers can assess using a rubric. Unit assessments assess students' knowledge of the skills taught within the genre unit.
Formal Summative Assessment	Implementation Frequency	Description
Pre- and Post-assessments (digital and print formats)	Three times per year, at the beginning and end of each genre unit.	Pre- and post-assessments evaluate (or measure) students' knowledge of core skills taught throughout the program and progress toward meeting grade-level standards.

Look Fors

Teacher Conferencing

Use independent writing time to confer with students, make informal observations, keep anecdotal records on students' progress, differentiate instruction, pull students for small group instruction, or conduct formative assessments.

1. "Look Fors" in this lesson. Check that students are doing the following:

- using the Middle section of the revising checklist to:
 - evaluate their draft's body paragraphs for remaining checklist items
 - revise for each checklist item in this section
- adding at least one fact, example, definition, or detail to each of their subtopics
- using appropriate linking words

Conferencing Tip

Pay close attention to how students are using the strategy from the lesson. Assist students in using a checklist to evaluate and revise their essay's body paragraphs.

2. "Look Fors" from previous lessons. Check that students are doing the following:

- writing in complete sentences, indenting the first sentence of each paragraph, and using correct punctuation and capitalization

Rubric

Total Score (56%)

Scoring

Content & Ideas

Focus & Development N/A 1 2 3 4

Supporting Details N/A 1 2 3 4

> Structure & Organization

> Quality & Elaboration

> Conventions


Educator Resources and Support

Writing instruction requires capable, educated teachers. Teachers must be able to explain concepts explicitly, model their writing and their thinking, and give targeted, actionable feedback.

To support educators, Writing A–Z provides professional development (PD) resources to guide the use of the instructional assets in the program and to build teachers' writing knowledge base.

Professional development resources help teachers increase their knowledge about the subjects they teach and present evidence-based, supported strategies that enhance teachers' effectiveness. PD is most influential when it is relevant, meaning teachers should be able to access it when needed. In the Writing A–Z program, PD resources can be accessed at the unit and module level and on demand from the PD library. Teachers can determine when and how to utilize PD resources.

The educational strategies and content shared in the videos were developed by experienced educators or experts in that field and are offered in several formats.




PUT into PRACTICE

Extending Opinion Writing into Persuasive Writing

Professional Development | Put into Practice | Video ~5 mins | Grades 2-5

Put Into Practice:
3–5-minute video prepared by a literacy coach



LEARN from EXPERTS

Francesca Pomerantz

Cultural Responsiveness and Overcoming Biases

Professional Development | Learn from Experts | Video ~12 mins | Grades K-5

Learn from Experts:
10–15-minute video presented by a pedagogical expert




LISTEN and LEARN

Motivating Reluctant Writers

Professional Development | Listen & Learn | Audio ~16 mins | Grades K-5

Listen and Learn:
10–20-minute interview with a teacher about current educational topics



READ the RESEARCH

Peer Feedback

Professional Development | Read the Research | Article | Grades K-5

Read the Research:
articles that explain the research underlying instructional best practice

RESEARCH-BASED TEACHING STRATEGIES THAT SUPPORT LEARNING TO WRITE

Strategy Instruction

Teaching writing strategies such as planning, evaluating, revising, and editing improves the quality of writing for typically developing students and for struggling writers in elementary and higher grades. The research on writing strategies is among the most robust in the writing instruction literature with the largest effect sizes (Gillespie & Graham, 2014; Graham, 2006; Graham et al., 2015; Graham et al., 2012; Graham & Perin, 2007a, 2007b; Rogers & Graham, 2008; Smedt & van Keer, 2014). In addition, research with students in grades 2–6 has shown that instruction in self-regulation strategies (goal setting, self-monitoring, self-reinforcement, and self-assessment) also positively impact the quality of students' writing (Graham et al., 2012). Setting specific goals has been shown to improve the quality of writing for adolescent and elementary students, typically developing students, and those with learning disabilities. Goal setting may involve general as well as specific goals. For example, students might set a general purpose of persuasion for their writing and set more specific goals for the final product or for what to accomplish when revising (e.g., add a counter argument) (Gillespie & Graham, 2014; Graham et al., 2015; Graham et al., 2012; Graham & Perin, 2007a, 2007b).

Providing Feedback

Providing students with feedback is a well-known best practice, but because writing is so complex, giving effective feedback to student writers is challenging. When reading a student's writing, there are numerous elements to take into consideration, so providing effective feedback can be time-consuming. For example, teachers may examine and give feedback on the following:

- Students' use of strategies for generating ideas, planning, drafting, self-evaluating, revising, editing, and self-regulating
- Higher-level skills (organizational patterns, text structures, genre structures, word choice, awareness of task, audience and purpose, elaborating, and literary devices)
- Lower-level skills (spelling, sentence structure, syntax, handwriting/keyboarding)

Effective feedback must be timely and actionable so that it helps students (1) gauge their understanding or performance relative to the criteria for success, (2) identify what should be done to close the gap between their performance and the learning goal, and (3) suggest ways to improve. (Wilson, 2019) *Timely* means feedback must be given before the conclusion of the learning, and *actionable* means the feedback must be precise, so that it can be transferred to the future learning (Brooks et al., 2019).

Additionally, feedback should not be reserved for students' final submissions but should occur frequently throughout the writing process and include written and verbal feedback.

Think-Alouds

Making self-talk or think-aloud visible to students refers to any kind of dialogue that reveals the teacher unfolding ideas as they think through issues, problems, thoughts, questions, reasons, and reflections. Think-alouds are “necessary to make the underlying cognitive processes used in writing visible to students” (Philippakos et al., 2015, p. 12). When teachers demonstrate how to complete a task and verbally explain the thinking process involved in doing so, they also model self-regulation strategies for managing difficulties and maintaining motivation (Philippakos et al., 2015). Think-aloud should be modeled throughout the gradual release model, in small- or whole-group instruction, and while conferring with students.

Process Approach

The process approach to writing is an instructional method with several components. Although no standard definition for this approach exists, it generally involves engagement in “cycles of planning (setting goals, generating ideas, organizing ideas), translating (putting a writing plan into action), and reviewing (evaluating, editing, revising)” (Graham & Sandmel, 2011, p. 396). The approach involves an environment where students collaborate and focus on writing for authentic purposes and audiences, ownership of writing, and self-reflection and evaluation. Personalized writing instruction is provided as needed through mini-lessons and conferences (Graham & Sandmel, 2011).

The process writing approach has been shown to have a positive impact on writing quality for both typically developing students and students with learning disabilities (Gillespie & Graham, 2014; Graham et al., 2015; Graham et al., 2012; Graham & Perin, 2007a, 2007b; Graham & Sandmel, 2011).

Genre Models

Genres are types of writing designed to address specific purposes and audiences. The genres taught in elementary school are writing to inform, persuade, and narrate. Effective writers incorporate the knowledge of genre elements into planning, drafting, evaluating, revising, and editing. Learning about genre models, including the purpose and audience for each type, helps students develop the background knowledge needed to plan and revise their writing (Philippakos et al., 2015). Research shows that teaching students the elements or characteristics of specific genres and analyzing models of good writing in those genres has been shown to positively affect writing quality (Graham & Harris, 2019).

Think aloud: The first question asks which steps were hard in the writing process. For me, the planning step was the hardest, especially when I was thinking about a topic and trying to get some ideas about it. Once I got my ideas organized, the drafting step was easy. I learned that organizing is important for me and to do it early. I also learned that I need to add more details to my writing.

Think-Aloud in Writing A–Z modeling self-reflection.

Think aloud: I think I did a good job at providing facts that tell why plastic is dangerous. Now I think I can add a sentence that shows emotion about how the plastics make me feel. I did write *This makes me sad* but that is a telling sentence. When I think about the animals that suffer I got sad and angry. I could add *and angry* to the end of the paragraph, but that is still a telling sentence.

How can I *show* that I am sad and angry about what happens to the animals? What would *sad* look like or feel like? It hurts my heart. I want to scream and cry. How about this: *The thought of these animals getting sick or dying because of plastics brings tears to my eyes and makes my heart hurt.* AND, to engage my readers' emotions, what if I add: *I want to yell at the top of my lungs STOP USING PLASTIC!*

Think-Aloud in Writing A–Z modeling revising for showing vs telling details.

Think aloud: Now that I am happy that my essay has two strong reasons and that both are supported with details, I need to evaluate my word choice. I am looking at the word *bike rider*. I notice that I use it three times in this paragraph. Is there a synonym I can use for variety so I don't use the same word over and over? How about *cyclists*? First, bike lanes make bicycling safer for cyclists. That sounds stronger. I'll use it again in the last sentence!

In the next sentence, the words *running into each other* could be stronger. We know that there are words that mean the same thing as *running into* but are more vivid. I would use the word *smashing*, but that almost sounds like the cars and bikes were running into each other on purpose. How about the word *collide*? *Collide* also means that they run into each other. When bicycles and cars have separate lanes, there is a smaller chance of them colliding. The word *colliding* makes sense here, and it is definitely stronger than *running into*.

Think-aloud in Writing A–Z modeling revising word choice

Grammar and Writing

Writing is an essential communication tool, and sentences are the building blocks of writing. Traditional approaches to teaching grammar, such as teaching rule-based skills in isolation, do not help improve the quality of students' writing; however, research (Graham & Perin, 2007a, p. 449, table 1) shows instruction that involves teaching students how to combine or expand single sentences into compound and complex sentences does improve writing. Sentence-level construction skills are essential for a skilled writer. First, knowledge of effective sentence construction helps student writers translate their thoughts into text; second, a well-constructed sentence makes the writer's message clearer for their audience to comprehend (Graham et al., 2019). Writing A–Z teaches sentence construction within the context of students' writing, which provides opportunities for students to expand their syntactic range and consider the impact on their audience. Lessons provide practice with expanding, rearranging, and combining basic sentences and clauses into more sophisticated versions. To build background in basic parts of speech, sentence structure, mechanics, and other grammar skills, Writing A–Z includes independent, digital practice through instructional videos and games.

Positive Writing Environment

Effective teachers create positive writing environments in which (1) writing is seen as a fun, enjoyable, collaborative activity; (2) writing is shared, displayed, and published; (3) effort is encouraged, and success is attributed to learning; (4) positive interactions are promoted; (5) realistic but high expectations are set; (6) writing assignments are appropriate to students' varying skill levels and interests; (7) students are engaged; and (8) self-regulation is encouraged (Graham et al., 2015).

Establishing a positive writing environment is important if regular collaboration is to take place. Student writing quality has improved when students collaborate in planning, drafting, evaluating, revising, and editing (Graham et al., 2015; Graham et al., 2012; Graham & Perin, 2007a, 2007b; Smedt & van Keer, 2014). Collaboration is not limited to co-writing. When conferring with peers, students learn as much from giving peer feedback as they do from receiving it. Providing students time to work with peers to help identify strengths and problems and recommend improvements benefits all students. Studies found that for both college students and elementary students (MacArthur, 2019), the experience of giving feedback helped increase the quality of their papers.



Optimizing Foundational Skills Instruction

Research shows that student achievement requires a combination of data utilization and analysis, effective scheduling, professional development, scientifically based practices, and parent involvement, in addition to teacher dedication and strong leadership. (Crawford & Torgesen, 2006). The Writing A–Z solution incorporates all of these elements to provide an informed, carefully designed learning path that supports student literacy. The flexible design allows teachers to choose the path that works best for their students.

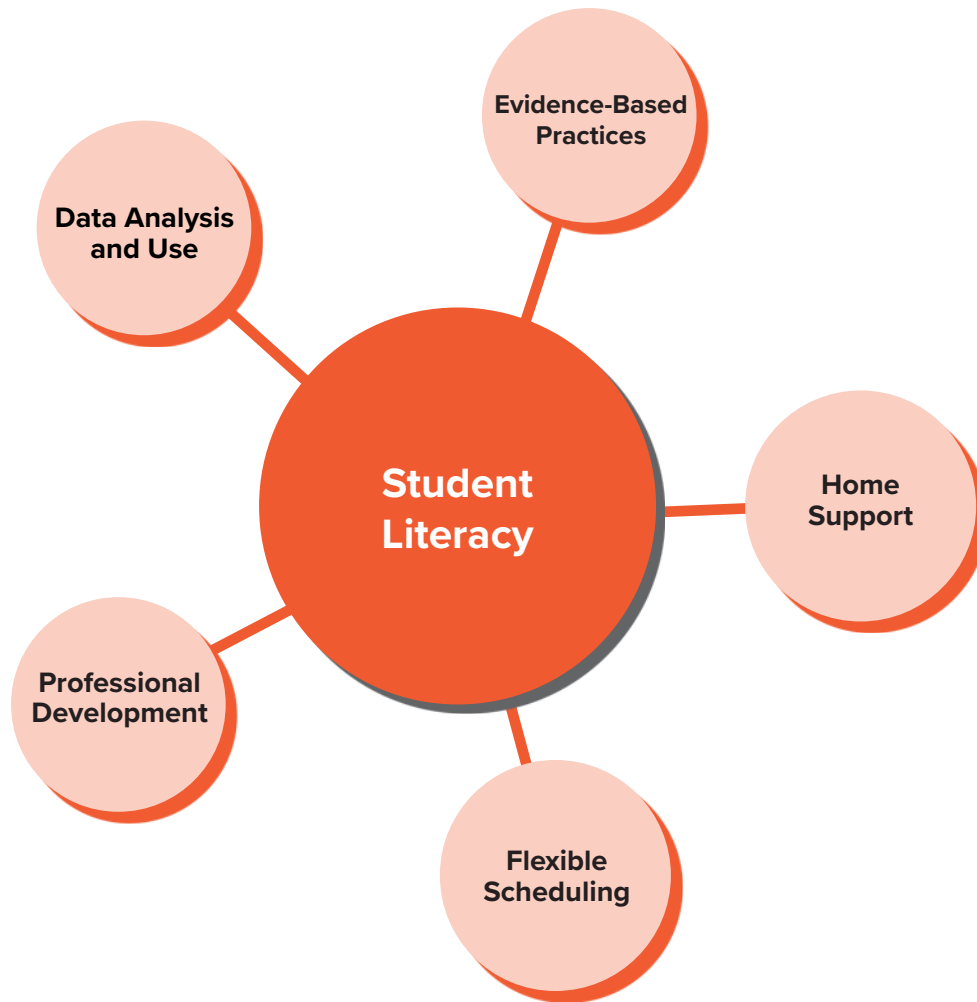
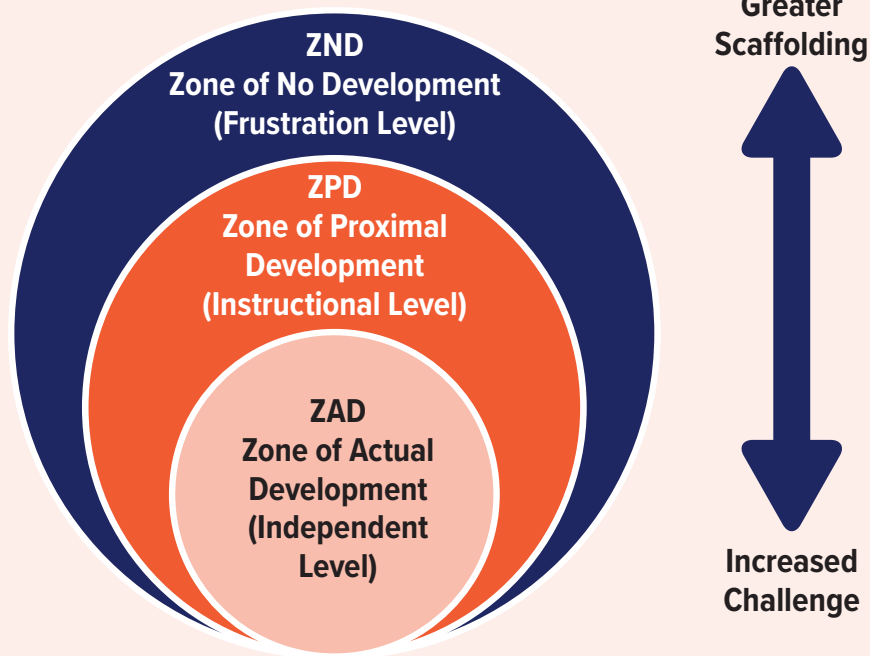


Figure 6. Designed path that supports student literacy

Systematic and Flexible Instruction

Systematic and flexible lessons allow optimal writing instruction and learning, ensuring consistency but also flexibility for teachers to apply routines where they are needed most. Writing A–Z lessons use scaffolded instruction that follows a gradual release model in which explicit instruction gives way to guided practice, followed by the independent application of skills by students. Repetition provides scaffolded support (Duke & Pearson, 2002).

Whole Group to Small Group



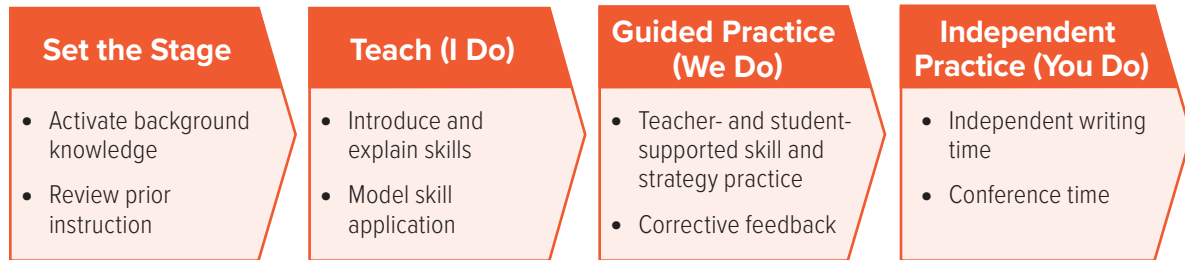
Credit: (Doolittle, 1995)

Established learning theory has shown that students gain the most from instruction centered on their current ability alongside opportunities to stretch—with support. Whole-group instruction is a great starting point, allowing teachers to leverage academic diversity to support student learning within their zone of proximal development (Vygotsky, 1978). The concept of zones of proximal development has implications for instruction. The level of instruction that challenges students should be balanced with proficiency level. This ensures that instruction is neither too difficult nor too easy.

We know that Vygotsky's zones of proximal development fluctuate as students gain mastery and engage with more challenging material. Learning needs are fluid; students who have been cruising along easily may suddenly hit a speed bump. Because of this, a scaffolded, gradual release format offers the best opportunity for customized small-group instruction to support struggling learners.

The scaffolded approach used in Writing A–Z lessons gives teachers significant flexibility with core elements, which can be taught in whole-class instruction followed by small groups as needed. There are instances in which whole-group instruction means longer and more productive time on task. Capitalizing on the unique learning opportunities presented in a richly diverse, heterogeneous classroom, whole-class application includes activities that allow students to learn from each other as they engage in grade-level writing. Together, teacher and peer support will facilitate better understanding.

Explicit instruction and modeling is represented in the Teach, or “I Do,” portion of the lesson. This transitions to Guided Practice, or the “We Do,” portion. This is when the teacher collaborates with students to apply the content of the Teach section. Teachers can deliver this part of the lesson to the whole group or a small group, or use it for additional differentiated support.



Writing A–Z gradual release lesson plan model

The “We Do” segment also presents opportunities for students to work with their peers. This allows for more heterogeneous grouping, such as pairing students who are just learning a skill with those who have mastered it and can provide support. Students participate in discussion, giving and receiving feedback, and collaborative planning and practice, all of which are integral elements of effective writing instruction. These activities equalize the participation of all learners and help students develop social-emotional skills, including social awareness and relationship skills. All of these activities foster the development of speaking proficiency, general writing knowledge, and a robust vocabulary.

Analysis that Informs Instruction

The gradual release model followed in the Writing A–Z program includes opportunities for formative assessment via observation, checklists, student writing samples, digital interactivities, and pre- and post-assessments. Immediate corrective feedback based on teacher observation and independent student performance informs the use of systematic instructional routines to scaffold and modify daily writing lessons and meet students’ needs. Checklists and rubrics, as well as consistent conferencing, provide useful data which can be used to reteach and reinforce key concepts for struggling writers.

A flexible lesson format, along with focused instructional routines, makes it possible for teachers to provide meaningful writing instruction and support in whole-group, small-group, or independent settings. The systematic and flexible instruction in Writing A–Z supports and challenges students at all proficiency levels.

Revising Checklist Compare Contrast Essay			
Checklist Grade 3			
Beginning	👍	👎	🗨️
I introduced my subject or topic.			
I hooked my readers.			
Middle Similarities	👍	👎	🗨️
This paragraph explains the similarities between the two topics.			
I used facts, details, and examples from the text to develop this paragraph.			
I used precise, expert words.			
I used linking words and phrases to connect my details.			
Middle Differences	👍	👎	🗨️
This paragraph explains the differences between the two topics.			
I used facts, details, and examples from the text to develop this paragraph.			
I used precise, expert words.			
I used linking words and phrases to connect my details.			
End	👍	👎	🗨️
I reminded my reader of my topic.			
I left my reader with something to think about.			

Culturally Responsive Teaching

To learn, students must be able to engage personally with instruction. Culturally responsive teaching recognizes the importance of including students' cultural references in all aspects of learning (Ladson-Billings, 1994). The pedagogy is effective because it makes meaningful connections among diverse students' cultural identities, experiences, and perspectives. These methods affirm and celebrate diversity, creating a sense of community that invites deeper engagement with the curriculum.



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Cultural responsiveness begins when a teacher acknowledges and values students' diverse identities and recognizes they might not always be the cultural expert. Collaborative learning, in which teachers turn the tables to allow students to be the teacher, is an effective strategy that lets students question, challenge, and add to the learning by sharing their own experiences. Selecting informative and varied texts enriches classroom discussion by building on students' background knowledge and creating opportunities for sharing.

Writing A–Z provides opportunities to explore cultural diversity through topics, discussion, and writing prompts, allowing students to see their own cultures valued while appreciating those of others. Likewise, the modules and units are flexible and designed to be relevant to the experiences of a diverse student population. The program provides tips demonstrating how teachers can present inclusive and effective lessons. Teachers can help students connect to the experiences of others by asking questions that make the topic more relevant to their own experiences. When writing activities reveal cultural differences, it is important to emphasize the positive aspects of such differences while pointing out commonalities. For example, family structures might differ, but family is important in all cultures.

Writing A–Z maximizes opportunities for students to share aspects of their culture by providing practical suggestions for teachers. Teacher tips are interspersed throughout module lessons. If students come from different cultures, Writing A–Z includes suggestions to share information about their heritage (without putting them on the spot). If students are familiar with different storytelling techniques from culturally diverse writers, they can explore them. If students have lived in a place featured in a text or discussion, that is a great opportunity to invite them to share their knowledge and write about that place.

Writing A–Z instructional designers recognize that “both teaching and learning are naturally cultural, and difference is inherent to the human condition” (Gay, 2018, p. xxxi). Instruction that makes learning relevant and accessible is “good teaching” that serves students and society.

Culturally Responsive Tip

Take cultural considerations of students in your class when brainstorming possible topics. Avoid making value judgments about aspects of cultures or regions.

Culturally Responsive Tip

Invite students to think of a topic related to their culture or heritage and share a fact they think the class would be interested in learning. Celebrate the differences and information shared to build respect for diversity and allow them to be experts on a topic.

Tips in Writing A–Z lesson plans point out culturally responsive teaching opportunities, such as these tips for planning writing topics and sharing interesting information about students’ cultures.

Social-Emotional Learning

Often considered the “hidden curriculum,” social-emotional learning (SEL) skills are interrelated cognitive, emotional, and behavioral competencies essential to students’ social, emotional, and academic development. Opportunities for personal growth in these areas are usually buried (or “hidden”) within the formal curriculum. Yet, in many ways, they are just as important as explicit instruction in grade-level content. Success in and out of the classroom involves students learning to demonstrate concern for others, make good choices, and become responsible for their behaviors.

SEL Tip

Explain to students that knowing their own strengths and weaknesses is called self-awareness. Self-awareness is important in all areas of life, not just as they reflect on learning.

Tips in Writing A–Z lesson plans point out SEL opportunities, such as this tip that can be used as students review a self-reflection anchor chart.

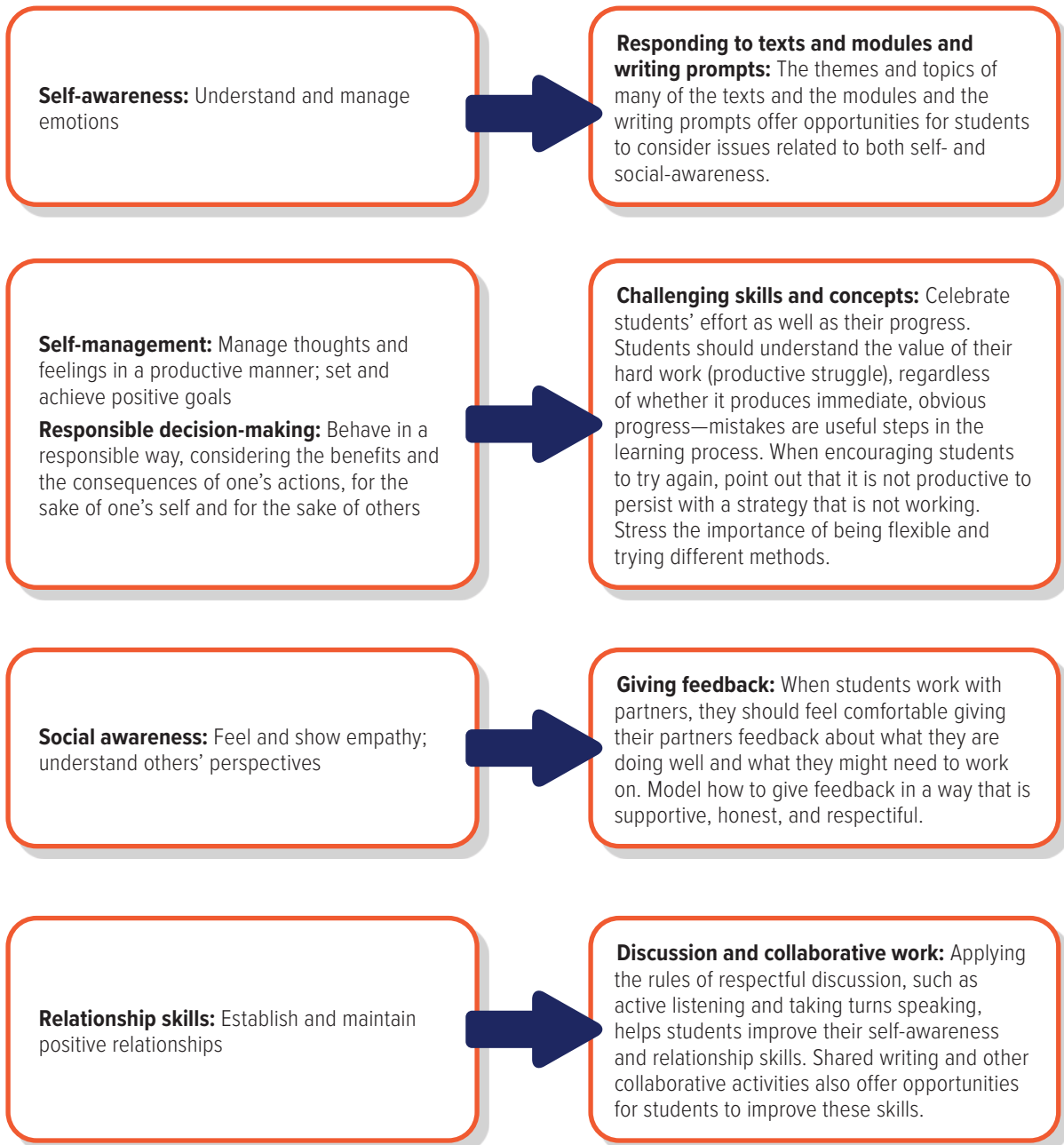
There is growing advocacy for the inclusion of interpersonal and intrapersonal skill instruction that is key to supporting students’ overall development (Pellegrino & Hilton, 2012). A growing body of evidence demonstrates SEL skills are particularly relevant for K–5 learners (Durlak et al., 2011). Indeed, it is believed when SEL skills are promoted in the classroom, students’ academic achievement and social skills improve.

The Writing A–Z program makes the “hidden curriculum” less hidden to support the development of these lifelong skills. Each unit includes explicit instructional tips aligned to SEL competencies outlined by the Collaborative for Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning (CASEL). Teacher tips embedded in lessons encourage collaboration, mutual respect, and teamwork and also highlight realistic, authentic opportunities for students to practice and develop social-emotional skills.

How Writing A–Z Lessons Help Students Develop SEL Skills

CASEL Competencies

Writing A–Z SEL Teacher Tips



Writing Checklist

Use the revising checklist to guide your revisions.

Dear Principal Westbrook,

I would like to share my thoughts about the length of the third grade lunch period. In my opinion, the lunch period should be longer. There are two reasons why I think this. First, there is more to the lunch period than just eating. For example, students have to wait in line, **get select** their food, wash their hands, and find a seat. Since these things take time, students only have fifteen minutes to **eat cram down their food**. When I arrive to pick up students, I see many who continue to eat as they walk toward the garbage can. They throw away perfectly good food because they do not have enough time to eat. Second, healthy foods like fruits and vegetables take a long time to eat. When the lunch period is short, students choose a quick, unhealthy snack instead of healthy foods that take longer to eat. **Students need nutritious food to help them learn and grow**. As you can see, the lunch period needs to be extended.

Sincerely,

I

Done ✓

Students use checklists with genre-specific criteria to help them self-evaluate their writing.

Self-management, another important SEL competency, is embedded in Writing A–Z as students set their own goals and track their progress on those goals. These essential self-management skills help students own their learning and reflect on their accomplishments. As students work through writing tasks, they can evaluate their progress using interactive checklists and decide next steps.

The student platform of Writing A–Z also provides incentives to support tracking progress. Students earn stars when they complete activities that they can use to customize their avatar and other visual aspects of their interface. Students also earn badges for achieving milestones and see their progress toward each badge from a panel in the student interface that tracks the statistics of each student’s achievements.

Overall Badges

Hi Danita!
Welcome to your stats.

1615 ★ Stars To Spend

1640 ★ Stars Earned

Students see their progress toward earning redeemable stars and badges from the My Stats area of Kids A–Z.

USING WRITING A-Z TO DEVELOP EFFECTIVE WRITERS

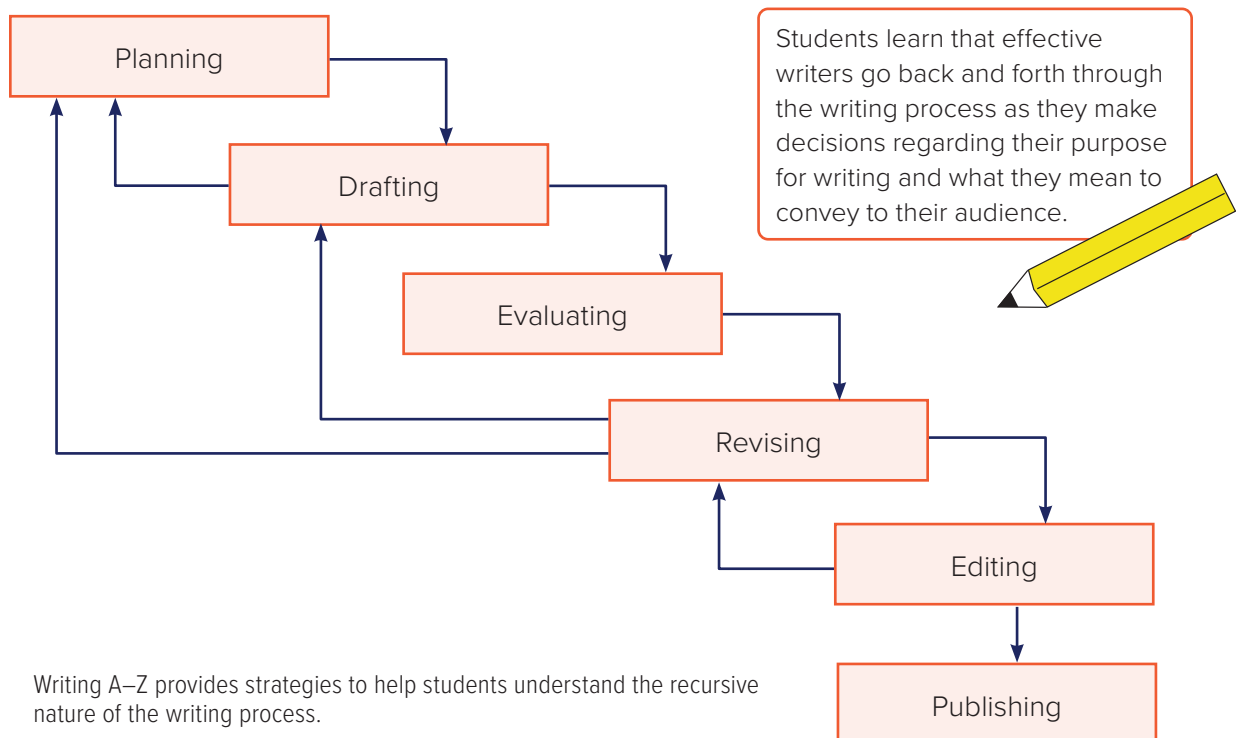
Although science informs what students need to learn, it does not mandate an exclusive route to desired learning outcomes. Writing A–Z adheres to research-based strategies that help lead to those outcomes.

- Explicit instructional steps embedded in the gradual release of responsibility model
- Instruction that follows a systematic scope and sequence within each unit
- Instructional routines to practice writing and grammar skills
- Spiral practice to ensure multiple opportunities to work within the writing process, building writing and grammar skills over time
- Engaging instruction with a digital experience for students

STRANDS OF THE WRITING ROPE™

Critical Thinking Strand

The **critical thinking** strand requires a significant amount of executive functioning as students think about what they want to communicate to their audience through their writing. To do this, students must understand the writing task, tap into background knowledge, and decide if they need to gather information. This strand also includes knowing the steps in the writing process (planning, drafting, evaluating, revising, and editing) and understanding that these steps are recursive.



Writing A–Z provides strategies to help students understand the recursive nature of the writing process.

Research

- Improving elementary students' writing involves providing strategy instruction for the stages of the writing process (Graham & Perin, 2007a). This type of instruction explicitly and systematically teaches students strategies for planning, revising, and/or editing text and is designed to teach students to use these strategies independently (Graham & Perin, 2007a).
- Engaging students in activities that help them gather and organize ideas for their compositions before they write a first draft includes activities such as gathering possible information for a paper through reading or developing a graphic organizer of their ideas before they begin writing (Graham & Perin, 2007a).
- Setting clear and specific goals for what students are expected to accomplish with their writing product includes identifying the purpose of the assignment as well as the characteristics of the final product (Graham & Perin, 2007a).
- Teaching students the elements or characteristics of specific genres and analyzing models of good writing in those genres has been shown to affect writing quality positively (Graham & Harris, 2019).
- Providing students with specific evaluation criteria has shown moderately strong effects on revision and writing quality. Evaluation lessons should include genre-specific elements that do more than ask students to evaluate the organization of their piece (MacArthur, 2019).

Writing A–Z Solution

Writing A–Z includes the lessons, tools, and activities educators need to teach the writing process and support the critical thinking strand of the Writing Rope™.

WaLT™

WaLT™ (Writing and Learning Together) is a digital writing notebook that allows teachers and students to complete the writing process—including planning, drafting, revising, editing, and publishing—100 percent digitally. WaLT™ does the following:

- provides a digital writing space with robust editing tools
- houses the materials needed to move recursively through the stages of the writing process, including genre-specific graphic organizers, reference texts, and revising and editing checklists
- allows students to view the materials alongside the writing space, making it easy to reference materials while they write
- saves students' work so they can move fluidly through the stages of the writing process and teachers can seamlessly access students' writing

Graphic Organizers

Level 3: Plan

All About Chocolate

0:00 / 1:15

Yummy Chocolate Brownies

Gather these ingredients: 1 cup butter or margarine, 4 squares of unsweetened chocolate, 4 eggs, 2 cups white sugar, 2 teaspoons vanilla extract, 1.5 cups all-purpose flour, 1 teaspoon baking powder, pinch of salt. Preheat the oven to 350 degrees Fahrenheit. Rub grease over a 9x13 inch baking pan. Melt the butter in a saucepan over medium heat on the stovetop. After the butter is melted, take it off the heat and stir in the chocolate until it is melted and mixed in. Add the eggs one at a time, stirring thoroughly. Then add the sugar and vanilla, stirring the mixture until smooth. In a separate bowl, mix the flour, salt, and baking powder. Gently pour the butter, chocolate, and sugar mix into the flour and stir it until the flour is completely wet. Pour the mixture into the baking pan and spread it evenly. Bake for 25 to 30 minutes until the brownies begin to pull away from the sides of the pan. Let the brownies cool in the pan before you cut them. Makes 12 brownies.

Use your graphic organizer to plan your writing.

Middle

Reason 1

bike lanes make riding safer for bike riders

Detail

bike lanes make riding safer for bike riders

saw a bike rider get scared, fell into a hole

Add Detail +

Delete Detail

Supporting Resources

WaLT™ houses the resources needed to complete each lesson, including:

Reference Texts

Level 2: Take Notes

What I think about brownies:

1. They are yummy
2. I need to wait a long time for them to cook
3. I wish the recipe made more brownies

Use this space to complete your writing assignment.

All About Chocolate

0:00 / 1:15

Yummy Chocolate Brownies

Gather these ingredients: 1 cup butter or margarine, 4 squares of unsweetened chocolate, 4 eggs, 2 cups white sugar, 2 teaspoons vanilla extract, 1.5 cups all-purpose flour, 1 teaspoon baking powder, pinch of salt. Preheat the oven to 350 degrees Fahrenheit. Rub grease over a 9x13 inch baking pan. Melt the butter in a saucepan over medium heat on the stovetop. After the butter is melted, take it off the heat and stir in the chocolate until it is melted and mixed in. Add the eggs one at a time, stirring thoroughly. Then add the sugar and vanilla, stirring the mixture until smooth. In a separate bowl, mix the flour, salt, and baking powder. Gently pour the butter, chocolate, and sugar mix into the flour and stir it until the flour is completely wet. Pour the mixture into the baking pan and spread it evenly. Bake for 25 to 30 minutes until the brownies begin to pull away from the sides of the pan. Let

Done ✓

Revising Checklists

Level 5: Revise

Revision Checklist

Beginning

I introduced my topic.

I stated my opinion.

Middle

My reasons support my opinion.

I used linking words to connect my ideas.

I used strong, precise words.

End

I restated my opinion.

Use the revising checklist to guide your revisions.

When bikes and cars share the road, it can be dangerous. Cities should create bike lanes.

First, bike lanes make bicycling safer for bike riders. When bicycles and cars have separate lanes, there is a smaller chance of them running into each other. Additionally, sharing the same lane can sometimes make bike riders so scared that they ride too close to the curb or edge of the street. I have seen a bike rider fall into a hole!

Editing Checklists

Level 5: Edit

Revision Checklist

Editing Checklist

Capitalization

My sentences begin with capital letters.

Punctuation

My sentences end with correct punctuation.

Grammar

I checked for correct grammar.

I check for matching verb tenses.

Use the editing checklist to guide your edits.

Have you ever been riding a bike when a car creeps up behind you? Or maybe you have been in a car and found yourself stuck behind a bike for blocks and blocks. Both are stressful. However, there is something cities can do to help. Instead of having cars and bikes share the road, cities should create bike lanes.

First, bike lanes make bicycling safer for cyclists. When bicycles and cars have separate lanes, there is a smaller chance of them colliding. Additionally, sharing the same lane can sometimes make bike riders so scared that they ride too close to the curb or edge of the street. I have seen a cyclist fall into a muddy ditch! That was a dangerous situation that could have been avoided if we had lanes just for bike riders.

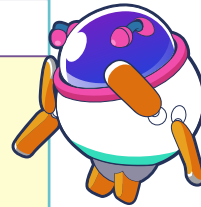
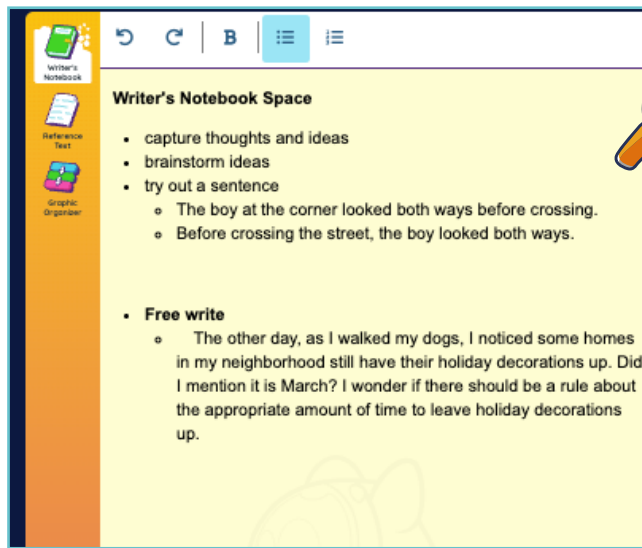
It is clear that whether you are a driver or a bicyclist, bike lanes are a win-win. They are safer and more convenient for everyone. All cities should have them too!

Done ✓

Pre-writing and Planning

The pre-writing and planning steps of the writing process should not be rushed or skipped. At the pre-writing stage, students talk about ideas, list what they already know about a topic, read to learn more about it, and gather information. During the planning step, students organize information and ideas. They also learn how to set writing goals and identify their audience and purpose for writing.

- Lessons in Writing A–Z include a digital Writer’s Notebook where students can record ideas, free write, and take notes before they plan their pieces.



WaLT™, the Writing A–Z digital platform, houses a digital Writer’s Notebook.

- Writing A–Z includes lessons on pre-writing strategies such as gathering information about a topic.

Set the Stage

1. Ask students to think about whether or not garbage is a problem in our world. Ask them to think about what they know about recycling. They should think about what they have learned from previous experience, articles they have read, and from other sources of information.
2. Pair students with a partner or small group to share what they already know about recycling with their groups.
3. Ask students to share their opinions about garbage and recycling.
4. Discuss how thinking about what they already know about recycling can help them form an opinion. Then ask: *Do you believe that you have enough facts to support your opinion? Would additional facts strengthen your point of view?*
5. Explain that even though we have opinions about a topic, writers often learn more about the topic to strengthen the support of their opinion.

Some lessons help students understand that although they might have an opinion about a topic, they need to gather more information to support their opinion effectively.

Think aloud: Sometimes, writers use texts to help them form opinions. However, texts can also be used *after* an opinion has been formed. I already have an opinion about recycling and garbage, but I want to gather more evidence that *supports* the opinion I already have.

Teacher think-aloud supports the lesson objective to gather more information.

- Pre-writing lessons and videos teach students strategies such as brainstorming ideas with peers and using semantic maps (graphic organizers) to organize ideas. Genre-specific graphic organizers and are available to print or present in WaLT™.

In this lesson, students are asked to refer to the brainstorming of ideas they did in the previous lesson and use a fictional narrative graphic organizer to plan their narrative.

In the previous lesson, students generated ideas in their Writer's Notebook.

Think aloud: I will now take my ideas from Lesson 1 and put them in the graphic organizer to plan my fictional narrative. In Lesson 1, I decided who my main character is: Bill the octopus. I'll write *Bill* on the Characters line in the Beginning section. I remember learning that in the planning stage, I don't have to write in complete sentences. Writing in note form helps me get my initial thoughts and ideas down. I've also decided that there will be a ride attendant who won't let Bill on the ride. I'll add *ride attendant* on the line as well. I've already decided on the setting of my story. I'll write *in the ocean, in the future (year 3172)* on the Where/When line. Finally, I'll add my problem to the Situation/Problem line: *Bill wants to ride a roller coaster, but he isn't tall enough.*

2. Explain that the Middle section of the graphic organizer is where you will plan a series of at least three events, concentrating on the steps that the character will take to solve the problem.

▼ [Sample Dialogue](#)

Think aloud: I will now use the graphic organizer to plan the middle of my story. I see three Middle boxes to include three attempts and roadblocks. Not every attempt needs to include a roadblock, but it does add suspense to the story. In my story, the middle will describe my character, Bill, attempting to get on the rollercoaster and experiencing roadblocks, or setbacks. I will list these events in sequential order. Sequential order is the order in which something happened.

3. Model using the graphic organizer to plan your first attempt and roadblock. Explain to have two more attempts and roadblocks.

In this lesson, students learn how a graphic organizer helps structure a narrative in the the beginning, middle, and end.

Think aloud: I will now complete the Attempt 1 and Roadblock 1 lines of the graphic organizer. I'll brainstorm some ideas for what Bill might do to attempt to solve this problem? I'll ask myself *What are some things Bill might do to solve this problem?* The first idea to pop into my head is that Bill will try to sneak onto the roller coaster. Maybe he'll try to do it with a group of whales! This is Bill's first attempt at solving the problem. I'll write *tries to sneak on the roller coaster with a group of whales* on the Attempt 1 line. Now, I need to think of a reason that this attempt will not work. What if the whales toss him out of line? Yes, I like that idea! I'll write *whales toss him out of line* on the Roadblock 1 line.

4. Model completing the End section of the graphic organizer. In addition to the character's feelings, include a lesson learned on the Character's feelings line.

▼ [Sample Dialogue](#)

Think aloud: I will now complete the End section of the graphic organizer. This will help me when I am writing the end of the story. I already know from my notes from Lesson 1 that Bill will solve the problem of wanting to ride a roller coaster by picking a different roller coaster to ride--one for which he meets the height requirements. I'll write *picks a different roller coaster* on the Solution line. There's just one final line to complete: Character's feelings. I need to think about how Bill will feel after he rides this new roller coaster. If I were Bill, I think I would be pretty excited to be on a roller coaster! I'll write *excited* on the Character's feelings line. I will also include a lesson learned on this line. In my story, Bill learns that cheating and trickery is not the way to solve a problem, so I will write *cheating is not a good way to solve a problem.*

Check for Understanding

Check your students' understanding by using the game below.

[GAME](#)

A lesson that provides instruction in a skill, strategy, or concept. This section can be delivered by the teacher or digitally via the video below. Use the resources provided, or substitute with your own.

10 mins

[VIDEO](#)

🗣️ Social Emotional Tip

Discuss how roadblocks are a natural part of life. Create an anchor chart with strategies that students can use when they encounter obstacles.

Beginning: graphic organizer supports the elements at the beginning of a narrative.

Characters
Where/when
Situation/Problem

Middle: graphic organizer supports the elements in the middle of a narrative. In this example, these elements are the characters' attempt at solving the problem and the roadblock that gets in their way.

Attempt 1
Detail
Add Detail +
Add Attempt +
Roadblock 1
Detail
Add Detail +
Add Roadblock +


End: graphic organizer supports the elements at the end of a narrative.

Solution
Character's feelings

- In Module 4, students use reference texts, which Writing A–Z provides in a digital and printable format, to gather information and inform their writing. The lessons teach students strategies for reading and marking evidence in the text. As students learn more about the goals and nature of each writing genre, the activities require them to exercise increased critical thinking—even at the planning stages, when they must use resources to inform and support their planned writing and weigh in on which points are important to include.

Sometimes people throw away water bottles or other plastic. They do not recycle their garbage. People may not know that wind and rain can move garbage from land to sea. **Plastic takes a very long time to break down. It can remain in the oceans for hundreds of years.** Plastic pieces are very dangerous to sea animals.

One group, Washed Ashore, found a way to tell people about the problems in the oceans. First, they take the garbage from a beach. Then, they clean and sort it. Finally, they work with the plastic pieces to make huge works of art. The artwork is mostly of sea creatures.



Washed Ashore has created more than seventy of these works of art. Some of them are now traveling in a show all over the United States. Each piece shows the effects of trash.

In one show, people learn how **plastic fools fish and other sea animals. They think the plastic is food, eat it, and get very sick or even die.**

This would not happen if people used less plastic and did not litter. The plastic would not end up in the ocean.

Only 14% of plastic is recycled; 95% of plastic is used only once before it is thrown away.

3. Explain how to mark a text for evidence that supports your opinion. Marking could involve highlighting, starring, underlining, or some other way of emphasizing parts of the text.

▼ **Sample Dialogue**

Think aloud: My opinion is based on what I already know about recycling. Today, I will use a strategy to find evidence to support my opinion. I will read texts about recycling and I will *mark* the text when I find evidence that may support my opinion about plastics being a big problem. Marking the text is a helpful strategy for organizing and retrieving information.

4. Display and read the first paragraph of [Garbage Art](#). As you read, model marking the text to note one or two details that support your opinion.

▼ **Sample Dialogue**

Think aloud: My opinion is that people should use less plastic. As I read, I will look for details that support this opinion. In the first paragraph, I read *Plastic takes a very long time to break down. It can remain in the ocean for hundreds of years.* This is an important fact that supports my opinion, so I'll mark it. The next sentence also includes a fact that supports my opinion. I'll mark it as well.

5. Read the rest of "Garbage Art," asking students to stop you when they notice a detail that you should mark. Mark each appropriate detail, saving the marked up text to reference in the next lesson. Possible details include:

- ... *plastic fools fish and other sea animals. They think the plastic is food, eat it, and get very sick or even die.*

Sample dialogue includes think-alouds that help teachers explain why a writer might need to gather information from sources to support an opinion. Teachers model the evidence from the text and think aloud about WHY they did so—these details support their opinion.

Resources from Reading A–Z are used in lessons that teach students to gather information from sources. Students learn how to mark text, which is a strategy for identifying and retrieving information from sources.

Informative Writing: Reading Texts (Compare and Contrast) 3

Kamala Harris and Ruby Bridges

Kamala Harris made history as the first female vice president of the United States. She is also the first Black and first Indian-American vice president. Kamala is from Oakland, California. As a child, Kamala attended civil rights demonstrations with her parents. Kamala's mother was from India, and her father was from Jamaica. Fighting against injustice became her life's work.

Ruby Bridges made history at the age of 10. It was 1960 in New Orleans, Louisiana. Ruby was the first Black student to attend an all-white school in the South. Federal marshals had to escort Ruby to school to keep her safe from angry crowds. Ruby's bravery made a difference. Ruby grew up to write books about her experience. She fights against injustice as a civil rights activist.

Read the informative texts. You are using a T-chart to take notes for your essay. What note should you write under "Similarities"?

- A** Made history in 2021.
- B** Made history in 1960.
- C** Famous for being the first.
- D** From Oakland, California.

In addition to lessons, videos and interactivities support students' understanding of how to gather information from sources.

Revising, Editing, and Self-Evaluation

A skilled author is able to recognize where revisions will have the most impact on their writing. Self-evaluation requires students to think critically about their revision decisions, which then inform their writing goals. Writing A–Z provides revising and editing checklists with genre-specific evaluation criteria aligned with lesson objectives.

- The Writing A–Z revision lessons help teachers model evaluation strategies. For example, teachers and students work together to evaluate a strong and a weak writing sample using a criteria-specific checklist. Students then offer plausible revisions for the weaker sample before applying the strategy to their own writing independently.

Revising Checklist

Beginning

- I introduced my topic. (Feedback icons: thumbs up, sideways thumb, thumbs down)
- I stated my opinion. (Feedback icon: thumbs up)
- I hooked my reader. (Feedback icon: thumbs up)

Middle

- I have 2-3 reasons that support my opinion. (Feedback icon: thumbs up)
- I have 2 or more sentences that support each reason: examples, details, facts, anecdotes. (Feedback icon: thumbs up)
- I used linking words to connect my ideas. (Feedback icon: thumbs up)

End

- My closing sentence restates my opinion. (Feedback icon: thumbs up)
- I left my reader with something to think about (a message/why they should consider my opinion). (Feedback icon: thumbs up)

Sample 1

Almost everyone thinks their pet is the best kind of pet to have. In my opinion, dogs are the best pet there is. Dogs make great listeners. I share secrets with my dog that I do not feel comfortable telling anyone else. Dogs can help you meet new people. When we go for a walk, someone often wants to pet my dog, and then I end up talking to the people, too. Lastly, dogs promote a healthy lifestyle. Dogs need to go for a daily walk which means that their owners get a daily walk, too. In conclusion, dogs make great pets and just may be the perfect pet for you.

Sample 2

I love my cat. I think cats are the best pet to have. Cats are easy to take care of. You just have to feed a cat, give it water, and scoop its litter box. Cats like to be nearby and cuddle. Also, cats make great pets for people who live in apartments. Cats make very little noise and do not have to be walked. I think that cats make the best pets.

Sample 3

Students do many important things during the school day. In my opinion, recess is the most important part of the day. Recess gives students the chance to spend time together. This helps students learn how to work and play well with one another. Also, recess builds healthy bodies. Lastly, getting outside gives students' brains a break. Studies show that students learn more when they have time to move around during the day. Even though studying is important, I think recess is the most important part of the school day.

Next →

Students and teachers use a checklist with genre-specific criteria to evaluate different writing samples on the same topic.

- Drawing on the self-regulated development model of Dr. Harris and Dr. Graham, Writing A–Z created checklists that help students self-evaluate the quality of their writing and then set goals for subsequent revisions and edits.

Revising Checklist 1

Revising Checklist 2

Beginning

- I introduced my topic. (Feedback icon: thumbs up)
- I stated my opinion. (Feedback icon: thumbs up)

Middle

- My reasons support my opinion. (Feedback icon: thumbs up)
- I have 2 or more sentences that support each reason: details, facts, anecdotes. (Feedback icons: thumbs up, sideways thumb, thumbs down)
- I used linking words to connect my ideas. (Feedback icon: thumbs up)
- I used strong, precise words. (Feedback icon: thumbs down)

End

- I restated my opinion. (Feedback icon: thumbs down)
- I wrote a closing. (Feedback icon: thumbs up)

Editing Checklist

Use the editing checklist to guide your edits.

Dear People on the Planet,

Bees are critical to our survival and we need to protect them. One reason we need to protect them is because they pollinate other plants. That means they travel from one plant to another and this helps make flowers, fruits and vegetables. Once I watched a bee land on a flower and then jump to another one and another one. It was pollinating the plant right in my backyard. The other reason is that bees help make food and things we eat and use. For example, we enjoy honey which bees make. And we consume fruits and vegetables. Bees also make beeswax and even some medicine we use. Once my mom gave me honey to help my sore throat feel better. If bees are extinct we do not have them and then we will not have food. They're important to earth.

Sincerely,

Ruth

Next →

Thumbs Up, Sideways Thumb, and Thumbs Down symbols help students use specific criteria to evaluate the quality of their writing. Checklists in WaT are digital and color coded and appear alongside the piece of student writing.

Publishing and Reflection

- Module 5 asks students to choose a piece of writing to publish and present to an audience. Before doing so, students reflect on what they have learned in the unit, then they revise and edit their piece in preparation for publication.

WE DO: Guided Practice 15 mins

A time to extend learning by applying the content of the lesson to a writing sample. Guided practice can be delivered to the whole class or to a small group, or modified for additional support or differentiated instruction. Use the resources provided, or substitute with your own.

1. Discuss how reflection is an important part of the writing process. Writers reflect to recognize what they have learned, think about how they can help other writers, make goals for next time, and celebrate their hard work.
2. Write the following reflection questions:
 - What have you learned about informative writing?
 - What parts of the writing process do you find difficult? What parts come more easily?
 - What things do you want to continue to learn, and what do you want to improve?
3. Group students to use the questions to reflect on and discuss their growth as informative writers. Encourage them to jot any notes in their notebooks.
4. Write the following sentence frame: *I chose this piece about ____ because _____. I want to revise and edit it one more time so I can continue to work on _____ (specific strategy, skill, or concept).*
5. Inform students that, in their writing time, they will provide written responses to the three reflection questions and complete the above sentence frame with the piece that they want to publish.

Engage Students Tip
Work as a class to recall concepts, skills, and strategies that students have learned throughout the informative writing unit.

Self-Regulation Tip
Create a checklist for group discussion. Checklists may include such items as *I respected others' ideas, I did not interrupt, I stayed on topic*, and so on.

Teacher Tip
Encourage students to list a few specific people with whom they want to share their published piece.

Students discuss how reflection is essential to the writing process. Writers reflect to recognize what they have learned, think about how they can help other writers, make goals for next time, and celebrate their hard work.

- Non-judgmental self-reflection exercises invite students to reflect on their development as writers in different areas of growth. Students' answers are not scored as correct or incorrect; instead, students receive general feedback on the importance of engaging in self-reflection.

Interactivities invite students to reflect on their development as writers by offering them different areas of growth to consider in non-judgmental self-reflection exercises.

Text Structure Strand

Text structure instruction involves “explicitly and systematically teaching students knowledge about the structure of specific types of text, such as stories or persuasive essays” (Graham & Perin, 2007a, p. 449). The **text structure** strand of the Writing Rope™ represents the understanding of the different levels of text structures.

- Genre text structures: similarities and differences in how various genres (informative, opinion, narrative) are organized
- Paragraph structures: how groups of sentences are organized to bolster a main idea and its supporting details
- Patterns of organization: how typical five-paragraph structures are patterned depending on their purpose (compare and contrast, problem and solution, cause and effect, descriptive, and sequence/chronological)
- Transition words and phrases: the role words and phrases play in linking ideas within and between paragraphs, including words that signal relationships between ideas

Research

- Teaching students the elements or characteristics of specific genres and analyzing models of good writing in those genres has been shown to positively affect writing quality (Graham & Harris, 2019).
- Providing students with good models for the type of writing that is the focus of instruction also produces positive results. These examples should be analyzed, and students should be encouraged to imitate the critical elements embodied in the models (Graham & Perin, 2007a).

Writing A–Z Solution

Genre Study

- In support of this best practice, Writing A–Z covers the three academic writing genres: opinion, informative, and narrative. Each unit begins with a genre study module, which includes five lessons and videos that introduce students to the genre’s purpose, audience, elements, characteristics, and structure. With the teacher’s support, students observe the text’s tone and use of language. They learn how linking words and phrases connect ideas, contribute to the text’s organization, and support its coherence and clarity. Students read and evaluate strong and weak writing samples from each genre in preparation for their own writing.

Module 1: Genre Study

Lesson 1	Lesson 2	Lesson 3	Lesson 4	Lesson 5
Genre Study (Audience and Purpose)	Genre Study (Elements of Opinion Writing)	Genre Study (Linking Words)	Genre Study (Structure)	Genre Study (Evaluate)

The five lessons in each genre study module introduce students to the elements and characteristics of the genre in which they will write.

Revising Checklist

Beginning

- I introduced my subject or topic.
- I let my readers know about what they will learn.
- I hooked my readers.

Middle

- I used facts, concrete details, examples, and definitions to develop each paragraph.
- I used precise, expert words.
- I used linking words and phrases to connect my details.

End

- I reminded my reader of my topic.
- I left my reader with something to think about.

Revising Practice 1

Strong

Have you ever visited the desert Southwest? It is a unique and incredible environment in the United States. The desert Southwest is home to many plant and animal species and is like no other habitat on earth.

To begin, most people think that the desert Southwest is a dry, barren wasteland. The desert Southwest is not a barren place, for many plant and animal species are found only there.

One important plant is the giant cactus, or saguaro. Saguaros are not only magnificent, growing over forty feet tall, but they are also home to many animals. For example, the glided flicker and Gila woodpecker carve nests into the saguaro's flesh, or skin. Then, when the nest is abandoned, creatures like elf and screech owls, purple martins, finches, and sparrows move in.

In conclusion, there is much to explore in the desert Southwest. Most people would be surprised at the amount of life there. It truly is a fascinating place.

Revising Practice 2

Weak

The Everglades is a cool place in the United States. Forget the idea that the Everglades is just a big swamp. Nope! Lots of interesting plants and animals live there.

Have you seen orchids? They're so pretty. Lots of orchids grow in the Everglades. Air plants live there too. Air plants don't need dirt to live. They like to hang off other things, especially trees.

As far as animals go, I especially like the manatees. In pictures, they look so silly and cute. You'd think you were looking at a bald, floating cow. They munch on the water plants that grow in the Everglades. The Snail Kite is a bird in the Everglades that pretty much only eats snails. So neat!

I would definitely like to visit the Everglades. It would be cool to see those different plants and animals for myself—especially the manatees!

Students use a checklist to evaluate the elements of each genre. Weak and strong text samples help students identify the inclusion and quality of the elements.

- Lessons and videos provide explicit instruction on how linking and transitional words and phrases connect ideas within and between paragraphs in a longer piece of writing. Instruction is specific to an organizational pattern so students understand the relationship between the ideas the linking words support.

Linking Words

and but also

for example first finally

then last next

Subordinating conjunctions

because after before

whenever while

since although

6. Create anchor chart with common linking words such as *and*, *but*, *also*, and *for example* and subordinating conjunctions such as *because*, *before*, *after*, *whenever*, *when*, *while*, *since*, and *although*. Model how to include linking or transition words when you transfer your ideas from the graphic organizer to your draft.

✓ [Sample Dialogue](#)

Think Aloud: I have two reasons recorded on my graphic organizer. I will write: *There are two reasons why I think this.* The first reason on the graphic organizer is that students have to do more than just eat. When adding the ideas from the graphic organizer to my draft, I need to use complete sentences. We have talked in previous lessons about linking words. Can anyone remind me of some of those linking words? Since this is the first reason I am going to give to my readers, I will use the transition word *first*. I will write: *First, there is more to the lunch period than just eating.*

On my graphic organizer, I noted that students have "many things to do" besides eating. I want to make sure my audience understands just what those things are, so I am going to provide an example by listing them. I will write: *For example, students have to wait in line, get their food, wash their hands, and find a seat.* Now I want to link my reason to my problem. I can do this with the word *since*. *Since these things take time, students only have fifteen minutes left to eat.*

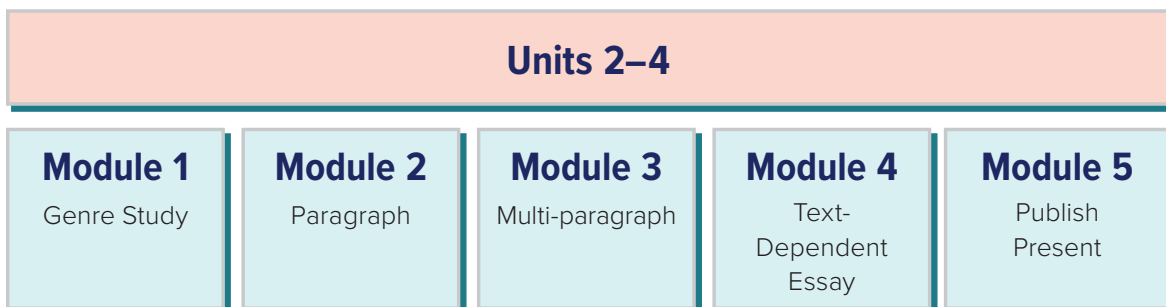
- The Writing A–Z graphic organizers and revision checklists are genre-specific to help students further understand text structures, paragraph structures, and patterns of organization.

Genre-Specific Graphic Organizers

	Opinion	Informative	Narrative
Goals	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Purpose • Audience • Title 		
Beginning	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Name of topic or text • Opinion/claim 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Topic 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Characters • Where/when • Situation/problem
Middle	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Reason 1 • Detail/evidence • Reason 2 • Detail/evidence 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Part 1 • Fact/example/detail • Part 2 • Fact/example/detail 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Attempt • Detail • Roadblock • Detail
End	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Closing 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Closing 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Solution • Character’s feelings

All graphic organizers have a Goals section where students set their purpose for writing and identify their audience. They also have a Beginning, Middle, and End section. The differences among the elements in those sections are genre-specific.

- The Writing A–Z module sequence is designed to teach increasingly complex paragraph structures and patterns of organization. For example, in grades 2 and 3, students learn how to write a paragraph in Module 2 of the opinion and informative units. In Module 3, students learn how to write multiple paragraphs. In Module 4, they learn to use evidence from source texts to write a text-dependent essay. In grades 4 and 5, compare and contrast, chronological/sequence, and problem/solution patterns of organization are modeled within genre units.



Modules 2, 3, and 4 increase in complexity of text structures and paragraph structures as well as the skills and strategies.

Syntax Strand

The **syntax** strand of the Writing Rope™ acknowledges the importance of grammar in writing. Students must be able to construct sentences that are clear and build on each other to make meaning. Knowing syntax structures helps students share their own ideas effectively and understand the ideas of others when reading or listening. Students' understanding of syntax affects the drafting, revising, and editing stages of writing as well as their ability to provide feedback and evaluate their own writing.

Research

- Instructing students in grammar outside the context of writing has a negative impact (-0.32) on the quality of student writing (Graham & Perin, 2007a).
- Teaching students to focus on the function and practical application of grammar within the context of writing (as opposed to defining and describing grammar) produced strong and positive effects on students' writing (Graham & Perrin, 2007a).
- Teaching adolescents how to write increasingly complex sentences involves instruction in combining simple sentences into more sophisticated examples to enhance the quality of students' writing (Graham & Perin, 2007a).
- Instructing students directly in syntactical patterns and offering systematic practice in constructing sentences is beneficial to students (Saddler & Graham, 2005).

Saddler (2019) identifies three strong theoretical principles supporting sentence-combining instruction and practice:

1. Students need instruction in the concept of written sentences and sentence types. Sentence-combining builds an awareness of the options possible by helping them think about the sound of their language.
2. Familiarity with sentence construction and reconstruction reduces the cognitive strain on students, which allows them to concentrate on other writing tasks (e.g., navigating the writing process, being aware of audience and purpose, and so on).
3. The ability to produce a variety of sentences (syntactic fluency) leads to quality writing by making writing more enjoyable to read.

Writing A–Z Solution

Writing A–Z provides multiple opportunities for teachers to explicitly build students' knowledge and use of grammar in the context of their writing.

- Drafting, revising, and editing lessons include grammar instruction embedded within the context of student writing. Writing A–Z teaches grammar at the sentence level, so students learn the function and impact grammar has on meaning. Lessons and videos incorporate activities focused on sentence structure and fluency. Students learn by combining, rearranging, expanding, and deconstructing practice sentences. Through the gradual release of responsibility model, teachers provide instruction, examples, and collaborative practice manipulating sentences. Students then apply these skills and strategies to their writing.

Examples of sentence-level instruction:

6. Model how to locate similar sentences that could potentially be combined into a compound sentence.

✓ [Sample Dialogue](#)

Think aloud: I wonder if any of these sentences could be combined. Should I just choose two sentences and combine them? Wait, that isn't the right way to go about it. I need to read the sentences and see which ones are similar. I may be able to combine them if they're similar. I'm going to read the sentences and circle the ones that are related. Then, I'll decide if they can be combined. I notice that sentence B tells how much adult blue whales weigh and that sentence C states how long blue whales can grow. Those two sentences both describe the size of blue whales. I will circle them because they can probably go together. Sentence D is about what blue whales eat, and sentence E is about the sound they make. These sentences are completely different, so they will not work together as a compound sentence.

Sentence-combining is taught in the context of a paragraph to help students understand that sentences build to communicate ideas clearly.

7. Model how to combine the two sentences into one compound sentence using a coordinating conjunction that makes sense.

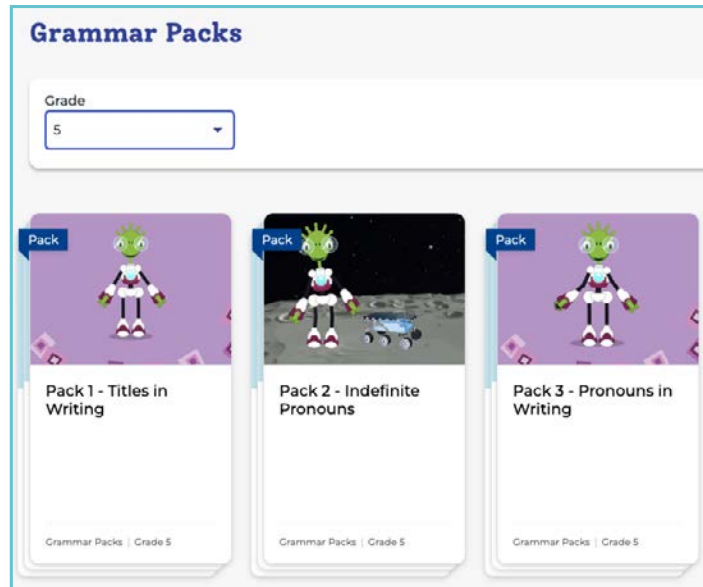
✓ [Sample Dialogue](#)

Think aloud: So, let me go back and look at the two sentences I circled. I think they are similar enough that I can combine them. I know that I need to use a coordinating conjunction when making a compound sentence. First, I will try to combine the sentences with the conjunction *but*. I will put a comma after the first sentence, before the conjunction. I will write *Adults weigh over 150 tons, but they grow to be 80-100 feet long*. This compound sentence doesn't really make sense. I'm not trying to contrast those two ideas, so I shouldn't use the word *but*. Let me try a different conjunction. I'll write *Adults weigh over 150 tons, and they grow to be 80-100 feet long*. That sounds much better!



In this video, students learn to use Who, What, Where, Why, and How questions to expand their sentences.

- Grammar Packs are made up of instructional videos and practice games that students watch and play independently. The packs supplement grade-level grammar instruction by building students' background knowledge of basic grammar skills and language standards. Students are automatically assigned a series of Grammar Packs upon rostering. When the pack is complete, the next pack is automatically assigned. All Grammar Packs are also available under Collections, where they can be assigned to students in addition to their automatically generated grammar assignments.



Grammar Packs include lessons on grade-level language arts skills, including parts of speech, grammar and usage, sentence structure, figurative language, literary technique, capitalization, and punctuation.

Writing Craft Strand

The **writing craft** strand of the Writing Rope™ focuses on the techniques writers use to engage and guide their audience through word choice, literary devices and figurative language, perspective and point of view, and writing voice or style.

Research

- Writing is a form of communication. However, when students only write for themselves, they miss the opportunity to understand the writer-reader connection. As Shanahan points out in chapter 13 of *Best Practices in Writing Instruction* (2019, p. 315), writing for an audience requires “varied demands of explicitness and detail; when we write for ourselves, we can take shortcuts and use a wide variety of abbreviations and summary statements. It is also not necessary to be explicit since you, the writer, will know what you intend to mean. But when writing for others, such shortcuts can be problematic. They might lead to miscommunication.” If students do not write for other audiences, they will not learn how to address the needs of their readers.

- In *Teaching Elementary Students to Be Effective Writers* (What Works Clearinghouse, 2018, p. 21), the authors recommend that students learn the concept of audience:

Writing for different purposes often means writing for different audiences. To help students understand the role of audience in writing, it is important to design writing activities that naturally lend themselves to different audiences. Otherwise, students may view writing in school as writing only for their teacher. When discussing writing purposes, teachers and students can generate a list of potential audiences for a given writing assignment. Students then can choose the audience that best fits their writing topic. For example, when writing persuasive letters, students could write for parents, friends, companies, or newspapers, depending on their chosen topic. When working on narratives, students could write a fable to read to preschool students. It is important that students' writing is shared with their intended audience.

Students should learn to adjust their tone and word choice to better convey their meaning and suit their audience. To develop this skill, students might write about the same topic for different audiences. For example, students could write a description of their favorite video game for a friend who also plays the game. Then, they could write a description for an adult, such as the school principal, who is unfamiliar with the game. Allowing students to write for a range of audiences enables them to think of writing as an authentic means of communication to accomplish a variety of goals.

- Revision is a stage of the writing process with two significant instructional opportunities. First, revision requires writers to consider how their ideas are communicated to their readers. Effective writers understand that when they revise, they must think about their piece and how it communicates their message to their audience. In doing so, they make revisions to improve the quality and clarity of their writing. Second, revising provides opportunities for teachers to target instruction in a way that not only enhances the current piece but also has the potential to improve the quality of future pieces (MacArthur, 2019).
- Students' awareness of their intended audience plays an essential role in shaping their decisions and approach to writing. In all stages of the writing process from developing and organizing ideas to the language the student uses, clear and effective communication requires an awareness of readers' needs and their level of knowledge about the writing topic (National Assessment Governing Board, 2017).

Writing A–Z Solution

The revision stage of the writing process provides teachers with opportunities to model strategies for improving word choice, using literary devices, and addressing an audience, task, and purpose.

- Writing A–Z includes two revision lessons and videos for grades 3 through 5 in most modules. Two revision lessons allow teachers to spend more instructional time modeling multiple approaches to revising and helping students understand the connection between their revision goals, audience, and purpose for writing. Students learn to improve their writing by adding, deleting, substituting, or rearranging words, ideas, details, and sections of text.

Revision lessons include strategies for the following elements:

Word Choice	Literary Devices	Quality/Elaboration		Audience
Precise nouns	Similes	Linking, transition, temporal words and phrases	Adding concrete details (e.g., facts, numbers, statistics)	Tone
Vivid verbs	Metaphors	Anecdotes	Deleting irrelevant details	Formal language
Precise adjectives/adverbs	Personification	Prepositional phrases	Evidence from source text	Revising lead and conclusions
Replacing weak adjective/noun or adverb/verb with precise or concrete nouns and verbs		Showing vs. telling details (sensory details and descriptive details)	Using domain-specific vocabulary and definitions for clarity	Considering readers' knowledge of specialized vocabulary
Shades of meaning; strategies for using synonyms and antonyms to revise word choice		Dialogue for clarity (thoughts, feelings, emotions, dialogue that moves plot)		Considering counterargument or opinion of the audience

“What the child can do today in collaboration, tomorrow, he will be able to do independently.”

—Lev Vygotsky



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Transcription Strand

The **transcription** strand of the Writing Rope™ represents spelling, handwriting, and keyboarding skills. Mastery of these lower-order cognitive tasks frees students' ability to focus on other strands of the rope. Lack of fluency in these skills interferes with the ability to write effectively. Foundational skills (phonics) must be taught explicitly and reinforced during writing instruction.

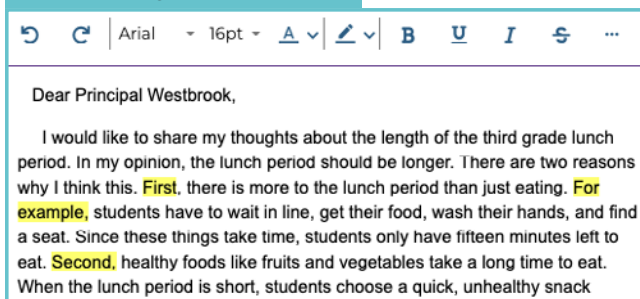
Writing A–Z does not explicitly teach handwriting or keyboarding so students can instead focus on their ideas and writing fluency rather than letter formation or spelling. However, writing is an ideal avenue for students to practice and apply the handwriting and spelling skills they learn during phonics instruction. Writing provides both an authentic opportunity for practice and a reason to learn handwriting and spelling (i.e., in order to write well).

Research

Word Processing

Basic skills such as handwriting and spelling impact students' writing fluency. Keyboarding and word processing skills can assist students who struggle with these foundational aspects of writing. Most grade 4 students are required to complete their state assessments using a computer. Word processing is a skill students will need throughout their lives.

Robust editing tools in WaLT™

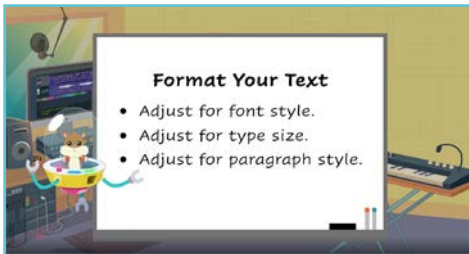


- Research has shown that in grades 4 through 12, using word processing to compose has a “fairly consistent, positive impact on the quality of students’ writing” (Graham & Perin, 2007a, p. 468). Word processing skills include typing fluently without looking at the keyboard and knowing how to add, move, delete, and format text.
- Word processing helps students learn to revise their writing as it simplifies the physical nature of adding, deleting, and rearranging their writing (MacArthur, 2019).
- Researchers recommend that students learn to type in grade 1, and by the end of grade 2 or 3, students should be able to type as fast as they can write and use a word processor to compose (What Works Clearinghouse, 2018).

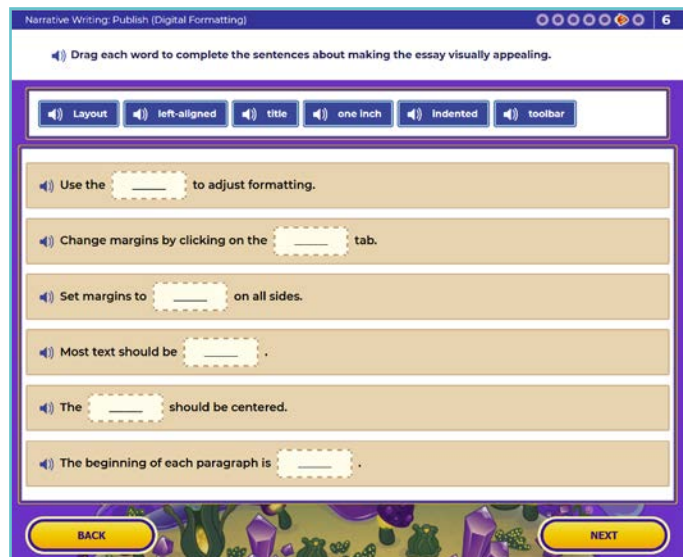
Writing A–Z Solution

In Writing A–Z, students can write using paper and pencil, or they can use the program’s word processing platform, WaLT™, in grades 2 through 5. WaLT™ supports students’ keyboarding and digital composition skills by providing a digital writing space with robust editing tools.

- Module 5 in the Writing A–Z genre units prepares students to publish and present their writing to an audience. Lessons, videos, and interactivities in these modules include instruction in formatting text (e.g., adjusting font size and style, creating bulleted and numbered lists, text alignment). Teachers can publish students’ final pieces to a secure, digital class library that is accessible to the class and parents.



Instructional videos teach students how to format text.



Interactivities support students’ understanding of digital formatting.

INCREASED WRITING INSTRUCTION AND PRACTICE

Students need committed instruction time to become effective writers. This includes time for instruction in skills and strategies for the writing process and the elements and characteristics of genres students are expected to compose. Instruction must include teacher modeling and thinking aloud, collaborative and independent practice, and time to receive actionable teacher feedback.

Research

- Devote 60 minutes daily to writing, which is ideal according to experts. Teachers should spend the first 30 minutes teaching and modeling learning strategies, skills, and techniques used by effective writers. Students should spend the last 30 minutes practicing the skills and strategies they learned during writing instruction and conferring with their peers and teacher (What Works Clearinghouse, 2018).

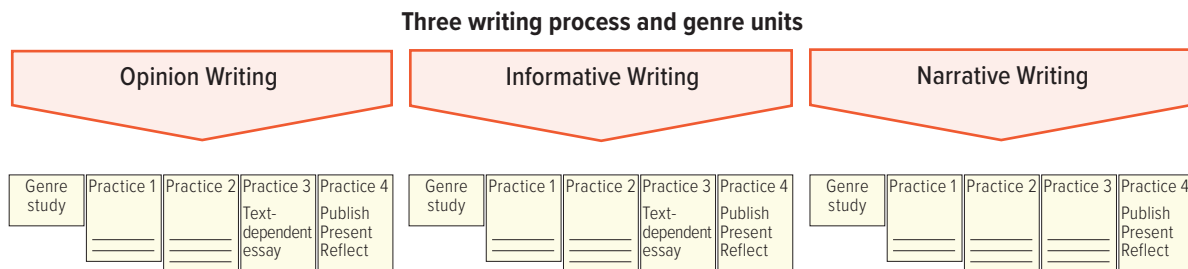
- Teach students strategies for planning, revising, and editing their compositions. This is a powerful method for struggling writers and adolescents in general (Graham & Perin, 2007a).
- Teach writing strategies through the gradual release of responsibility model: Students first receive explicit instruction, then they are supported through guided practice, and ultimately, they apply the skills they have learned independently. This method provides scaffolded support through repetition (Duke & Pearson, 2002).
- Teach students to write for a variety of purposes (Graham et al., 2012).
- Teach students about genre models, including the purpose and audience for each type. Doing so helps students develop the background knowledge needed to plan and revise their writing (Philippakos et al., 2015).

Writing A–Z Solution

Writing A–Z was designed with the understanding that teachers face challenges planning and scheduling strategic writing instruction. The scope and sequence cover the writing processes of opinion, informative, and narrative genres in eighty explicit yet flexible units, modules, and lessons. The program ensures full coverage of writing standards and increased writing time for students.

Flexible Scheduling

Each of the three genre units includes a genre study module and four writing process modules. Each module consists of five sequenced writing process lessons written in step-by-step explicit instruction.



With Writing A–Z, students experience the writing process cycle four times per genre unit (twelve times per year).

Within each unit, the writing modules build in complexity; however, teachers can teach the units and modules in any order. Because the lessons in each module build alongside the steps of the writing process, lessons should not be reordered or taught outside their respective modules.

Examples of how the units and modules in Writing A–Z can be taught in different sequences

Teach in order of the units.

Unit 1 Building a Writing Community Module 1 (5 lessons)	Unit 2 Opinion Modules 1–5 (25 lessons)	Unit 3 Informative Modules 1–5 (25 lessons)	Unit 4 Narrative Modules 1–5 (25 lessons)
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Teach units in any order—for example, to coincide with the reading block.

Unit 1 Building a Writing Community Module 1 (5 lessons)	Unit 4 Narrative Modules 1–5 (25 lessons)	Unit 3 Informative Modules 1–5 (25 lessons)	Unit 2 Opinion Modules 1–5 (25 lessons)
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Break up modules over the year.

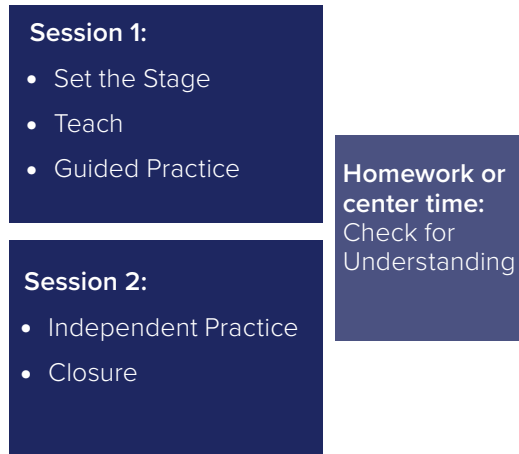
Unit 1 (5 lessons)	Unit 2 Modules 1–2 (10 lessons)	Unit 3 Modules 1–2 (10 lessons)	Unit 4 Modules 1–2 (10 lessons)	Unit 2 Module 3 (5 lessons)	Unit 3 Module 3 (5 lessons)	Unit 4 Module 3 (5 lessons)
Unit 2 Module 4 (5 lessons)	Unit 3 Module 4 (5 lessons)	Unit 4 Module 4 (5 lessons)	Unit 2 Module 5 (5 lessons)	Unit 3 Module 5 (5 lessons)	Unit 4 Module 5 (5 lessons)	



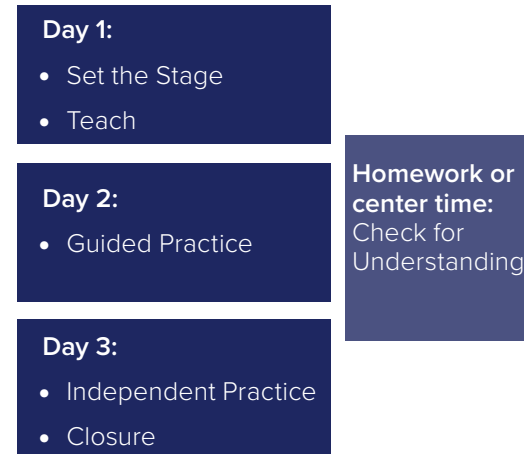
80 lessons ≠ 80 days: Many teachers do not have uninterrupted time to teach writing. To help teachers juggle scheduling constraints, Writing A–Z includes eighty flexible lessons that can be broken up into multiple writing sessions, so there is no fear of falling behind in the program.

Examples of how lessons can be broken up for flexible scheduling

Two 30-minute blocks of time:



Over multiple days:

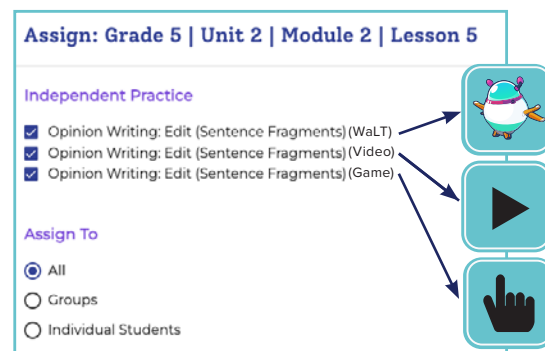


Writing A–Z lessons can be broken into manageable chunks and taught over multiple days.

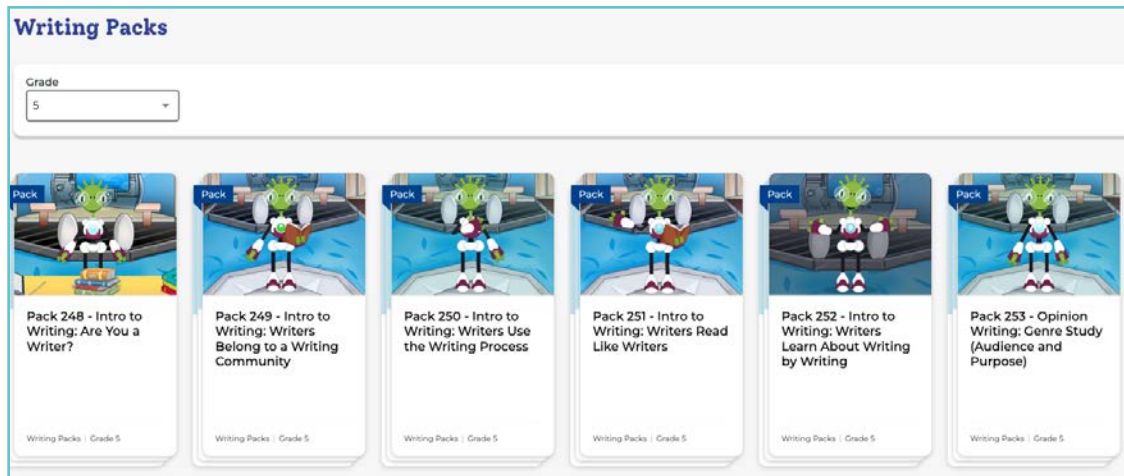
Digital Instruction

Instructional videos and interactivities accompany the I Do section of each lesson. The videos ensure students receive instruction when they need it, through accessible and engaging language and graphics. Interactivities provide an opportunity for students to actively respond to what they learned in the video. Videos and interactivities can be used for multiple purposes:

- Give students the opportunity to review a lesson for extra support or assign to students who were absent from in-class instruction
- Flip the classroom (teachers may assign a video as homework, then teach the lesson the following day)
- Assign for homework as an introduction to the lesson
- Show to the whole group by a substitute teacher.



All instructional videos and their corresponding interactivities are available as Writing Packs under Collections where they can be assigned to students outside of a writing lesson.



Writing Packs are available in the Collections.

Writing in Content Areas

The informative and opinion genres lend themselves to integrate what students are learning in their content areas. Lessons in Writing A–Z encourage students to apply their existing knowledge of those content areas to the task of writing and to gather more knowledge about particular topics in service to developing the piece they are writing.

With eighty writing lessons available, teachers are able to integrate writing with content-area instruction. The opportunity to write about what they are learning gives students more writing practice and increases reading comprehension. Writing A–Z includes Writing Process Packs, which are collections of genre-specific graphic organizers, checklists, and rubrics for content-area writing. Writing Process Packs are printable or can be completed in WaLT™.

Writing Process Pack Examples

Opinion Process Packs	Informative Process Packs	Narrative Process Packs
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Opinion Paragraph• Opinion Essay	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Inform/Explain Paragraph/Essay• How-to• Problem/Solution• Compare/Contrast	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Personal Narrative• Fictional Narrative

FEEDBACK

Research

- Feedback has a positive impact on students' writing, especially if the feedback is (1) frequent, (2) positive, (3) explains the specific problem, (4) offers specific suggestions to resolve the problem that include circling students back to their purpose for writing, and (5) expresses confidence in the student's ability to achieve their goals (Graham et al., 2019).
- Effective feedback must be timely and actionable so that it helps students (1) gauge their understanding or performance relative to the criteria for success, (2) identify what should be done to close the gap between their performance and the learning goal, and (3) identify ways to improve (Wilson, 2019). *Timely* means feedback must be given before learning concludes, and *actionable* means the feedback must be precise so that it can be transferred to future learning (Brooks et al., 2019).

Grades do not create skilled writers; feedback does.

Writing A–Z Solution

- To help teachers provide feedback aligned to learning targets, skills, and strategies, Writing A–Z strategically embeds “Look Fors” in each lesson under the You Do: Independent Practice & Teacher Conferencing drop-down. The Look Fors are conference points aligned to the lesson objectives, which helps focus the teacher's feedback on what students learned in the lesson. Placed in the You Do section of the lesson plan with students' independent writing instructions, this list helps teachers provide targeted and actionable feedback to help students improve as they actively compose.

You Do: Independent Practice & Teacher Conferencing 25 mins

Student Writing Practice
25 mins

Encourage students to use all of the revision strategies they've learned as they revise their writing. Allow more than one day for revisions. Not all targets need to be met in one independent writing session.

1. Reread their draft
2. Identify at least one weak or vague word
3. Think of synonyms that are more descriptive, precise, or specific
4. Cross out weak words and add stronger words or phrases by using a caret, writing between lines, using sticky notes, or editing the text
5. Use the Revising Checklist to continue to revise for the following:
 - state a clear topic and opinion
 - include several reasons supported by relevant details
 - use linking words
 - write a closing

Teacher Objectives

Students Will Be Able To...

- revise a draft by identifying general words and replacing them with stronger words
- identify at least one word or phrase which lacks precision or vividness in an opinion piece
- identify the word in a pair of verbs or adjectives that is more precise or more vivid than the other
- determine whether sentences with replaced words still make sense in context

Teacher Conferencing

Use independent writing time to confer with students, make informal observations, keep anecdotal records on students' progress, differentiate instruction, pull students for small group instruction, or conduct formative assessments.

1. "Look Fors" in this lesson. Are students doing the following:
 - rereading their draft and identifying weak words
 - using synonyms to replace a vague word
 - substituting weak words with stronger words or phrases
 - utilizing one or more of the strategies for revising text
2. "Look Fors" from previous lessons. Are students doing the following:
 - adding details to their draft
 - adding reasons and examples that support their opinion
 - inserting an anecdote to support at least one of the reasons
 - including a closing statement
 - using linking words to connect opinion and reasons

Conferencing Tip

Pay close attention to how students are using the strategy from the lesson. Assist students in identifying weak words, generating synonyms, and choosing a more precise, yet appropriate word. Help students rehearse the new word in the context of the sentence.

ELL Tip

Develop word consciousness by helping students notice the difference between written and spoken Standard English. Help generate synonyms for adjectives and verbs that students use in their writing and have them record the words in their writer's notebook.

Lessons include “Look Fors,” conferring points aligned to the lesson objectives, which helps focus the teacher's feedback.

- To ensure feedback is timely, Writing A–Z makes it easy for teachers to provide written and audio feedback in WaLT™.

In the In Basket, teachers see student writing and can leave audio or digital feedback.

In WaLT™, teachers can send students written and audio feedback. Students are notified when their teacher sends feedback. Feedback that is unread or has not been listened to appears in purple, and feedback that has been previously read or listened to turns white.

Students are notified when their teacher sends feedback.

- Immediate, relevant feedback is also provided for component skills that students demonstrate in interactivities. After each response, students receive either confirmatory or corrective feedback depending on the accuracy of their answer. After reading and listening to the feedback, students have an opportunity to attempt the question again in order to demonstrate their understanding of the feedback.

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