The five features of effective writing

BY KATHLEEN CALI AND KIMBERLY BOWEN

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The five Features of Effective Writing — focus, organization, support and elaboration, style, and conventions — are a valuable tool for understanding good writing and organizing your writing instruction. By teaching these features, you can help your students become more effective writers in any genre, at any level, and make your writing instruction easier to manage at the same time. This series of articles, written with the support of the North Carolina Department of Public Instruction, will show you how.

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The five features of effective writing

Teaching the features of effective writing

By organizing your instruction around focus, organization, support and elaboration, style, and conventions, you can help students become more effective writers and make your own job easier.

BY KIMBERLY BOWEN AND KATHLEEN CALI

We teach children how to read books but not how to read their own writing...Unless we show children how to read their own writing, their work will not improve."

— Donald Graves, *A Fresh Look at Writing*

At the beginning of the year, one of us asks our sophomores what aspect of their writing they would most like to improve. Inevitably, some respond "I want to improve my handwriting," or "I don't know how to use commas." Certainly penmanship and punctuation are important, but what have we done to make students think that these are the most important aspects of writing?

Teaching writing is hard and often frustrating. For decades, teachers have assigned writing, graded it, and watched pages covered in red ink stuffed into the backs of notebooks, never to be read again. Many teachers will admit to being uncomfortable teaching writing in the first place: while early grades teacher education programs spend hours upon hours on teaching reading, they spend far less time on teaching writing, and secondary teachers may have no preparation for this work at all. Students, too, can easily grow frustrated as they are asked to write more and are assessed more thoroughly on their writing than ever before, but don't see a reward for their work. More writing, as we all know, is not necessarily better writing.

Part of the difficulty in teaching and learning writing is that few tasks involve so many complex, interwoven layers as writing. Composing a piece of written communication demands an understanding of the content, knowledge of the audience and the context, and the ability to use appropriate conventions for that audience and context.

Teaching writing, learning writing, and editing our own writing is easier when we break apart these layers. This is why North Carolina now bases its writing assessments on five **Features of Effective Writing**. By focusing on what is most important in a piece of written communication, these features not only provide teachers with a more objective set

of criteria for assessing writing; they also provide students with a framework for reading and improving their own writing.

What are the Features of Effective Writing?

The five Features of Effective Writing are **focus**, **organization**, **support and elaboration**, **style**, and **conventions**.

Focus

Focus is the topic/subject established by the writer in response to the writing task. The writer must clearly establish a focus as he/she fulfills the assignment of the prompt. If the writer retreats from the subject matter presented in the prompt or addresses it too broadly, the focus is weakened. The writer may effectively use an inductive organizational plan which does not actually identify the subject matter at the beginning and may not literally identify the subject matter at all. The presence, therefore, of a focus must be determined in light of the method of development chosen by the writer. If the reader is confused about the subject matter, the writer has not effectively established a focus. If the reader is engaged and not confused, the writer probably has been effective in establishing a focus.

Organization

Organization is the progression, relatedness, and completeness of ideas. The writer establishes for the reader a well-organized composition, which exhibits a constancy of purpose through the development of elements forming an effective beginning, middle, and end. The response demonstrates a clear progression of related ideas and/or events and is unified and complete.

Support and Elaboration

Support and Elaboration is the extension and development of the topic/subject. The writer provides sufficient elaboration to present the ideas and/or events clearly. Two important concepts in determining whether details are supportive are the concepts of relatedness and sufficiency. To be supportive of the subject matter, details must be related to the focus of the response. Relatedness has to do with the directness of the relationship that the writer establishes between the information and the subject matter. Supporting details should be relevant and clear. The writer must present his/her ideas with enough power and clarity to cause the support to be sufficient. Effective use of concrete, specific details strengthens the power of the response. Insufficiency is often characterized by undeveloped details, redundancy, and the repetitious paraphrasing of the same point. Sufficiency has less to do with amount than with the weight or power of the information that is provided.

Style

Style is the control of language that is appropriate to the purpose, audience, and context of the writing task. The writer's style is evident through word choice and

sentence fluency. Skillful use of precise, purposeful vocabulary enhances the effectiveness of the composition through the use of appropriate words, phrases and descriptions that engage the audience. Sentence fluency involves using a variety of sentence styles to establish effective relationships between and among ideas, causes, and/or statements appropriate to the task.

Conventions

Conventions involve correctness in sentence formation, usage, and mechanics. The writer has control of grammatical conventions that are appropriate to the writing task. Errors, if present, do not impede the reader's understanding of the ideas conveyed.

Where did the Features originate?

The North Carolina Writing Assessment began in the 1990s by scoring student writing on four criteria: main idea, support and elaboration, organization, and coherence. With the 1999 revision to the English Language Arts Standard Course of Study, the State Board of Education and the Department of Public Instruction reevaluated this assessment. With input from educators, DPI adopted a new rubric that matches the new curriculum, meets concerns of community and business leaders, and incorporates contemporary approaches to teaching and evaluating writing. Several other states use similar models in teaching and assessing student writing.

How do the Features help teachers?

Integrating the Features of Effective Writing into the planning, drafting, revising, editing, and publishing phases of the writing process helps teachers to improve their writing instruction by:

- *Providing objective criteria for assessing student writing.* When faced with a stack of papers to grade, teachers often slip into focusing on surface details or aspects of writing that are easiest to grade. The Features help teachers to focus their comments, conferences, and direct instruction on the most critical features of effective writing.
- *Focusing direct writing instruction and conferences on the right feature at the right time.* Rather than teaching a strict sequence of composition and grammar lessons throughout the year, teachers can provide students with flexible instruction in the appropriate feature when they need it most during the writing process. Teachers can teach lessons on focus and organization when students are planning their writing. During revision, teachers can provide lessons on support and elaboration or style, or, if necessary, review focus or organization. Lessons on conventions can be reserved for the editing phase of the writing process, as students prepare their work for sharing or publication.
- *Giving equal weight (and equal instructional priority) to each feature.* Focus and style are often neglected in writing lessons, while conventions and organizations are widely taught — sometimes to excess. By giving equal weight to the five Features, teachers

can ensure that students receive the instruction they need to improve all aspects of their writing.

How do the Features help students?

The Features of Effective Writing can help students to become better writers by:

- *Allowing students to focus their attention on just one feature at a time.* By reducing the cognitive demands of writing, students can focus on the aspect of writing that is most important at each step of the writing process.
- *Providing students with more opportunities to succeed by focusing on areas of strength as well as weakness.* Evaluating student writing with five distinct scores helps students to see themselves as multidimensional writers, with weaknesses and strengths. Students who are poor spellers can be recognized for the quality of their ideas, while perfect spellers may realize that correct writing is not necessarily interesting writing. Students can learn to recognize their strengths and work to improve their areas of weakness.
- *Making expectations visible to students.* When students know the criteria by which they will be evaluated, they no longer have to rely on the teacher to make judgments about the quality of their writing. They can instead use the Features to revise their writing continually.
- *Teaching students to become critical readers of their own writing.* Students who are taught to diagnose and correct their own writing problems are on their way to becoming self-regulated, independent writers. By providing instructional support, including demonstrations of writing strategies, writing “think-alouds,” guided practice in small-group settings, conferences with teacher and peers, and opportunities to transfer strategies to new contexts and genres of writing, teachers can move students toward independence.
- *Teaching students to become critical readers of the writing of others.* Students can use the Features to evaluate their peers’ writing in order to give constructive feedback during confere nces. Students can also learn to read critically and evaluate the writing of professional authors and to appropriate their techniques.

What research says about the Features

North Carolina’s model of five Features of Effective Writing is similar to another model, the Six Traits of Writing[1], on which there has been significant recent research. Although research on the effectiveness of teaching the Six Traits[2] is relatively new, several studies show that *the quality of writing improves when students are taught to use this model to evaluate their writing.* In a study in Oregon[3], three fifth-grade classrooms where teachers taught the Six Traits as part of the writing process were compared to three classrooms in which students learned only the process. Students in the Six Traits classrooms scored higher on the state writing assessment than students in the process-only classrooms.

These preliminary results are confirmed by earlier research showing that teaching **writing scales** such as the Features of Effective Writing or the Six Traits improves the

quality of students' writing. In his meta-analysis of twenty-five years of writing research, George Hillocks (1986) concluded that writing scales were the most effective way to improve student writing.

Research also shows the importance of integrating direct instruction into the writing process. Studies of classroom instructional modes have revealed that classrooms using an "environmental" mode of instruction, in which direct instruction was integrated into the writing process, were much more effective than classrooms that used the writing process alone. Unlike the "natural process" classrooms, which were characterized by low teacher input (a lack of direct instruction and guidance) and high student input, environmental classrooms were characterized by high input from both teachers and students, including both direct instruction and guided practice in small groups. The least effective classrooms, characterized by high teacher input and low student input, focused on teaching traditional grammar and provided students with few opportunities to evaluate or revise their own writing.

Another study of effective language arts instruction in high schools, conducted by researchers at the National Center for English Learning Achievement[4], confirmed that teachers in higher achieving schools were more likely to teach skills in context, while teachers in more typical schools tended to teach skills in isolation with few opportunities for students to practice them in authentic contexts.

Other studies support teaching students specific procedures for diagnosing and correcting their own writing problems. In studies of **procedural facilitation**, students were taught to evaluate their writing using question cards that helped them *compare* their writing to their original purpose, to *diagnose* any problems, and to operate to fix the problems to match their purpose (Bereiter and Scardamalia, 1987). Researchers have also successfully used **cognitive strategy instruction** and **self-regulated strategy development**[5] to teach struggling writers procedures for planning and reviewing their writing (Harris and Graham, 1992).

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Notes

1. See http://www.nwrel.org/assessment/about.php?odelay=1&d=1.
2. See http://www.nwrel.org/assessment/pdfGeneral/Research_On_61traits_Bellamy.pd f.
3. See http://www.ncacasi.org/jsi/2000vii2/six_trait_model.
4. See http://cela.albany.edu/.
5. See http://www.education.umd.edu/literacy/srsd/srsd.htm.

Focus

BY KATHLEEN CALI

When I was in college, my English professor returned a paper to me with the comment, "Well-written, but what's your point?" At first I was incensed, but after I calmed down I realized that he might just be right — So what? What good were my fluid sentences, my clever turns of phrase, my picture-perfect spelling and grammar, if I had nothing to say? After I became an English teacher, I read more than my share of "bed-to-bed" stories and "all-about" reports that left me with that same question: "So what?" My writing and the writing of many of my students lacked a clear *focus*.

More than just the main idea

Focus is the Feature of Effective Writing that answers the question "So What?" An effective piece of writing establishes a single focus and sustains that focus throughout the piece. Just as a photographer needs to focus on a particular subject to produce a clear picture, a writer needs to focus on a single topic or main idea in order to produce an effective piece of writing. But finding a focus means more than just knowing what to photograph or write about. Good photographers also think about what they want their photograph to *communicate*. This affects their decisions about how to frame their subject in the shot, and whether to zoom in for a closeup or zoom out for a wide angle shot. Similarly, writers must think about what their topic should communicate. For a newspaper reporter, for example, finding a focus for a story means finding an "angle," a perspective from which to tell the story.

Focus, therefore, involves more than just knowing *what* your story is about, but understanding *why* you are writing it in the first place. Without a clear focus, students' stories, reports, and essays degenerate into lists of loosely related events or facts with no central idea to hold them together, leaving the reader to ask "So what?" By establishing a clear focus before they start to write, students can craft their writing into a coherent, unified whole. Finding a focus helps students find the significance in their stories, the message that they want to convey to their audience, their reason for writing.

Establishing a clear focus also helps readers understand the point of the piece of writing. Readers don't want to read a mishmosh of unrelated ideas; they read to learn something new, to be surprised, to gain a new insight on an old idea, to view something from a new perspective or angle.

Focus is also the critical feature that drives all the other features. Focus determines what choices the writer makes about everything from organizational structure to elaborative details to word choice, sentence length, and punctuation. At the same time, effective writers take advantage of the appropriate supporting features to strengthen the focus of their writing.

Finding focus: before writing and during revision

A critical factor in establishing a focus is *setting a goal*. Studies by writing researchers show that goal-setting is an important element of planning for mature adult writers (Bereiter and Scardamalia, 1987; Hayes and Flower, 1980). Bereiter and Scardamalia found that immature writers engaged in little goal-directed planning before they wrote. Instead, most of their planning occurred on the fly while they were writing, using a "what next?" strategy to write the next sentence. Rather than viewing their text as a whole, immature writers focused on localized, surface-level revisions that did little to improve the quality of the text. Bereiter and Scardamalia characterized this immature writing process as a linear "knowledge-telling" process. For mature writers, however, planning and revising were goal-directed, recursive activities that occurred at a global level throughout the writing process. As a result, for mature writers, writing becomes a "knowledge-transforming" process that not only improves the quality of their writing, but also moves them toward greater understanding of their topic.

The time for students to think about focus, therefore, is *before they begin to write*, during the prewriting phase of the writing process. Critical to establishing a focus is *knowing your audience*. Who will read the piece of writing, and why? What will readers know or expect when they sit down to read?

Author Katie Wood Ray suggests that students not only need to know what they are going to write about; they also need to be able to envision a range of possible roles, audiences, and forms for their writing. This ability to envision multiple possibilities requires exposure to a wide range of genres by a wide range of authors. Students can also use expressive writing, such as journal writing, personal experience narratives, and other forms of exploratory writing, to explore and experiment with different perspectives that will help them find their focus. Strategies such as RAFTS[1] (Role, Audience, Form, Task, Strong verb) can help students find their focus before they begin writing.

Guiding questions for focus

Although it is important for students to think about focus before they begin writing, focus can also be strengthened through thoughtful revision. Students and teachers can use these guiding questions during revision conferences to strengthen the focus of their writing.

1. What is the most important point in your piece?
2. Does the piece stay focused on the most important topic or the main event?
3. Are there any ideas or events in your story that do not strengthen the main focus?

Lesson plans[2] that help students learn to find and strengthen their focus are available.

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Notes

1. See http://www.hhs.helena.k12.mt.us/Teacherlinks/Oconnorj/persuasion.html#rafts1.
2. See http://www.learnnc.org/support/writing-lessons-focus.

Organization

BY KATHLEEN CALI

When I was a writing resource teacher, I was a fountain of formulas, ready to spout forth the appropriate formula for each type of writing: "First, Next, Last" for narratives, ASO2 (Audience, Situation, Opinion, Two Reasons) for persuasive writing, and of course, the all-purpose five-paragraph essay. For many students, writing instruction rarely extends beyond these simplistic recipes. But teaching organization is much more complicated than teaching students the formula for a five-paragraph essay. Although formulaic writing can help scaffold students' early efforts at writing a particular genre, the scaffolding must eventually be removed to allow students to grow as writers.

If *focus* is the foundation for constructing a piece of writing, *organization* is the the structural framework for that writing. Organization is important to effective writing because it provides readers with a framework to help them fulfill their expectations for the text. A well-organized piece of writing supports readers by making it easy for them to follow, while a poorly organized piece leads readers through a maze of confusion and confounded or unmet expectations.

Organization, simply put, is the logical progression and completeness of ideas in a text. Instruction in organization focuses on two areas: **text structures** specific to the particular genre and the **cohesive elements** that tie clauses, sentences, and paragraphs together into a cohesive whole.

Text structures

A **text structure** is the framework of a text's beginning, middle, and end. Different narrative and expository genres have different purposes and different audiences, and so they require different text structures. Beginnings and endings help link the text into a coherent whole.

BEGINNINGS: HOOKING YOUR READER

Where to begin is a crucial decision for a writer. Just as a good beginning can draw a reader into a piece of writing, a mediocre beginning can discourage a reader from reading further. The beginning, also called the lead or the hook, orients the reader to the purpose of the writing by introducing characters or setting (for narrative) or the topic, thesis, or argument (for expository writing). A good beginning also sets up expectations for the purpose, style, and mood of the piece. Good writers know how to hook their readers in the opening

sentences and paragraphs by using techniques such as dialogue, flashback, description, inner thoughts, and jumping right into the action.

WHAT'S IN THE MIDDLE?

The organization of the middle of a piece of writing depends on the genre. Researchers have identified five basic organizational structures: **sequence**, **description**, **cause and effect**, **compare and contrast**, and **problem and solution**.

Sequence uses time, numerical, or spatial order as the organizing structure. Some narrative genres that use a chronological sequence structure are personal narrative genres (memoir, autobiographical incident, autobiography), imaginative story genres (fairytales, folktales, fantasy, science fiction), and realistic fiction genres. Narrative story structures include an initiating event, complicating actions that build to a high point, and a resolution. Many narratives also include the protagonist's goals and obstacles that must be overcome to achieve those goals.

As early as kindergarten, children can be introduced to basic informational genres that are organized sequentially, including learning structures for writing instructions, experimental recounts and experimental procedures. Older students can learn to use timelines to organize biographies, oral histories, and recounts of current and historical events.

Description is used to describe the characteristic features and events of a specific subject ("My Cat") or a general category ("Cats"). Descriptive reports may be arranged according to categories of related attributes, moving from general categories of features to specific attributes.

Children's initial attempts at descriptive reports often are "All About" reports that have little internal organization. Informational alphabet books and riddle books [1]can be used to introduce kindergarten children to the writing of descriptive reports through shared or interactive writing. Older children can learn to develop categories of related attributes to organize their reports by using webs, concept maps, and software such as Inspiration and Kidspiration. Expectation outlines (Spiegel, 1981) are another strategy that can help students anticipate the categories of information found in a report.

Cause and Effect structure is used to show causal relationships between events. Cause and effect structures organize more sophisticated narratives as childen become more adept at showing the relationship between events. Young children also can begin to extend opinion essays by giving reasons to support their opinions using the word *because*. Signal words for cause and effect structures also include *if...then*, *as a result*, and *therefore*.

Comparison and Contrast structure is used to explain how two or more objects, events, or positions in an argument are similar or different. Graphic organizers such as venn diagrams, compare/contrast organizers, and data matrices can be used to compare features across different categories. Primary grade children can begin to use words such as *same* and *different* to compare things. Other words used to signal comparison and contrast organizational structures include *alike*, *in contrast*, *similarities*, *differences*, and *on the other hand*.

Problem and Solution requires writers to state a problem and come up with a solution. Although problem/solution structures are typically found in informational writing, realistic fiction also often uses a problem/solution structure that children can learn to identify.

ENDINGS: BEYOND "HAPPILY EVER AFTER"

Anyone who has watched a great movie for ninety minutes only to have it limp to the finish with weak ending knows that strong endings are just as critical to effective writing as strong beginnings. And anyone who has watched the director's cut of a movie with all the alternate endings knows that even great directors have trouble coming up with satisfying endings for their movies. Just like directors, writers have to decide how to wrap up the action in their stories, resolving the conflict and tying up loose ends in a way that will leave their audience satisfied. Student writers struggle with writing strong endings, often relying on the weak "I had a lot of fun" summation or the classic "It was just a dream" ending to rescue them from their stories.

The type of ending an author chooses depends on his or her purpose. When the purpose is to entertain, endings may be happy or tragic, or a surprise ending may provide a twist. Endings can be circular, looping back to the beginning so readers end where they began, or they can leave the reader hanging, wishing for more. Endings can be deliberately ambiguous or ironic, designed to make the reader think, or they can explicitly state the moral of the story, telling the reader what to think. Strong endings for expository texts can summarize the highlights, restate the main points, or end with a final zinger statement to drive home the main point to the audience.

Cohesion: the glue that holds the structure together

If narrative and expository structures are the framework, cohesive elements such as transition words are the glue that holds these structural elements together. Transition words show the relationship between different sentences and ideas. Poor writers tend to loosely connect their sentences with *and* and *then*. Good writers use transition words that show causal and logical relationships between words, sentences and paragraphs, such as *because* and *after*.

TRANSITION WORDS

There are six categories of transition words:

1. **Spatial order.** Words used in descriptive writing to signal spatial relationships, such as *above*, *below*, *beside*, *nearby*, *beyond*, *inside*, and *outside*.
2. **Time order.** Words used in writing narratives, and instructions to signal chronological sequence, such as before, after, first, next, then, when, finally, while, as, during, earlier, later, and meanwhile.
3. **Numerical order.** Words used in expository writing to signal order of importance, such as *first*, *second*, *also*, *finally*, *in addition*, *equally important*, and *more or less importantly*.
4. **Cause/effect order.** Words used in expository writing to signal causal relationships, such as *because, since, for, so, as a result, consequently, thus, and hence*.
5. **Comparison/contrast order.** Words used in expository writing to signal similarities and differences, such as (for similarities) *also, additionally, just as, as if, as though, like,*

and *similarly*; and (for differences) *but, yet, only, although, whereas, in contrast, conversely, however, on the other hand, rather, instead, in spite of,* and *nevertheless.*

6. **General/specific order.** Words used in descriptive reports and arguments to signal more specific elaboration on an idea, such as *for example, such as, like, namely, for instance, that is, in fact, in other words,* and *indeed.*

GUIDING QUESTIONS FOR ORGANIZATION

These **guiding questions for organization** can help students make sure that they have provided coherent transitions between the ideas in their writing.

- Does your piece have a clear beginning, middle, and end?
- Does your piece have a strong beginning that hooks the reader?
- Does your piece have a strong ending that fits the focus?
- Are the ideas and actions connected to each other?
- Can your reader follow the piece logically from beginning to end?
- Is it complete? Does it feel finished?

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Notes

1. See http://www.readwritethink.org/lessons/lesson_view.asp?id=73.

Support and elaboration

BY KATHLEEN CALI

Support and elaboration consists of the specific details and information writers use to develop their topic. The key to developing support and elaboration is getting *specific*. Good writers use concrete, specific details, and relevant information to construct mental images for their readers. Without this attention to detail, readers struggle to picture what the writer is talking about, and will often give up altogether.

Two important concepts in support and elaboration are *sufficiency* and *relatedness*.

Sufficiency refers the amount of detail — is there enough detail to support the topic? Any parent who has asked his or her child what happened at school knows how hard it is to get a child to elaborate on a subject. Teachers have a similar problem getting their students to elaborate when they write. Good writers supply their readers with sufficient details to comprehend what they have written. In narrative writing, this means providing enough descriptive details for the reader to construct a picture of the story in their mind. In expository writing, this means not only finding enough information to support your purpose, whether it is to inform or persuade your audience, but also finding information that is credible and accurate.

Sufficiency, however, is not enough. The power of your information is determined less by the quantity of details than by their *quality*.

Relatedness refers to the quality of the details and their relevance to the topic. Good writers select only the details that will support their focus, deleting irrelevant information. In narrative writing, details should be included only if they are concrete, specific details that contribute to, rather than detract from, the picture provided by the narrative. In expository writing, information should be included only if it is relevant to the writer's goal and strengthens rather than weakens the writer's ability to meet that goal.

Teaching support and elaboration

The first step in developing a story or essay is learning to add sufficient information. In many classrooms, the recipe for improving support and elaboration is to "sprinkle" a piece of writing with more details. But randomly adding details without relating them to the overall purpose of the writing rarely improves quality.

Why do students have so much trouble developing and elaborating on their topics? Many of the problems students have with elaboration stem from their **inability to take the perspective of their readers**. In oral language, children have conversational partners who

can ask for more information as it is needed. When students make the transition from oral to written language, they need to learn to provide those conversational prompts for more information on their own. This means they need to learn to think like a reader, to read their own writing from the reader's perspective, filling in the gaps for an audience that is not physically present.

Conferencing is at the heart of helping students develop support and elaboration in their writing. Students can learn to revise by asking questions about their writing and the writing of others during conferences with the teacher and with peers. Teachers can first model how to ask questions to add more information, from general requests to "tell me more" to more specific "who, what, where, when, why, and how" questions. Once students have learned to ask questions and add information, they can learn to delete irrelevant details that weaken the writing and to make details more specific and concrete.

Show, don't tell: support and elaboration in narrative writing

The best advice for developing support and elaboration in narrative writing is "Show, don't tell." Good writers help their readers imagine the story by describing the action, providing sensory descriptions, and explaining characters' thoughts and feelings. Poets are especially adept at using precise details to focus on specific, concrete, observable things or experiences.

Some ways that writers "show, don't tell" include the following:

- **Description of action.** Students often have difficulty elaborating on action in their narratives. Many beginning writers rush through the action in a story, condensing it into a few short sentences. Just as slow-motion replay helps television viewers understand the action in a sporting event, good writers can slow down a moment, breaking down an event into a moment-by-moment replay of the action. Students can learn to use slow motion replays to slow down a moment and to use action chains to elaborate on the actions in a sentence.
- **Description of physical states.** Good writers use sensory details to provide their readers with concrete images that help them construct a picture of what is happening in the story. Good writers use sensory details to show readers what things in their story look like, sound like, smell like, taste like, and feel like. Similes and metaphors can also help readers construct a picture by comparing the object being described to something they know. Students can learn to construct images with words by identifying the imagery in poetry and using guided imagery to construct their own word pictures.
- **Descriptions of internal states.** Although most students would rather watch the movie than read the book, books have an advantage over movies because they let the reader inside the characters' thoughts and feelings. Beginning writers, though, often neglect to include either their own or their character's thoughts and feelings when they write. "Thoughtshots" (Lane, 1999) and journals help students get inside the minds of their characters and reveal their inner thoughts and feelings. Thoughtshots and journals can also be used to help students learn to take different perspectives by getting inside the minds of people from different times, places, cultures, and backgrounds. Good

writers also use dialogue to reveal a character's personality, internal thoughts, and feelings and to provide background information about the story.

Finding the right information: support and elaboration in expository writing

Information is the key to developing support and elaboration in the expository genres — informational, critical, and argumentative writing. While writers of narratives can often rely solely on their own observations and inner resources to develop their writing, writers of expository genres have to look outside themselves for the information they need to develop their writing. As a result, in expository writing, the ability to find relevant information is just as important as the ability to effectively use that information to develop a topic. Knowing how to use facts, statistics, examples, and anecdotes to develop a topic is not enough; students also need to learn the research, evaluation, and notetaking skills that will help them find that information.

Finding sufficient information. In the Information Age, students have no trouble finding lots and lots of information on any subject they can type into an Internet search engine. Many students never bother to consider the source of their information, though, giving equal weight to information they find in the equivalents of the *New York Times* and the *National Enquirer*. The real challenge, then, is not finding sufficient information, but teaching students to separate the wheat from the chaff.

As a result, *teaching students research and evaluation skills is critical to the development of support and elaboration in expository writing*. Students need to be taught how to (a) locate multiple sources of information in books, on the internet, and from people in their communities, (b) critically evaluate the credibility, accuracy, and relevance of that information, (c) separate fact from opinion, and (d) cite their sources so their readers can make their own judgments about the credibility of their information. In addition, teaching notetaking and summarization skills cuts down on plagiarism by helping students learn to translate ideas into their own words.

Finding relevant information. Knowing who the audience of a piece of writing will be is critical to developing relevant support. When children target their writing to a specific audience, they quickly learn to select only the information that is relevant to that audience. Information that is convincing or useful for one audience may have no effect on a different audience.

Students can learn rhetorical techniques to tailor their support to their audience, asking whether their audience would respond better to using facts, statistics, or personal anecdotes to support their argument. Students can also learn strategies for selecting the information that is strongest and most relevant to their audience, to delete weak, irrelevant information, and to arrange their information from strongest to weakest. Summarizing the same information for different audiences also helps students learn to identify the facts that are relevant to a specific audience.

Guiding questions for support and elaboration

FOR NARRATIVE WRITING:

- Is your story developed with specific details that are related to the main event?
- Do all of the details move the story along?
- Does your story have enough elaboration so that your reader can see and feel what is happening? Can you show me an example where your reader can see or feel what is happening?

FOR INFORMATIONAL WRITING:

- Is your essay developed with specific information (facts, statistics, etc.) that is related to the main topic?
- Does all of the information support the main topic?
- Does your essay have enough information to fulfill your reader's needs?

FOR ARGUMENTATIVE WRITING:

- Is your essay developed with specific details that are related to the main topic?
- Does all of the information support the main argument?
- Does your essay have enough supporting evidence to persuade your reader?

References

NARRATIVE WRITING

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INFORMATIONAL WRITING

Harvey, Stephanie (1998). *Non-Fiction Matters: Reading, Writing, and Research in Grades 3-8*. Portland, ME: Stenhouse.

Stead, Tony (2002). *Is That a Fact? Teaching Non-Fiction Writing K-3*. Portland, ME: Stenhouse.

Capital Community College Guide To Grammar and Writing[1]. This guide to grammar and writing includes sections on developing an argument and rhetorical devices.

Notes

1. See http://www.ccc.commnet.edu/grammar/.

Style

BY KATHLEEN CALI

A writer's style is what sets his or her writing apart and makes it unique. Style is the way writing is dressed up (or down) to fit the specific context, purpose, or audience. Word choice, sentence fluency, and the writer's voice — all contribute to the style of a piece of writing. How a writer chooses words and structures sentences to achieve a certain effect is also an element of style. When Thomas Paine wrote "These are the times that try men's souls," he arranged his words to convey a sense of urgency and desperation. Had he written "These are bad times," it's likely he wouldn't have made such an impact!

Style is usually considered to be the province of literary writers. Novelists such as Ernest Hemingway and William Faulkner and poets such as Emily Dickinson and Walt Whitman are well known for their distinctive literary styles. But journalists, scientists, historians, and mathematicians also have distinctive styles, and they need to know how to vary their styles to fit different audiences. For example, the first-person narrative style of a popular magazine like *National Geographic* is quite different from the objective, third-person expository style of a research journal like *Scientific American*, even though both are written for informational purposes.

Not just right and wrong

Style is not a matter of right and wrong but of what is appropriate for a particular setting and audience. Consider the following two passages, which were written by the same author on the same topic with the same main idea, yet have very different styles:

> "Experiments show that Heliconius butterflies are less likely to ovipost on host plants that possess eggs or egg-like structures. These egg mimics are an unambiguous example of a plant trait evolved in response to a host-restricted group of insect herbivores."
>
> "Heliconius butterflies lay their eggs on Passiflora vines. In defense the vines seem to have evolved fake eggs that make it look to the butterflies as if eggs have already been laid on them." (Example from Myers, G. (1992). *Writing biology: Texts in the social construction of scientific knowledge*. Madison: University of Wisconsin Press. p. 150.)

What changed was the *audience*. The first passage was written for a professional journal read by other biologists, so the style is authoritative and impersonal, using technical terminology suited to a professional audience. The second passage, written for a popular science magazine, uses a more dramatic style, setting up a conflict between the butterflies

and the vines, and using familiar words to help readers from non-scientific backgrounds visualize the scientific concept being described. Each style is appropriate for the particular audience.

Elements of style

Many elements of writing contribute to an author's style, but three of the most important are *word choice*, *sentence fluency*, and *voice*.

WORD CHOICE

Good writers are concise and precise, weeding out unnecessary words and choosing the exact word to convey meaning. Precise words — active verbs, concrete nouns, specific adjectives — help the reader visualize the sentence. Good writers use adjectives sparingly and adverbs rarely, letting their nouns and verbs do the work.

Good writers also choose words that contribute to the flow of a sentence. Polysyllabic words, alliteration, and consonance can be used to create sentences that roll off the tongue. Onomatopoeia and short, staccato words can be used to break up the rhythm of a sentence.

SENTENCE FLUENCY

Sentence fluency is the flow and rhythm of phrases and sentences. Good writers use a variety of sentences with different lengths and rhythms to achieve different effects. They use parallel structures within sentences and paragraphs to reflect parallel ideas, but also know how to avoid monotony by varying their sentence structures.

Good writers also arrange their ideas within a sentence for greatest effect. They avoid loose sentences, deleting extraneous words and rearranging their ideas for effect. Many students initially write with a looser oral style, adding words on to the end of a sentence in the order they come to mind. This rambling style is often described as a "word dump" where everything in a student's mind is dumped onto the paper in no particular order. There is nothing wrong with a word dump *as a starting point*: the advantage of writing over speaking is that writers can return to their words, rethink them, and revise them for effect. Tighter, more readable style results when writers choose their words carefully, delete redundancies, make vague words more specific, and use subordinate clauses and phrases to rearrange their ideas for the greatest effect.

VOICE

Because voice is difficult to measure reliably, it is often left out of scoring formulas for writing tests. Yet *voice* is an essential element of style that reveals the writer's personality. A writer's voice can be impersonal or chatty, authoritative or reflective, objective or passionate, serious or funny.

Teaching style

READ-ALOUDS

The best way to teach students about style is to have them *listen*. Listening to good writing read aloud will help students develop an ear for different styles. The best writers have a distinctive style that readers can most appreciate when they hear it aloud rather than reading it silently. As students develop their ear for different styles, they can compare the styles of different authors in the same genre, examine how writers change their styles for different audiences, and consider which styles are most effective for different audiences, genres, and contexts. Read-alouds of picturebooks, poetry, and plays help students develop an ear for language that they can transfer to their writing.

When you read aloud in class, have students **think of the reading as a performance**. Many an ear for language has been deadened by that dreaded classroom affliction — round-robin reading. The worst way to teach students about style is to have them read aloud with no rehearsal. A writer's style is lost when students stumble and stutter over unfamiliar words. Instead, reading aloud should include activities such as reader's theater, choral reading of refrains, and echo reading that **give students the opportunity to rehearse** the writer's style and cadence before reading to an audience. Reading aloud for an audience also helps students become aware of the effect of word choice, sentence structure, and voice on that audience.

MEMORIZATION

Although memorizing and reciting poems, folktales, speeches, sermons, soliloquies, and songs may seem archaic, memorization helps students internalize different oratorical and poetic styles. Teaching students oratorical and storytelling techniques can help them think about how words and sentence structures are used for dramatic effect. Even memorizing a joke helps students think about style.

WRITING IN DIFFERENT VOICES

Differences in characters' personalities — their styles — are often revealed through the words they speak. Younger students can practice assuming different voices: angry, sad, whiny, excited, scared, dreamy. What words would they use? What would the words sound like? Would their sentences be long or short? Older students often have difficulty moving away from a chatty, conversational voice to the more authoritative voice of expository writing genres; practice with an emphasis on voice will help.

FINDING LIVELIER WORDS

Elementary students should learn to use a thesaurus. Have them make *word collections* of strong verbs, concrete nouns, and precise adjectives and adverbs. Ask them to identify vague, generic words in their own writing and brainstorm livelier alternatives.

Older students can learn to envision themselves in the setting they are describing and brainstorm words that concisely convey vital elements of that setting. As Partricia O'Connor writes, "If you ride, think of a horse's gait: walk, trot, canter, gallop. If you're

musical, use your toe or an imaginary baton to mark the tempo: adagio, andante, allegro, presto. Think of an oncoming train, the waves of the sea, wheels on a cobblestone street."

SENTENCE COMBINING

One of the most effective methods for helping students develop sentence fluency is sentence combining. In *sentence combining* activities, students combine short sentences into fluid passages. Sentence combining helps students move away from the short, choppy simple sentences of beginning writers toward longer, more complex sentences. These activities can also help students learn to tighten up their sentences and to rearrange them to achieve different effects. Strong (2001) uses sentence-combining activities to study the stylistic choices that professional writers make.

References

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Zinsser, William. (2001). *On Writing Well: The Classic Guide to Writing Non-Fiction*. (6th edition). New York: Harper-Collins.

On the Web

Lesson plans with style

http://www.learnnc.org/support/writing-lessons-style

Ideas for teaching style to your students.

Ernest Hemingway's Kansas City Star Stories

http://www.kansascity.com/mld/kansascity/news/special_packages/hemingway/

Newspaper articles published in the Kansas City Star and thought to be authored by Hemingway.

William Faulkner on the Web

http://www.mcsr.olemiss.edu/%7Eegjbp/faulkner/n-sf.html

This excerpt from the Faulkner's *The Sound and the Fury*, told from the point of view of Benjy, a mentally retarded character, is a good example of how different characters can speak in different styles.

Conventions

What research and best practice show about teaching grammar and spelling.

BY KATHLEEN CALI

> The teaching of formal grammar has a negligible or, because it usually displaces some instruction and practice in actual composition, even a harmful effect on the improvement of writing.
>
> — Braddock, Lloyd-Jones, and Schoer, 1963, quoted in Hillocks, 1986, p. 133

Fifty years of research into grammar instruction confirms what many teachers have long suspected: when it comes to improving writing, traditional grammar instruction simply does not work. In fact, the most unequivocal conclusion reached by George Hillocks in his 1986 meta-analysis of twenty-five years of writing research was that traditional grammar instruction was *the most ineffective method of improving writing*.

Many teachers, though, worry that throwing out all instruction in grammar and conventions will produce a generation of students who are unable to write an intelligible sentence. So what's a teacher to do? Rather than eliminating instruction in conventions, the Features of Effective Writing model puts conventions in their proper place in the writing process — at the end, where they can be considered only after students have revised their writing for the other four features, as they prepare to publish their work.

What are conventions?

Conventions are the surface features of writing — **mechanics, usage, and sentence formation**. Conventions are a courtesy to the reader, making writing easier to read by putting it in a form that the reader expects and is comfortable with.

MECHANICS

Mechanics are the conventions of print that do not exist in oral language, including spelling, punctuation, capitalization, and paragraphs. Because they do not exist in oral language, students have to consciously learn how mechanics function in written language.

For example, while speakers do not have to be conscious of the spellings of words, writers not only have to use standard spelling for each word but may even have to use different spellings for words that sound the same but have different meanings. The same

holds true for punctuation: speakers do not have to think consciously about intonation and pauses, but writers have to decide where to use a period instead of a comma and how to indicate that they are quoting someone's exact words.

USAGE

Usage refers to conventions of both written and spoken language that include word order, verb tense, and subject-verb agreement. Usage may be easier than mechanics to teach because children enter school with a basic knowledge of how to use language to communicate. As children are learning to use oral language, they experiment with usage and learn by practice what is expected and appropriate.

However, the oral language that many children use at home is often very different from formal "school" language. In addition, children who speak a language other than English at home may use different grammatical rules, word order, and verb conjugations. Although it may be easier to teach "correct" usage when a child's oral language at home is already very similar to school language, children from all oral language backgrounds benefit from learning about how language is used in different situations.

SENTENCE FORMATION

Sentence formation refers to the structure of sentences, the way that phrases and clauses are used to form simple and complex sentences. In oral language, words and sentences cannot be changed once they have been spoken. But the physical nature of writing allows writers to craft their sentences, combining and rearranging related ideas into a single, more compact sentence. As students become more adept at expressing their ideas in written language, their sentences become longer and more complex.

Conventions in the writing process: last, not first

Teaching conventions in isolation is ineffective at best, because students need opportunities to *apply* their knowledge of conventions to their writing. Even daily oral language activities are a waste of time for students without procedural knowledge of how and when to use conventions in writing. Consequently, the most effective way to teach conventions is to integrate instruction directly into the writing process.

Attention to conventions too early in the writing process, however, can interfere with both students' development of *automaticity*. Writers need the ability to automatically juggle the many physical and cognitive aspects of writing — letter formation, spelling, word order, grammar, vocabulary, and ideas — without consciously thinking about them. The only way to develop this automaticity in writing is to practice, practice, practice. For many students, however, most daily writing is limited to filling in the blanks on worksheets.

The first step to improving automaticity, then, is to provide daily opportunities to write for extended periods of time. Initially, this writing should be single-draft writing only, using phonic spelling, with no physical editing of their writing by either the teacher or the student. Only when students grow more automatic in their writing should teachers introduce conventions into the writing process.

Students' **motivation to write** also suffers when teachers focus on conventions first and ideas last. Many students have little self-confidence when they write because teachers and parents have been too quick to point out their errors instead of praising their ideas first. This problem can be solved by having students share first drafts in a positive, conversational atmosphere that focuses only on the content of their writing, with no correction of errors (Cunningham, Hall, and Cunningham, 2003).

The proper place for teaching conventions, then, is at the end of the writing process, during the editing phase, when students are preparing their writing for publication. When students know that their work will be published for a specific audience, they are more motivated to learn the conventions that will make their writing readable and to edit for those conventions.

Conventions in the primary grades (K-2)

Because primary students should be concentrating first on developing fluency in written language, their **first draft writing should not be corrected** for usage, spelling, or punctuation. Instead, primary students should begin to develop an ear for their writing by publishing their writing orally. Many teachers have a five-minute "sharing time" or "author's chair" time every day at the end of their writing workshop time, when four to five students have a chance to read their drafts aloud to the rest of the class.

Once students have learned to produce fluent single draft writing, usually by the middle of second grade, they can begin to add very simple editing rules. Ask questions such as "Does each sentence start with a capital letter?" and "Does each sentence make sense?" (Cunningham, Hall, & Cunningham, 2003). Primary students can also learn strategies for proofreading their drafts, such as the "Mumbling Together[1]" DPI writing strategy lesson. Daily practice with oral language can also help.

MECHANICS

Because spelling, punctuation, and capitalization, are easier for young children to physically see and correct in their writing, those are the first conventions students should learn to edit in their writing.

Spelling. For beginning writers, correct spelling is less important than having opportunities to apply their emerging knowledge of the alphabetic principle to their own writing. ***Phonic spelling*** (also called *invented spelling*) allows beginning writers to apply their developing knowledge of phonics to sound out the spelling of words as they write. However, because over fifty percent of the words students encounter are high-frequency sight words that are rarely spelled phonetically (such as "they"), beginning writers also need to learn strategies for spelling these words. *Word walls* provide students with a tool for learning the correct spellings of high-frequency words and applying them in their daily writing (Cunningham & Hall, 2000).

Punctuation and capitalization. Primary students can begin to learn the basic functions of punctuation marks and capitalization during shared reading and writing lessons. During the second or third read-aloud of a book, teachers can point out different punctuation marks and talk about why the author used them. Teachers can model the use

of punctuation marks during shared writing activities, and then encourage students to use punctuation marks in their own writing. One of the first editing rules that students can learn is to end each sentence with a period.

USAGE AND SENTENCE FORMATION

While memorizing definitions of parts of speech in isolation is not effective, students do need to know how to talk about the words they encounter when they read and write. Teachers can talk about why an author uses particular adjectives or verbs in their writing. The "Be the Sentence[2]" lesson from DPI Writing Strategies helps students experience physically how parts of speech and punctuation marks fit together to make different kinds of simple sentences.

Conventions in the elementary grades (3-5)

As upper elementary students become more adept at juggling the various aspects of writing, they can begin to focus more of their attention on conventions. At the same time, upper elementary students are beginning to branch out into writing in different content-area subjects and need to learn how conventions vary for different writing genres.

Although conventions are an important feature of effective writing, many students never move beyond surface-level editing to actually revising the content of their writing. This is why it is especially important to emphasize to upper elementary students that editing should be reserved for the end of the writing process, only after they have revised their work for the other four features.

Upper elementary students can learn proofreading symbols and act as editors for their peers. Have students skip lines in their early drafts to provide room for revision comments and editing marks. Because these students are growing more conscious of the opinions of others, providing opportunities to write for audiences other than their teachers and classmates can also help them become aware of the importance of editing their writing before they publish.

MECHANICS

Spelling. As students begin to encounter more difficult words, usually around second grade, they can no longer rely exclusively on the "sound it out" strategy to spell unfamiliar words. This is the point at which many students are first diagnosed with reading or writing disabilities. Many of these students can be "cured" of their disabilities through an understanding of the nature of the English language and a repertoire of spelling strategies.

Unlike phonetically regular languages such as Spanish, English includes many words whose spellings are determined by *morphology*; that is, their spelling is driven by meaning rather than by pronunciation. (This morphological basis for spelling allows English speakers in North and South Carolina to spell "Beaufort" the same way, even though they pronounce it differently.) This means that **students can use words they know to figure out the spelling of unknown words**. For example, a student who can't decide whether to spell the word "medicine" with a "c" or an "s" can think of related words, such as "medic" and

"medical", that use a "c". Other examples are using "bombardment" to identify the silent "b" in "bomb." Besides using familiar words, students can also use "Making Words" and word sorting activities to help them learn English spelling patterns. Students can also learn to use prefixes and suffixes from words they know to help them spell unfamiliar words (Cunningham, 2000).

Word walls are also an effective strategy for teaching upper elementary students to spell high-frequency words. For older students, homonyms, "spelling demons," and other frequently misspelled words can be added to the word wall. Lists of words for different units of study can also be posted on separate bulletin boards to help students correctly spell key vocabulary words. In addition, students who move to different classrooms during the day can use individual word wall folders with high frequency words (Cunningham & Hall, 2000).

Finally, upper elementary students can also use phonic spelling as a placeholder when they are unsure about correct spellings in their early drafts, with the understanding that they will identify misspelled words and correct them during the editing stage.

USAGE

Upper elementary students should start editing their writing using simple editing rules such as subject-verb agreement, verb tense consistency, and pronoun usage. As students increase the range of genres they write, they can also learn that different genres tend to use different verb tenses: past tense for narratives and recounts of science experiments; present tense for informational reports, instructions, recipes, and explanations; and future tense for plans and proposals.

SENTENCE FORMATION

For older students, problems with punctuation, sentence fragments, and run-on sentences are usually related to difficulties producing more complex sentences.

Problems with **sentence fragments** usually mean that students do not know how to combine simple sentences into more complex sentences that use subordinate clauses. Sentence combining lessons can show students alternative ways to combine simple sentences into more complex sentences, using the correct punctuation.

Run-on sentences also provide a good opportunity to teach students parts of speech, such as nouns, verbs, and coordinate conjunctions that can help them divide run-on sentences into self-sufficient complete sentences. In addition, many students have problems with run-on sentences because they want to show that two sentences are related; teaching students to use a semicolon to link two closely related sentences can solve this problem. Other punctuation marks can be introduced, as well, to show the relationships between clauses in complex sentences.

Conventions in middle and high school

By the time students enter middle school, they should have developed control of the basic conventions of written language, as well as the vocabulary to be able to talk about how

those conventions are used in their writing. So what's left to learn about conventions in middle and high school?

Middle and high school students first need to consistently edit their own work for appropriate conventions. They are then ready to **explore how conventions are used in specific contexts and genres** to achieve a particular effect with an audience. Rather than editing conventions only at the word and sentence level, students can begin to **understand how conventions contribute to the reader's understanding of the text as a whole**. At the same time, they can study how professional writers defy these conventions to achieve certain effects.

MECHANICS

By **middle school**, students should have control of conventions such as spelling, punctuation, and paragraphing. Spelling should be more a matter of acquiring specialized content-area vocabulary than learning new spelling strategies. Students should have a repertoire of spelling strategies to help them identify potentially misspelled words in their writing. They also should know how to use tools such as dictionaries and spell-checkers to check for the correct spelling.

Students should now learn how to use conventions that are specific to different genres, such as conventions for friendly letters and business letters, capitalizing lines in poetry, headings and subheadings in informational reports, and conventions for bibliographic citations.

USAGE

By sixth grade, students should have mastered basic knowledge of usage, such as word order, subject-verb agreement, verb tenses, and correct use of modifiers. In **middle school**, they can begin to use nominative, objective, and possessive pronouns appropriately and to check that pronouns match their antecedents. They can extend their knowledge of appropriate usage to different dialects, comparing usage in informal, ethnic, and regional dialects to standard English usage. Students can also compare usage in oral and written language by comparing quoted speech in literature to language used by the narrator or by translating written language into oral speech. Once students reach **high school**, they are ready to explore usage in different contexts and genres.

SENTENCE FORMATION

By **middle school**, students are ready experiment with using varying sentence lengths to achieve specific effects on an audience. They are also ready to use (and punctuate) dependent and independent clauses by combining simple sentences into more complex sentences.

High school students can further refine their writing by learning to structure their sentences and paragraphs to achieve specific effects in their writing. Students can use parallel structures within their sentences to make them easier to read. Students can also structure their sentences and paragraphs to emphasize the new information they provide about their topic. Passive voice, for example, can be used to emphasize the object of an action rather than the actor. (Had the preceding sentence been written as "Students can

emphasize the object of an action by using passive voice," the term *passive voice* would have been diminished in importance.)

High school students can also use sentence-combining activities to practice embedding information within subordinate clauses. In addition, they can use techniques specific to informational writing, such as *nominalization*, which converts actions into objects or processes in order to pack more information into a sentence. For example, the five-word sentence, "The group mobilized its forces" can be converted into a five-word phrase, "The mobilization of the group's forces," that can be used as the subject or object of a sentence.

Guiding questions for conventions in elementary grades

1. Are your sentences complete?
    - Do you have any sentence fragments that need to be completed?
    - Do you have run-on sentences?
2. Does your piece demonstrate standard usage?
    - Is there subject-verb agreement?
    - Is there consistency in verb tense?
    - Are pronouns used correctly?
    - Are all your words used correctly?
3. Are punctuation, capitalization, spelling, and paragraphs used correctly in your piece?
    - Does your punctuation make your piece hard to read?
    - Have you used capital letters for the first word in a sentence and proper nouns?
    - Have you spelled most common words correctly?
    - Do misspelled words in your piecve make it hard to read?
    - Have you used paragraphs appropriately?

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Notes

1. See http://www.learnnc.org/lessons/writing3142003234.
2. See http://www.learnnc.org/lessons/writing3142003727.

Further reading

An annotated bibliography on the Features of Effective Writing.

BY KATHLEEN CALI

General

Applebee, Arthur. (2000). "Alternative Models of Writing Development." In R. Indrisano & J. Squire (Eds.), *Perspectives on Writing: Research, Theory, and Practice*. Newark, DE: International Reading Association. Available online at http://cela.albany .edu/publication/article/writing.htm (see http://cela.albany.edu/publication/article/writing.htm).

> This chapter by the director of the national Center for English Language Achievement summarizes research on writing development and reports by the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP). The chapter examines research on students' purposes for writing, the development of fluency and control of written language, knowledge of text structures and strategic processes, and the social component of writing development.

Lane, Barry. (1999). *The Reviser's Toolbox*. Shoreham, VT: Discover Writing Press.

> In this book, Barry Lane provides ideas for helping students revise their drafts by learning to focus their writing, write better leads and endings, expand their drafts using Snapshots and Thoughtshots, and other revision strategies.

Ray, Katie Wood. (1999). *Wondrous Words: Writers and Writing in the Elementary Classroom*. Urbana, IL: National Council of Teachers of English.

> Ray has collected a myriad of examples of good writing from picturebooks and other literature that can be used to help students "envision" the possibilities for their writing. She includes examples of books to teach students different possibilities for text structures, ways with words, use of nouns, verbs, adjectives, conjunctions, paragraphing, punctuation, and other conventions of print.

Spandel, Vickie. (2001). *Creating Writers: Through 6-Trait Writing Assessment and Instruction* (3rd Edition). New York: Longman.

> Six-Traits trainer Spandel has developed lessons and student writing samples for each of the Six Traits which can be easily adapted to the Five Features.

Stead, Tony. (2002). *Is that a fact? Nonfiction writing K-3*. Portland, ME: Stenhouse.

Why wait until middle school to teach children informational writing? Stead provides lessons, bibliographies of nonfiction books, and detailed rubrics for teaching primary students to write a variety of nonfiction genres, including instructions, reports, scientific explanations, persuasive writing, and nonfiction narratives.

Strong, William. (2001). *Coaching Writing*. Portsmouth, NH: Heinemann.

Strong extends his expertise in sentence-combining to lessons on teaching middle and high school students to improve their grammar, usage, style, and voice through sentence combining activities and writing models.

Focus

Lane, Barry. (1999). *The Reviser's Toolbox*. Shoreham, VT: Discover Writing Press.

In this book, Barry Lane provides ideas for helping students revise their drafts by learning to focus their writing, write better leads and endings, expand their drafts using Snapshots and Thoughtshots, and other revision strategies.

Organization

Buss, Kathleen, & Karnowski, Lee. (2000). *Reading and Writing Literary Genres*. Newark, DE: International Reading Association.

Buss, Kathleen & Karnowski, Lee. (2002). *Reading and Writing Nonfiction Genres*. Newark, DE: International Reading Association.

These companion books provide lessons for teaching the organizational structures of a number of narrative, informational, and argumentative genres to elementary children.

Fletcher, Ralph. (1993). *What a Writer Needs*. Portsmouth, NH: Heineman n.

Fletcher includes useful lessons on different types of beginnings and endings.

Harris, Karen R., & Graham, Steve. (1992). *Helping Young Writers Master the Craft: Strategy Instruction and Self-regulation in the Writing Process*. Cambridge, MA: Brookline Books.

Although this book targets students with learning disabilities, the authors provide organizational supports and self-regulation strategies that can help all inexperienced or struggling writers.

Murphy, Pamela. (July, 2003). *Discovering the Ending in the Beginning*. Language Arts, Vol. 80, No. 6, pp. 461-469. In this article, Murphy shows how good writers lay the foundation for their endings from the very beginning of their piece.

Ray, Katie Wood. (1999). *Wondrous Words: Writers and Writing in the Elementary Classroom*. Urbana, IL: National Council of Teachers of English.

Ray suggests picturebooks that students can use to study different text structures that they can then use in their own writing.

Stead, Tony. (2002). *Is that a fact? Nonfiction writing K-3*. Portland, ME: Stenhouse.

Stead provides detailed lessons and rubrics for variety of nonfiction genres, including instructions, reports, scientific explanations, persuasive writing, and nonfiction narratives, which can easily be adapted for older students.

Write Design Graphic Organizers (see http://www.writedesignonline.com/organizers/cerebralflatulence.html)

This website includes definitions of the five main types of organizers, their different purposes and shows how design/format is related to the purpose of the organizer.

Support and Elaboration

Lane, Barry. (1999). *The Reviser's Toolbox*. Shoreham, VT: Discover Writing Press.

Lane provides ideas using Snapshots and Thoughtshots for developing support and elaboration in narrative writing.

Harvey, Stephanie. (1998). *Non-Fiction Matters*. York, ME: Stenhouse Publishers.

Harvey provides research, notetaking and summarization strategies that students can use to develop support and elaboration in their informational writing.

Style

Ray, Katie Wood. (1999). *Wondrous Words: Writers and Writing in the Elementary Classroom*. Urbana, IL: National Council of Teachers of English.

Ray has collected a myriad of examples from picturebooks and other literature that can be used to teach students about authors' word choice and ways with words.

Strong, William. (2001). *Coaching Writing*. Portsmouth, NH: Heinemann.

Strong uses sentence-combining exercises to study professional writers' word choice and sentence variety.

Strunk, William, and White, E. B. (2000). *The Elements of Style* (4th Edition). Boston: Allyn and Bacon.

> This classic stylebook is a still a great source of advice and examples of elementary rules of usage, misused words, and stylistic do's and don'ts.

Zinsser, William. (2001). *On Writing Well: The Classic Guide to Writing Non-Fiction*. (6th edition). New York: HarperCollins.

Zinsser, William. *Writing to Learn*. (1988). New York: Harper & Row.

> In these two books on informational writing and writing across the curriculum, Zinsser explores the principles of good writing in a variety of disciplines.

Guide To Grammar and Writing (see http://www.ccc.commnet.edu/grammar/) (Capital Community College, Hartford, CT)

> This guide to grammar and writing provides a useful grammar review for teachers and older students. The section on clauses is a helpful review for teachers who are teaching sentence combining. The guide also includes examples of good writing from literature, the Bible, and historical speeches. The sections on parallelism, developing an argument, and transitions are especially valuable for teaching style.

Conventions

Ray, Katie Wood. (1999). *Wondrous Words: Writers and Writing in the Elementary Classroom*. Urbana, IL: National Council of Teachers of English.

> Ray examines the conventions authors use to achieve different effects in their writing and how conventions differ for different genres of writing.

Strong, William. (2001). Coaching Writing. Portsmouth, NH: Heinemann.

> Strong includes exercises for teaching middle and high school students to experiment with the appropriate usage and conventions for different contexts and genres.

Strunk, William, and White, E. B. (2000). *The Elements of Style* (4th Edition). Boston: Allyn and Bacon.

> This classic stylebook is still a great source of advice and examples of elementary rules of usage, misused words, and stylistic do's and don'ts.

Weaver, Constance. (1996). *Teaching Grammar in Context*. Portsmouth, NH: Boynton/Cook.

> Weaver discusses the research that supports teaching grammar in context, how to analyze patterns of errors to inform instruction, how to incorporate grammar minilessons into writing instruction, and includes an appendix of lessons for teaching grammar in context.

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