

Your Writing Module

This module provides support for meaningful writing practice with whole class, groups or individual students. Classroom instruction should include writing for different purposes that incorporate a range of writing forms. Simple ideas and reproducible masters are offered to cultivate student writing in the literacy program and across the curriculum.



Using a Thesaurus

When writing, students should also become familiar with using a thesaurus to replace words that may be bland or redundant, or to find a word to better express what they are trying to say. Students should be encouraged to use a thesaurus when they are revising their writing and looking at the words and language they have used. In fact, they can be invited to read through their own piece of writing and identify two or three words that they feel might be improved on; then they could select replacements from those offered in the thesaurus. In some ways, the thesaurus is the opposite of a dictionary, since students need to have a meaning already. Sometimes a synonym might have a slightly different meaning from the intended use; however, when given a choice of vocabulary, writers can decide which word best suits their creative need.

The picture book *The Right Word: Roget and His Thesaurus* by Jen Bryant and Melissa Sweet celebrates the life of Peter Mark Roget and provides information of how he came to publish the thesaurus in 1852.

Teaching Tips

- Many spellcheckers identify unknown words and suggest possible alternatives from which the students might choose.
- It is important to point out to students that some words have more than one meaning and a dictionary might offer synonyms for each definition. For example, one definition of the word *ground* is “the solid part of the earth’s surface” and suggested synonyms are *globe, mainland, floor, archipelago, earth, soil*; for the definition of *ground* as “a rational motive or belief,” suggested synonyms include *account, occasion, reason, score*.

Using a Dictionary

To help students understand that a single word can have several synonyms, choose and display a word (e.g., *identity*) and ask students to suggest alternatives. Then have students use a print or online dictionary or thesaurus to investigate synonyms for the word *identity*: *character, integrity, ipseity, name, personality, singularity, selfdom, status, uniqueness*. Ask students to identify any synonyms that they might not be familiar with. Which word on the list might they choose to use in their own writing? Which synonyms are particular to describing specific things?

Extension

Students can work independently to investigate and list synonyms for any two of the following adjectives:

beautiful	nice
neat	creative
happy	smart
clean	scary

Which word has the most synonyms? Which synonym is unusual/unfamiliar? Which synonym(s) might you use in your own writing?

Feedback Strips

As students become more comfortable interacting with their group members and giving effective feedback, I begin to use feedback strips periodically. I tailor the feedback strips based on my students' needs and often to focus on a specific skill. (Two examples of strips appear below.) As usual, students give verbal feedback to their peers. In addition, though, they write feedback guided by the prompts on the page. Each student receives as many strips as there are other members in the group.

Students then return to their desks with written thoughts and suggestions from their peers. After the writing group time, I let students work on their pieces for at least 5 to 10 minutes to think about what their peers have shared. I remind them how Austin improved his butterfly sketch each time he received feedback from his peers. If we establish this routine early on, students come to anticipate the time and will begin to realize the power of the feedback guiding revision.

What is the difference between prompt pages and feedback strips? When students are new to the idea of writing groups, I use prompt pages to guide and scaffold their conversations. They are giving oral feedback only. In time, after students have had some practice giving feedback, I sometimes give them feedback strips where they record their thoughts for their peer writers.

Name of Writer: _____ Name of Listener: _____ Date: _____

I like the sound of ...

I want to hear more about ...

While you read, I remembered/I felt ...

Name of Writer: _____ Name of Listener: _____ Date: _____

When I listened to your writing, I noticed these strong/effective words ...

I also noticed ...

Have you considered ...

The Persuasive Sandwich Plan

Name: _____

State your opinion:



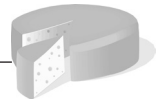
Reason 1:



Reason 2:



Reason 3:

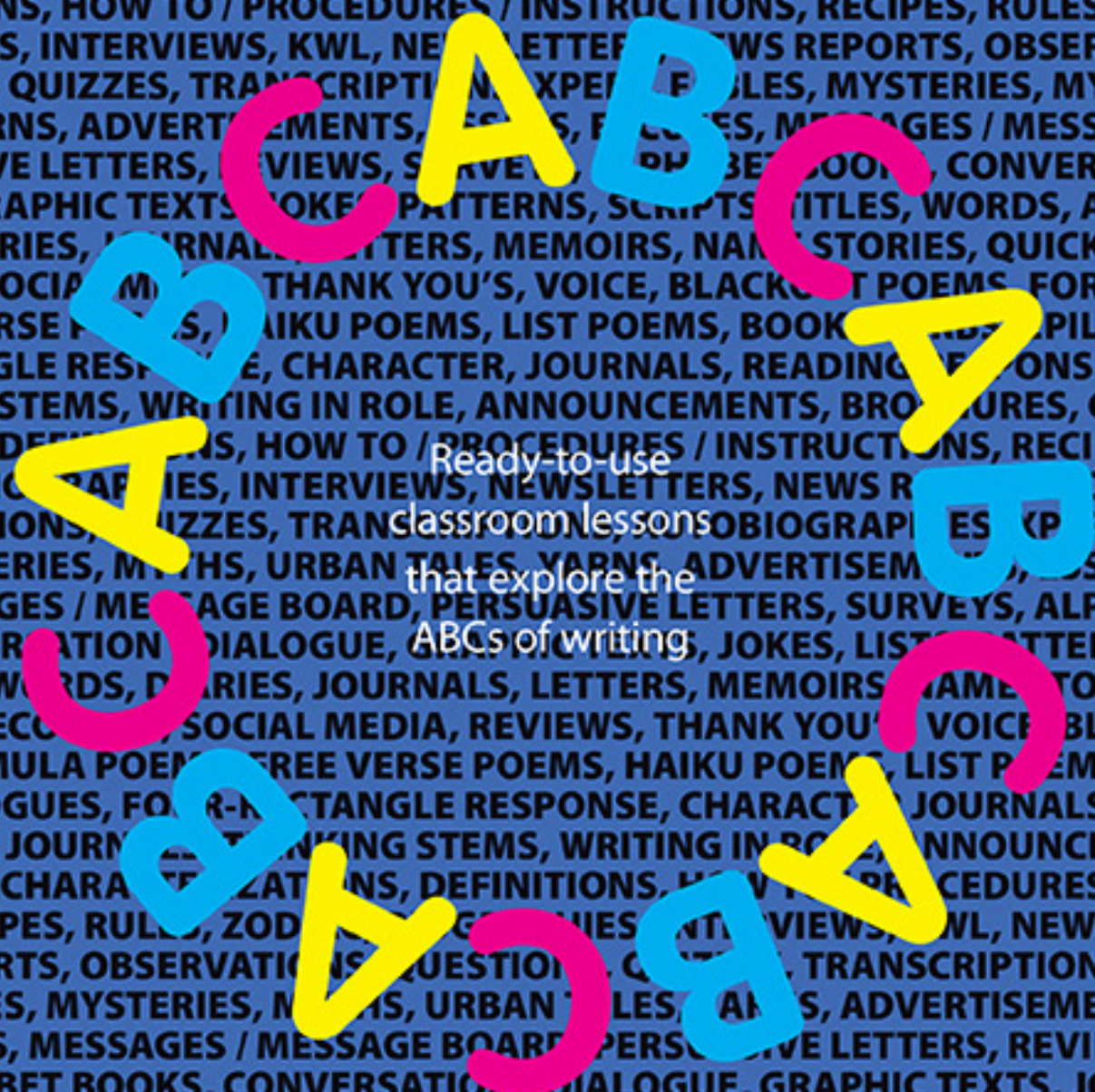


Restate your opinion:



Larry Swartz

Write to Read



Ready-to-use
classroom lessons
that explore the
ABCs of writing

60 easy ways to help students discover and investigate
the reading-writing connection

Xpert Writing

Xpert writing can be lists of facts about a topic (to inform), can give rules or instructions (to explain), and/or can tell a story about how the writer became an expert on the topic (to narrate).

Read to Write: Animal Xperts

Many writers of nonfiction are experts in the topics they present. They might have a personal interest or knowledge about a topic or issue but they also do extensive research to share information with others. The following picture book titles confirm that the authors are experts about animals:

Honeybee: The Busy Life of Apis Mellifera by Candace Fleming; illus. Eric Rohmann

Bat Citizens: Defending the Ninjas of the Night by Rob Laidlaw

Loon by Susan Vande Griek; illus. Karen Reczuch

The Tragic Tale of the Great Auk by Jan Thornhill

Write to Read: Write as an Xpert

1. List three things that you feel you know a lot about: e.g., a game, a sport, a hobby, a craft, an animal, a country, etc.
2. Review your list and put an asterisk (*) beside one you think you might be an expert on.
3. Prepare a quickwrite on your topic of choice. See how much information you can get down by writing continuously for five or six minutes.
4. Work in pairs to share your pieces. Each of you can ask questions to help gather more information about a topic from other writer.

Let's Go Further: Everything You Wanted to Know About...

You can revise and edit your xpert piece in one of the following ways:

- Write a magazine or newspaper article
- Create a brochure that includes information (and pictures) about the topic
- Share information in graphic text format
- Write a fictitious letter to apply for a job that uses your expertise
- Write in question and answer format, as if being interviewed by a reporter

Writing Tip

After writing as an expert, return to your original piece. Continue writing and adding information that helps to prove that you are an expert on the topic. Consider researching your topic through print or digital texts. What additional information might you add to your expert piece? Are there descriptive details you might add to your writing?

Yarns

A yarn is a humorous tale of made-up events.

Read to Write: Types of Tales

When you hear the words *tall tale* or *believe-it-or-not story*, what kind of stories come to mind? You can investigate examples of stories known as yarns that can have been knitted together from real and made-up facts.

Write to Read: Writing a Yarn

Writing Tip

Make your yarn tale as believable as possible by considering the features of narrative writing, voice, and realistic details.

1. Meet with two or three classmates. Together, choose any three items from the Tic-Tac-Toe Chart handout that appear in a straight line, vertically, horizontally, or diagonally.
2. Use the three chosen phrases to invent a humorous story that could be true.
3. Based on your oral storytelling, work independently to write a yarn story. Use the features of narrative writing to organize your story:
 - The beginning introduces the main characters and their problem.
 - The middle tells what the main characters did and what happens.
 - The conclusion tells how the main characters solve their problem and how the story ends.
4. Meet in pairs to exchange yarn stories. Before sharing your written stories, each partner tells their story. Then read your partner's story to determine how the oral story and written story compare.

Let's Go Further: Unbelievable!

These titles might inspire you to write more humorous yarn tales:

- The Day My Dog Saved the Day
- He Shoots! He Scores... 10 times!
- How Uncle Pete Got His Name in the Guinness Book of Records
- The Butterfly Infestation
- Alien Invasion
- If At First You Don't Succeed, Try, Try Again.
- Ding, Dong, the Robot's Dead!

What's Your Name?

1. What is your full name?
2. Why did your parents choose to give you this name?
3. Were you named after someone? Who?
4. Do you have nickname? How did you get it?
5. Do you like your name? Why?
6. Do you know your name in other languages?
7. If you could choose another name, what might it be? Why?
8. What, if anything, is unique about the spelling of your first name? Of your last name?
9. Do you know the meaning of your name? If so, what does it mean?
10. List any family members, celebrities, historical figures, authors, or fictional characters who share your first name with you.

Bonus: How many words can you make using the letters from your first and last names?

An alphabetical collection of more than 60 lessons that focus on all writing forms and feature a reading-writing connection.

Write to Read is full of quick and easy-to-use lessons that promote meaningful writing practice with a whole class, groups, or individual students. The lesson instructions are written directly to the student, are ready for teachers to use, and serve as a useful guide for student writing. Teachers will find strategies organized alphabetically that will inspire students to plan, develop, and share their writing.

The single-page lessons allow teachers to choose what they need to meet the diverse needs of students in grades three through eight. Each independent lesson guides students through the writing process with information about a writing form, along with suggested literature sources. Tips throughout the book help students successfully write to narrate, to inform, to entertain, to persuade, to respond, and to enjoy.

This practical book includes

- Step-by-step instructions and clear explanations for more than 60 forms of writing students can investigate and practice
- A grab-bag of ready-to-use activities, organized alphabetically for easy access and choice
- Suggested anchor books that provide literature samples for each genre
- Lessons that are easily adaptable for different grade and skill levels
- A reflection of the author's passion for engaging learners with authentic reading-writing experiences

In addition to the ready-to-use lessons, a wealth of teacher resources in **Write to Read** will help teachers dig deeper. The resources include an overview of how the lessons can be used to explore the functions of writing, along with teaching tools and reproducible masters for easy classroom use. The author's extensive recommendations for the best children's books to use in your classroom, along with professional resources, complement this important book.

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Larry Swartz has explored literature-based learning with students and teachers for more than 40 years in North America, England, New Zealand, and China. As a classroom teacher, consultant, and instructor with OISE/University of Toronto, he has inspired educators and students alike to learn in new and exciting ways. Larry is a well-known speaker and workshop leader. His many books for teachers include *Teaching Tough Topics*, *Better Reading Now*, and the classic *Dramathemes*.

An excerpt from *Write to Read* by Larry Swartz.

Ten Essentials for Writing to Read

Choice Matters

How much choice do students have in their writing topics? Does the notebook or reading response journal give students freedom to write in different forms and record personal responses? Do writing prompts serve to motivate student writing? Do mentor texts inspire students to write? Are students inspired by the writing of their friends? How much choice do students have in the way they present their writing, share their writing, publish their writing? Is there a balance between assigned writing tasks and student choices? In this book, teachers are given the opportunity to introduce a format or pattern for students to practice. Still, throughout the resource, suggestions are provided that invite students to make choices about the topics, prompts, and content that they choose to use, while still meeting the success criteria for each format.

Mentor Texts Matter

Mentor texts help develop relationships with authors and their work. If you want students to write effective lead sentences, it's important to provide them with examples from literature as models. If you want students to write memoirs, mystery stories, or myths, share examples of how published authors have done this effectively. One of most meaningful ways to teach students about different writing genres or writing formats is to provide literature and, through writer's workshop, explain and analyze how the author has been successful at engaging readers. Mentor texts (aka Anchor Texts) are written pieces, whether found in a book, magazine, or teacher and/or student writing, that can serve as an example of good writing for student writers. The texts are read for the purpose of studying the author's craft, or the way the author uses words and structures in the writing. The goal is to provide students with a model they could emulate in crafting their own written work. Moreover, when we use mentor texts in our classrooms, we teach students to read like writers.

Talk Matters

In a writing block of thirty minutes, how much time do students actually spend putting pencil to paper, or finger to keyboard? To prepare for writing with any given task, many students need time to talk to percolate ideas. For many students, opportunities to talk prepare and motivate them in their writing. For example, when writing a recount, the oral retelling of events is a rehearsal for what students will put into writing. For expository writing, students might turn to a partner to explain instructions and this conversation helps them with sequencing and the need for presenting ideas with clarity. *Let Talk Precede Writing* is a good rule to implement in the writing program.

Talk, however, shouldn't be limited to before-writing experiences. Some students need to chat with others to help them clarify ideas, receive advice, request information (including spelling and grammar). The oral feedback that students receive from their classmates as they write can be supportive and motivating. And when students share their completed writing projects with others, they invite feedback and suggestions from an audience, thus determining how successful they were at keeping the reader in mind for their written work.

The Thought Starters list on page 117 provides students with prompts for writing. Students can choose items from the list to motivate their writing in a variety of genres. Alternately, you can choose and post items from this list for students to focus on.

Resources that can effectively serve teachers in the use of mentor texts in their writing programs:

Mentor Texts by Lynn R. Dorfman and Rose Cappelli (also: *Nonfiction Mentor Texts*)

Powerful Writing Structures by Adrienne Gear.

Feedback Matters

When assessing student work, avoid simple judgments, such as “That’s interesting!” or “I liked your story.” It is important to look for a piece’s strengths and perhaps weaknesses and to consciously provide constructive advice that relates directly to the student’s written work. When receiving feedback, whether written or in a writing conference, a student feels their knowledge of the writers’ craft is acknowledged. Also, less is more. Feedback should be focused, be explicit, and offer examples or specific suggestions for improvement.

Writing with Others Matters

Most often, students are given the opportunity and choice to write independently. However, some writing formats are more conducive to the collaborative experience (e.g., group reports, brainstorming, brochures, transcription). As students plan, develop, and present written work with a partner or small group, they can share ideas, negotiate ideas, and hitchhike off one another’s thoughts. Having students work together, blending skills, talents, and interests, helps to promote communication and build a writing community.

Revising and Editing Matter

Revising and editing are two different processes. Students need to become aware that what most interests readers about their writing is what they have to say, not just their typos and errors. Editing is about correcting errors in grammar and spelling. Revision deals with the flow of narrative or ideas, relevance of information, and clarity of expression. Teachers tend to spend too much time focusing on editing, but by providing feedback suggesting changes, by providing explicit instruction on the craft of writing through one-on-one, small-group, or whole-class demonstrations, teachers can help students to revisit and refine their work.

Teachers need to engage students in their writing so that they will want to continue the writing process, which means students rethink and revisit their writing to develop strength or clarity, to alter its organization, or to select effective words and language structure. Not every piece of writing will be edited and revised. Many pieces benefit from being left unattended, even for a day or two. A fresh reading often can highlight changes that need to be made. Sharing a published piece by each student in the classroom at various points in the year (once a month?) is a positive reinforcement for their work.

Audience Matters

Students may be motivated to refine and polish their writing when they are preparing for an authentic audience. Yes, the teacher should be considered an important audience, but not the only one. Do students have opportunities to share their work with classmates, with a writing buddy or editing group, with others in the school, with families, with others in the community, with anonymous readers? A classroom blog or website is a meaningful tool for students to share their writing in a variety of capacities (e.g., newsletters, reports, collaborative books, persuasive letters). It is also worth noting that writers themselves are significant audiences; some writing can be, should be, kept personal, private.

“The writing workshop is a gathering place of passionate ideas and opinions. It is the room where our students can go to imagine and reimagine the world.”
—Kwame Alexander (2019)

See Revision Checklist on page 118.

Success Criteria Matter

Each piece of student writing provides data for the student's skills and knowledge of the writing process. A piece of writing can be assessed individually or comparatively (i.e., a revised version of the original). Another model is to choose writing samples from early in a semester and compare it to student's writing at a later stage.

For each of the writing formats in this book, provide students with three success criteria to consider. Different formats address different expectations; by displaying and explaining criteria, students can determine how well they have done for a particular genre. Clear instructions and a consistent routine with self-assessment checklists can help to support and enrich young writers.

Process Matters

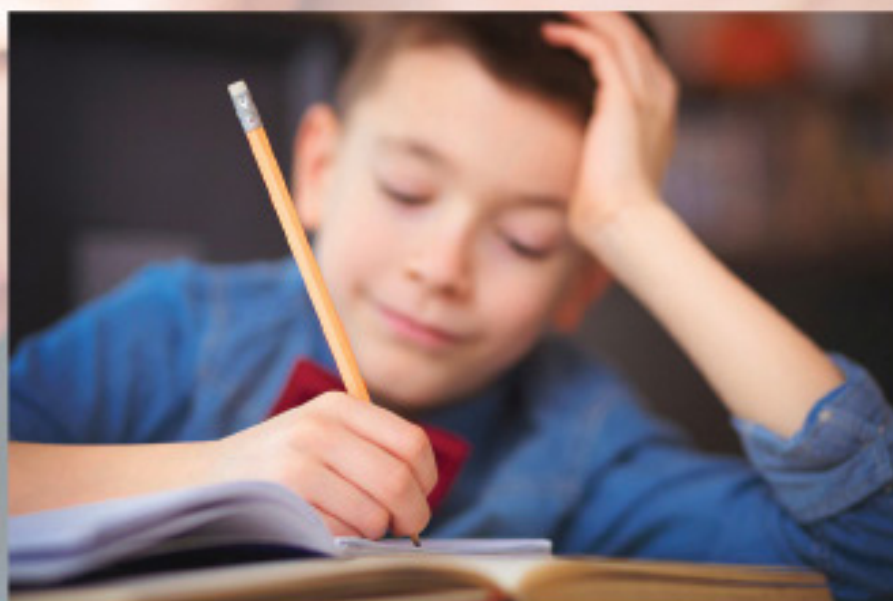
Writing is a process. Teachers may understand and implement the stages of writing—drafting, composing, revising, rethinking, redrafting, editing, and publishing—but writing never occurs in such neat phases. Students need regular and frequent time to draft if they are to learn the art and craft of writing. Often a piece that will eventually be published has to be set aside and developed at a future date. I'm reminded of my dear colleague Brian Crawford, who was concerned when teachers said, "Hand in your good copy." All copies, Brian claimed, were "good."

Across-the-Curriculum Matters

Although there is a need for a consistent, designated time within the literacy program for independent writing and writing workshop, students write throughout the day in school. It is recommended that we take note of the strategies they use as writers. Students can connect their writing projects in a variety of curriculum areas: recording observations in science and mathematics, using notebooks to record information in social studies and health, developing projects for individuals and groups in a variety of subject areas, writing in role in drama lessons. To value writing and consider authentic purposes for writing, students need to see themselves as writers outside of the language program and outside the classroom walls.

HOW DO I GET THEM TO WRITE?

Explore the reading-writing connection using freewriting and mentor texts to motivate and empower students



Karen Filewych

The Three-Page Approach to Writing a Transformation Story

If you teach Grade 1 or 2, consider giving your students three sheets of paper to help guide their transformation stories. My preference is blank on the top half of the page and interlined on the bottom. I number these pages for the students. I give them one page at a time, guiding them each step of the way.

For the first page, I instruct them to draw their character at the beginning of their story. I remind them to think about how the character is feeling or what he is doing at the beginning. After they have drawn their pictures, I ask them to begin their stories on this page by telling me about their character. I refer to the mentor text throughout, saying, for example: “Remember the beginning of *How the Grinch Stole Christmas*? The Grinch was unhappy and greedy. He was stealing toys and trees. This is what Dr. Seuss drew at the beginning of the story.”

As they finish that page, I give them the second. Again, I instruct them to draw their pictures first. What do they draw? I ask them, “What happens in your story that makes your character want to change? Remember when the Grinch was standing ice-cold in the snow? He was puzzling and puzzling till his puzzler was sore. Every Who down in Who-ville was still singing without any presents at all! *This* was what made the Grinch change. What is going to make *your* character change?” After the picture is drawn I prompt them to continue their story by writing about this transforming event.

Finally, as students are ready for the third page, I guide them to think about what their character will look like and feel like at the end of their stories. This is often the easiest for students to draw. After drawing, they write the end of their stories.

This format tends to work well for Grade 1 students especially because I teach transformation stories relatively early in the year for Grade 1. For them to write the entire story at once and on their own would be quite challenging, but by dividing it into three pages, all students can find success. Consider this three-page format for students in upper grades who might need more scaffolding.

Effective Mentor Texts	Transformation Stories
Grades 1 to 6	<i>Bad Kitty</i> by Nick Bruel <i>A Christmas Carol</i> by Charles Dickens <i>The Crippled Lamb</i> by Max Lucado <i>How the Grinch Stole Christmas</i> by Dr. Seuss <i>The Invisible Boy</i> by Trudy Ludwig <i>The Monsters' Monster</i> by Patrick McDonnell <i>Raven Brings the Light</i> by Roy Henry Vickers and Robert Budd <i>The Ugly Duckling</i> by Hans Christian Andersen <i>The Very Hungry Caterpillar</i> by Eric Carle

Stuck Story

Title of story: _____

Author: _____

What (or who) gets stuck?

Where does it get stuck?



What do the characters do to try to get it unstuck?

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____

What finally works to get it unstuck?

How Do I Get Them to Write? investigates the vital connection between reading and writing. This remarkable book argues that reading, writing, and the inevitable discussions that follow lead students to appreciate the experiences of others, open their minds to new possibilities, gain a glimpse into unknown worlds, make connections to their own lives, and reflect on their own choices and learning.

This practical resource shows teachers simple ways to inspire students to learn to write and write to learn. Teachers will discover how to

- structure their language arts program
- establish writing groups
- make assessment manageable
- use mentor texts to teach the skills of writing
- teach freewriting, journal, narrative, and transactional writing
- create engaging poetry units and author studies
- engage emergent writers in Kindergarten and Grade 1
- assist English language learners and reluctant writers
- create an environment where students enjoy putting pencil to paper or fingers to keyboard

How Do I Get Them to Write? is committed to helping teachers get all students writing regardless of their attitudes or their current abilities. Based on the premise that all students can learn to write with appropriate teaching, modelling, and practice, this is an ideal resource for teachers who love writing as well as for those who find it a challenging process.



Greg Campbell

Karen Filewych has more than twenty years of educational experience as a teacher of all elementary grades and most recently as a school administrator. Her passion for literacy began as a young child with nightly bedtime stories and weekly trips to the library. In 2007, she pursued this passion further by completing her Master of Education degree in the area of literacy. Her busy life includes writing, presenting workshops, and leading writer-in-residence programs for students in schools and classrooms. Her website, ***Words Change Worlds***, highlights the power of words and provides teachers with regular book reviews and teaching ideas. Karen lives in Edmonton, Alberta, with her family.

An excerpt from ***How Do I Get Them to Write?*** by Karen Filewych.

12

Reaching Our English Language Learners and Reluctant Writers

“If a child can’t learn the way we teach, maybe we should teach the way they learn.”

— Ignacio Estrada

Whether you have English language learners (ELLs) in your class or students who either dislike or fear writing, you may need to differentiate your lessons to meet their needs. The beauty of teaching writing is that students work at their own ability levels. The writing is both an end goal (*learning to write*) and a process of learning (*writing to learn*).

Consider how much our ELLs are learning every moment of the day. They are surrounded by both conversational English and academic English. They are exposed to an extensive amount of new vocabulary. They are learning the nuances of language: the rules, the exceptions, the structure, the grammar, the syntax, not to mention pronunciation. They are learning to listen, speak, read, and write. What an overwhelming and exhausting task! Therefore, in order to support our ELLs, we must ensure that they have direct language instruction regardless of the grades they are in. These are not cognitively challenged students — they are simply challenged because of circumstance.

Recognizing Student Fears

When I imagine myself in a classroom full of individuals speaking an unfamiliar language, I feel like fading into the background. For me, a foreign classroom would be a stressful environment. The thought of being asked to say something in an unfamiliar language terrifies me. The expectation to *write* something frightens me even more! We must remember that this is how many of our ELLs feel in our classrooms. For many of them, not only is the language new, but so are the culture, the climate, and the school system with its rules, routines, and expectations.

Once again, then, we must acknowledge the importance of developing a strong community of learners: a classroom in which ELLs feel safe enough to take risks and attempt language. As teachers, we can work to create as welcoming and low stress an environment as possible for students new to our country and our classrooms. We want them to feel comfortable asking questions and supported as they try to share their own thoughts and ideas.

In addition to ELLs, many teachers ask how to support their reluctant writers. At different ages for different individuals, some students begin to fear or even

dread writing. In dialogue with students over the years, I have found that ELLs and reluctant writers tend to have similar fears: fear of failure, fear of someone reading their work, fear of making mistakes, fear of incorrect spelling, punctuation, or grammar. Writing, after all, makes us vulnerable. If, when our students are writing, they thought no one would read their work, they would likely feel more comfortable and worry less about the end product. Often, in the younger grades, the students are excited for us to read their work and tell us about their pictures. As our students become older, many of them become more self-conscious about their writing, particularly if they doubt they are very good at it.

Strategies to Ensure Fair Treatment

By using the strategies and forms of writing outlined in this book, you should, I hope, be able to limit the number of reluctant writers in your classroom. Especially by establishing the practice of freewriting, I was often able to reduce the need for further intervention. How? Freewriting, in particular, addresses many of the concerns of the writers in our classrooms. It eliminates the worry about correct spelling, punctuation, and grammar. It eliminates the worry about someone reading their work. Freewriting was the game changer for me in my classroom. But the other strategies, too, help all students feel more successful. For example, providing plot patterns or a framework supports all writers; guided writing, mini-lessons, and individual conferencing serve as scaffolding for our students; and writing groups provide the peer support and oral communication necessary for students to improve their writing.

So, although these strategies help meet the needs of all students, be aware of students who need more support and more deliberate instruction than others. Remember that *fair* does not mean treating all students equally; *fair* means supporting our students based on their individual needs. The following strategies can be useful for elementary students of any age.

Hold Morning Meetings

As I described in Chapter 1, consider gathering each day for a morning meeting. These meetings are effective for all students, but they can be especially beneficial for our ELLs. The expected routine can be comforting as they are encountering things new to them throughout every day. In addition, by participating in morning meetings, they become more familiar with the structure of language, the format of questions and answers, and the expectations of listening and of talking in turn. In faith-based schools, this time can also be time for prayer and intentions. These class meetings become a safe place for our students to experiment with oral language which will ultimately help them with their writing as well.

Engage in Prewriting Discussion: Talk Time

Most of us are familiar with the value of pre-reading activities for our struggling readers and ELLs; however, prewriting discussion — talk time, put simply — can be valuable to all writers. Not only might students hear new vocabulary or correct misconceptions, but talk time is also helpful in generating ideas for their writing. By talking about something first, they begin to sort through their thoughts, making it easier to put them down on paper or screen.

Scaffolding can also come in the form of repeated instructions or step-by-step written instructions for our students. The majority of the class (though I wonder about this sometimes) may understand our multi-step instructions the first time we give them. But clear language and simple, step-by-step instructions will likely benefit many students. Giving auditory instructions is typical; providing visual instructions, as well, is recommended. You can write down your instructions on the whiteboard or Smartboard. Doing so provides students with the opportunity to check back as they move through various steps.

Our ELLs often smile and nod so we might assume they understand. We shouldn't. After giving whole-class instructions, check in with your ELLs individually and give the instructions again simply and directly. A peer could also be asked to provide this form of scaffolding.

Model and Model Again

When I am doing something for the first time — no matter what it is — I like to see someone do the task first so I can see how it is done most effectively. The same is true for writing in our classrooms. As discussed throughout this book, modelling is an essential experience for all students. Our ELLs and reluctant writers might require further modelling either in a small group or individually. What are we modelling? Anything really: sequencing our ideas, using conjunctions (*and*, *but*, *if*) within our writing, using a variety of sentence beginnings, even editing. We certainly cannot expect our students to learn something after one demonstration: plan for *ongoing* modelling.

Build on Background Knowledge

We all have background knowledge: our daily experiences since birth have created this knowledge about our world. The more we can build on background knowledge for our students and the more we can connect to their own lives, the better. This is effective for all students, of course, but perhaps most effective for those who struggle or who are new to the language. How do we do this? Encouraging students to make connections to the content we teach (text to text, text to self, text to world), the discussions we have, and the texts we read will assist them when it comes time to write. The more that students have knowledge about a topic, the more effectively they can understand and then elaborate on their understandings. The less background knowledge they have on a given topic, the more abstract (and, therefore, the more difficult) the learning.

The background knowledge of your ELLs may be significantly different than that of the other children in your class, but your choice of mentor text can take this into account. As mentioned in Chapter 2, whenever possible, choose mentor texts that reflect the various cultures in your classroom (see “Mentor Texts with a Cultural Component” on page 24). Reading aloud texts that students can connect with and see themselves reflected in provides them with an opportunity to talk about their own experiences. Honor these experiences and encourage the students to contribute to your discussions. What a wonderful learning experience for all the students in your class! The ELLs will have the opportunity to practise their oral language skills and feel included in your classroom, and the other students will glimpse a world likely unknown to them. Keep in mind, though, it takes time for ELLs to feel comfortable sharing in front of the class. They are more likely to do so when they feel supported, accepted, and connected.

After I read the book *Goal!* by Mina Javaherbin to a Grade 6 class, one student shared his personal connection to the text. Just as one of the characters in the book had to walk to the well for water every day, he, too, in his home in Sudan, had had to do the same. He also shared that they didn't have a soccer ball; instead, they played with a plastic bottle. His sharing prompted other students to contribute, and many articulated how lucky they were to live in Canada.

You can also build background knowledge by bringing in real objects or showing pictures or videos to support the learning. I once brought a couple of pomegranates into class to cut and eat when I realized that the reading selection would be difficult to understand if students were unfamiliar with this fruit. I learned two lessons from doing this: first, all students benefited from this hands-on experience; and second, showing the pomegranates led to an interesting discussion about various types of fruit throughout the world. My ELLs were sharing excitedly!

Keep Teaching Word Patterns and Families

For young writers, one of the stumbling blocks is spelling. Although freewriting helps students break through that barrier, we can also help students understand words better by teaching about patterns, chunking, blends, word families, and root words. Recognizing patterns and word families can help students become more confident readers and writers. I tell my students, “If you can spell *ball*, you can spell *call*, *fall*, *mall*, *stall*, and *tall*.” These concepts are naturally included in our primary classrooms as students are learning to read. In older grades these discussions still need to occur to assist all students, especially our ELLs and reluctant writers, with the development of their spelling. Depending on your grade and the specific needs of your students, this intentional teaching may be done in small groups rather than with the whole class.

Subject-Area Vocabulary: Cause for Accommodation

Our ELLs and reluctant writers may especially need support in subject areas with content-area vocabulary and in subjects with more abstract concepts. Make the necessary accommodations to support these students, for example, oral tests, a reader, a scribe, and the use of pictures. As well, the strategies presented in this chapter can be used across the curriculum to assist our ELLs and reluctant writers. Keep in mind that there is often a wide gap between what the students know and what they can communicate.

Deliberate Teaching of Vocabulary

Students need to understand many levels of vocabulary to function in a classroom setting: conversational vocabulary, academic vocabulary, and content-related vocabulary. We cannot assume that our students know all of the words we are using. Nor can we assume that our students know the meaning of a word in a given context.

The English language is riddled with multiple meanings that can be awfully confusing for those learning English. Consider these examples: *bark* (a dog barks; the bark of a tree), *nails* (fingernails; nails and a hammer), *mine* (it is mine; a diamond mine or a coal mine), *bolt* (a lightning bolt; a metal fastener; to run away quickly), and *tie* (to tie your shoes; a shirt and tie). We won't even go into the many meanings of the word *run* ... How perplexing for individuals new to English!

If our students cannot understand the vocabulary that is spoken or read, they cannot use it properly in their speech or written language. It is important to talk about the words we encounter in our reading. Sometimes I do this before reading a selection, sometimes as we read, and sometimes afterwards. Regardless, we should be cognizant of what vocabulary might be difficult for our students. New vocabulary will likely be attempted in speech before it is used in writing. This is another reason to ensure that our students have time to talk.

Deliberate vocabulary instruction will assist students in understanding the curriculum you are teaching in all subject areas. Avoid giving students a list of words. Plan ahead and look for vocabulary that will likely be difficult or simply unfamiliar to your ELLs. Planned exposure to words as well as explicit teaching of words is vital. I use several strategies to teach vocabulary words: word walls, labels, picture dictionaries, personal dictionaries, and real-world examples.

Subject-Area Word Walls

Just as I create word walls in my Grade 1 classroom, I find it helpful to create a content-driven word wall if ELLs are in the class. I have seen some teachers of upper elementary students effectively divide their word wall into sections: high-frequency words, science, social studies, mathematics, and so on. Some teachers include all words on one word wall, but color-code the various subject areas. Generally, in my classroom, I prefer to have a bulletin board for each subject and a portion of the bulletin board devoted to the content vocabulary we are currently studying. There are many ways to organize a word wall: find the method that works in your classroom.

For our ELLs it is effective to include pictures of the words whenever possible. Doing this works easily for a noun like *flag* but is a little more challenging for a word like *democracy*. Consider involving students in creating the words and pictures for your word wall, setting high expectations for legibility.

A Labelled Classroom

Whenever possible, I use word labels throughout the classroom. Through labels, students are exposed to these words repeatedly, which helps with both retention and understanding. If you are concerned that the other students will find this too juvenile in their classroom, remind them what it would be like to be in a class where they don't speak the language. Giving them this perspective quickly makes the use of labels an acceptable practice. In fact, my non-ELLs often become excited about helping their peers and take on the responsibility of labeling around the room.

Picture Dictionaries

I provide my ELLs with a picture dictionary that they can access throughout the year. For very young students, my favorite is Usborne's *First Hundred Words in English*. For older students, I prefer *The Heinle Picture Dictionary for Children*. My ELLs enjoy flipping through these books in their free time. Picture dictionaries allow students to discover new words at their own pace and in areas of interest. Most picture dictionaries are organized by theme or category. I do not typically use these dictionaries for students to look up how to spell the words. However, as they become familiar with the books, I have found students searching for a word

they are trying to spell if they remembered seeing it in the book beforehand. Picture dictionaries can be a powerful learning tool.

Personal Dictionaries

Students can create their own personal dictionaries. Within the dictionaries, they write the word to be defined and then use a combination of words and pictures to demonstrate the word's meaning. After I introduced this to my ELLs one year, I then found it was something all students wanted to do and ultimately benefited from. It became a reference and study guide for our content vocabulary and often echoed the word wall we created.

These dictionaries can be created on index cards, on a tablet, in a visual journal, or in a scribbler. Some students prefer the index cards because they can then create flaps that hide the picture and definition. Encourage students to get into the habit of underlining the root word if there is one. Learning to identify the root word will ultimately help them understand the meaning of the word and its connection to other words.

Real-World Examples

Using real-world examples, such as the pomegranates referred to earlier in the chapter, is also helpful. Students are more likely to remember the meaning of the word *pomegranate* once they have seen, touched, smelled, and, in this case, tasted one!

Assessment: Personalize It

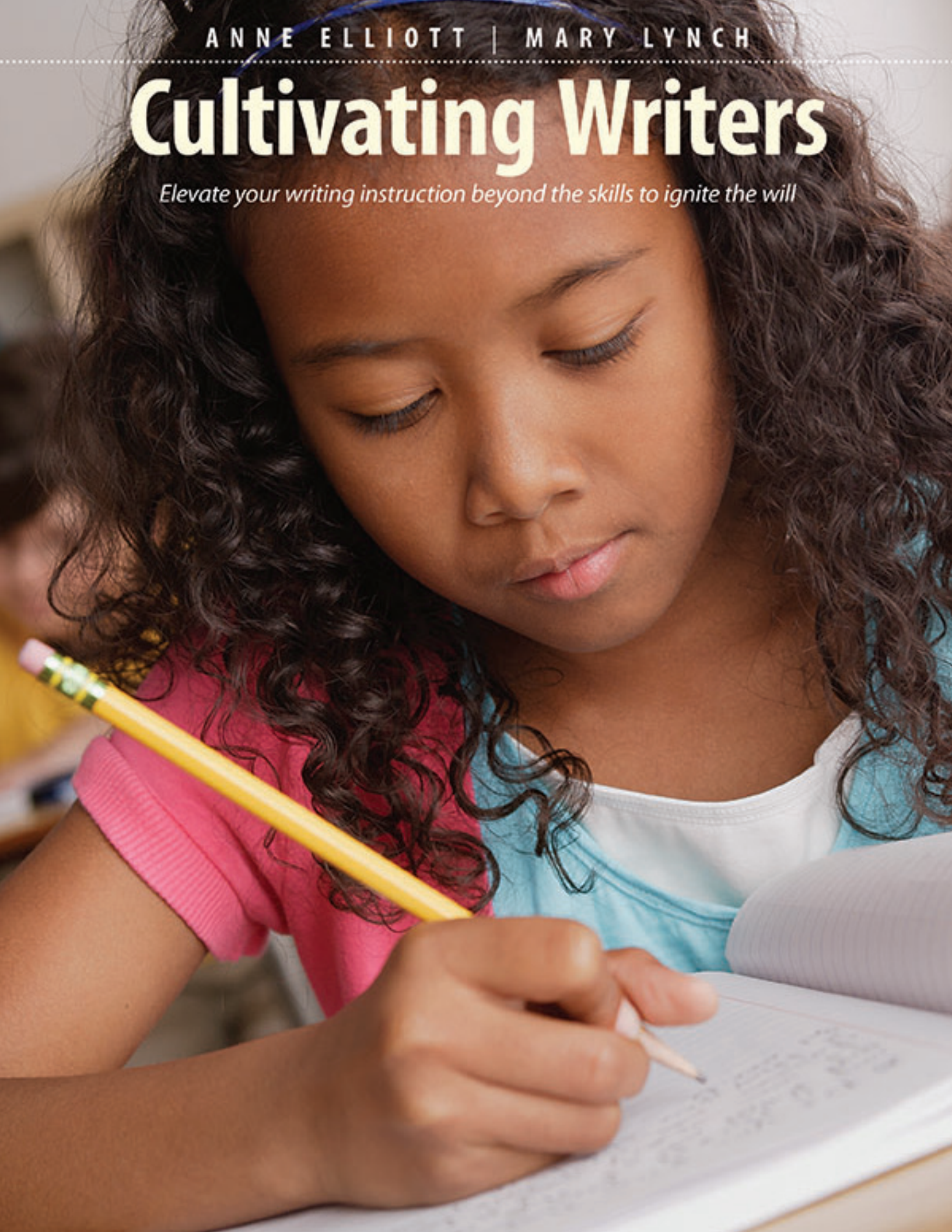
When it comes time for formative assessment, give a little extra attention to your ELLs and reluctant writers. Provide more comments and specific feedback than you would with the other students. Anything that is personalized will help to motivate them and provide them with guidance as they move forward with their work.

We can't expect any student to master something on the first try. This is especially true for our reluctant writers and ELLs. So, schedule conferences a little more frequently and check-in informally more often. When responding with written feedback on student work, be positive as well as specific in your suggestions for improvement. The added benefits? These students will begin to feel accepted and at least partially understood in their new surroundings.

ANNE ELLIOTT | MARY LYNCH

Cultivating Writers

Elevate your writing instruction beyond the skills to ignite the will



Mining a Memento

Adapted from *6 + 1 Traits of Writing*
by Ruth Culham, 2005
Purpose: To use treasured artifacts as
a stimulus for writing

Possible Mentor Texts:
Eve Bunting, *The Memory String*
Paul Fleischman, *The Matchbox Diary*
Mem Fox, *Wilfrid Gordon MacDonald
Partridge*
Anne Louise MacDonald, *The
Memory Stone*

In many long-term care homes, outside each room you will find a glass case that holds the resident's treasured mementos. Photos, figurines, medals, badges, documents, ball caps, and model vehicles adorn the shelf. These keepsakes serve as a reminder of the resident's life and even support dementia patients in identifying their room when disorientated. These items hold little monetary value to others, but to the owner are priceless. Is it any wonder that we, too, have drawers filled with notes, ticket stubs, buttons, stones, medals, shells, coins, etc. that transport us back to magical moments in our own lives? So let's start mining our mementos for memories.

1. Gather an assortment of objects you have collected over time. Select items that you treasure and that your students will be able to relate to and connect with. It may be something a dear family member gave you, a special item you purchased on holiday, or an item from nature that reminds you of where and when you discovered it. Good examples are a concert ticket stub, a letter from a relative, a shell from a beach holiday, a medal from a competition. Place these mementos in a basket or box and bring them into class to share.
2. Read aloud one of the picture books listed as mentor texts. Be sure to stop periodically to draw students' attention to how the various objects in the story evoke specific memories for the characters:

She held the warm egg and told Wilfrid Gordon about the tiny speckled blue eggs she had once found in a bird's nest in her aunt's garden.

She put a shell to her ear and remembered going to her beach by tram long ago and how hot she had felt in her button-up boots.

—from *Wilfrid Gordon MacDonald Partridge* by Mem Fox

3. Take a few minutes to reveal each object you have brought to class and offer an explanation as to why you treasure it dearly:

Take a look at this button I received when I went to Walt Disney World in Florida a number of years ago. As soon as I hold it I am transported back to the moment we entered the gates and were each ceremoniously given a button. My nieces were vibrating with excitement and anticipation. Their smiles lit up their faces and, to this day, I can close my eyes and hear their giggles and squeals in my mind.

4. Encourage students to search their own homes for a personal memento. Consider sending home a letter to families explaining the guidelines for this activity.
5. Once students return to school with their treasured object, have them share in groups their item and the thoughts, emotions, and stories connected to it.
6. After sharing, we recommend you take a photo of each artifact. The print of the photo can be then glued into each student's writer's notebook as a permanent keepsake.
7. Consider having students create a web around the image that details their object, where and when they received it, and why is important.

Writing Is...

Students will

- share and grow their definition of writing

Initially, many developing writers have a very narrow definition of what writing is. They pay attention to the overt actions, the aspects of writing that can be seen on the page. But they are less aware of the covert actions, what happens inside the writer's head and heart while composing text that is unseen. Our writers must become acquainted and very familiar with the thinking that goes hand-in-hand with writing, the invisible actions that take place in their brain that contribute to the writing process.

1. Prepare sheets with a sentence stem written on each:

Writing is...

Writing takes...

Writing means...

Writing involves...

Writing includes...

Color code papers according to sentence stem so students can easily distinguish between them.

2. Distribute one sheet to each student. Students are expected to respond to their sentence stem anonymously. Be sure to let students know that they will be trading pages multiple times so be sure to leave space for others to write.
3. Mix and mingle five times, until each student has responded to each sentence stem once. Once students have documented their thinking about writing, gather them together.
4. Select one sentence stem and share the variety of responses students have made. Allow students time to consider the similarities and differences between responses.
5. Repeat step 3 for each sentence stem over the next few days, depending on student engagement and time.
6. After exploring the variety of responses, summarize and consolidate the thinking of the class:

Students will

- witness the variety of thoughts, ideas, decisions, and moves writers make when constructing a piece of text

If we want to summarize all of the responses we shared over the last few days, I wonder what we would say. Is there a common idea that represents what writing is? We might come up with this: Writing is an expression that involves time, effort, energy, and thought.

Passionate/Proficient Writer Anchor Chart

Students will

- work collaboratively to build an anchor chart that outlines characteristics of a passionate and proficient writer

We have worked diligently to reveal the habits of authentic writers to our students through the Find, Plan, and Act activities. Now is the time to discover what students have internalized and committed to memory. Prepare yourself to be impressed!

1. Begin by asking your students to think about the following prompt: *What characteristics make a passionate and proficient writer?* Encourage students to share their thinking with an elbow partner.
2. Once they have had an opportunity to brainstorm together, have students share their ideas while you record their thinking on chart paper.

Sample Passionate and Proficient Writers Anchor Chart

Passionate Writers...	Proficient Writers...
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • are able to sense which topics and ideas have potential • are keenly observant of their surroundings, using it for writing inspiration, and jot down their ideas • are mindful of their writing territories (topics they know about, care about, and or wonder about) • embrace their Writer's Notebook as an essential tool in their writing life • know which text types they enjoy using and frequently explore the features and characteristics • dedicate specific times in their day for writing to develop stamina • have favorite spaces and places at school and home to write • have favorite tools to write with • talk about their writing with other authors • are eager to share their writing with their classmates, friends and family, community • understand the reciprocal nature between reading and writing • use other authors' work as inspiration • are eager to write 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • generate and develop ideas • select formats based on purpose and audience • use a variety of formats to communicate • know that writing is thinking on paper • carry on an inner conversation while they write • use the writing process to compose text • understand the various writing traits and features that writers use to draft text (Ideas, Organization, Sentence Fluency, Word Choice, Descriptive Devices, Voice, Craft Techniques, Format Features, etc.) • identify writing craft technique preferences • use resources (dictionary and thesaurus) • use feedback to elevate the quality of their writing • understand the value of revision • edit their work carefully • understand the role of structure in composing text (Fiction: characters, setting, plot, problem/solution; Nonfiction: main idea, supporting details)

This list is by no means an exhaustive one. Your students will likely come up with many more ideas linked to writing habits, traits, features, skills, strategies, craft techniques, the writing process, etc.

Cultivating Writers shows teachers how to take writing instruction beyond the skills to ignite the will to write among Grades 3-8 students.

Based on extensive classroom experience, this book shares strategies that help students tap into their own life experiences, model the habits of a writer, and make use of the tools of the trade. This highly-readable book explores ways to declutter writing instruction and focuses on developing writers who are motivated, engaged, and invested in developing their own writing lives. It offers 6 essential steps teachers can take to nurture the will to write.

- **Develop Your Writing Life** — cultivating your own writing identity as a teacher to become an active and contributing member of your classroom writing community
- **Tap Into Your Students' Lives** — using simple techniques to help students recognize their own lives as inspiration
- **Model the Habits of a Writer** — discovering and developing the habits of passionate, dedicated writers through the actions of FIND, PLAN, ACT, and SET GOALS
- **Make the Why of Writing Visible** — helping students identify the value of writing and use writing to help them grow as authors and learners
- **Provide What Students Need to Write** — offering the resources students need to feed their preferences and creating environments where writers thrive and flourish
- **Nourish the Will to Write** — exploring strategies that nurture and support students' ongoing development as authors throughout the year

This comprehensive book offers everything teachers need to build an environment that helps students see writing as a rewarding experience in and outside the classroom. Powerful real-life anecdotes and ready-to-use activities support this guide to developing classrooms full of thoughtful, passionate writers.

Cultivating Writers challenges teachers to nurture complete writers who have the will to write as they foster authentic writing engagement in a vibrant writing community.



Mary Lynch

Anne Elliott

Anne Elliott earned an M. Ed from the University of Western Ontario. A teacher of all grades from Kindergarten to Grade 8, Anne also shared her passion and knowledge with teachers as a literacy learning coordinator, literacy coach, and librarian. The author of teacher resources and school-board documents, her proven commitment to literacy education is reflected in her popular speaking engagements throughout North America. Anne lives in London, Ontario.

For more than 30 years, **Mary Lynch** taught in grades JK to 6 and served as a reading support teacher and literacy coach. A thoughtful speaker on literacy and the content areas, she earned her M. Ed. from the University of Western Ontario, where she is an instructor in the Teacher Education Program. Mary remains grounded in effective practice by working regularly with teachers in their elementary classrooms. She lives in St. Thomas, Ontario.

An excerpt from ***Cultivating Writers*** by Anne Elliott & Mary Lynch.

Third Step: Model the Habits of a Writer

We are all creatures of habit. You likely have a morning routine based on acts and behaviors that allow you to start your day on the right foot. Planning ahead sets us up for a successful start to the day. As Anne's custodian Bernie Leatherland is known to say, "Proper planning prevents poor performance." And it certainly does!

When we examine the habits of athletes, musicians, artists, hobby enthusiasts, and gardeners we find that there are distinct similarities. They each plan, find, act, and set goals for their chosen endeavor. The habits of individuals who have the desire and will to engage in a particular activity are one in the same. To become wilful writers, our students need opportunities to develop the habits of a writer in an environment that supports them. When we intentionally reveal the habits of passionate writers, our emergent authors find their voice through worthwhile idea-generation (Finding); they come to know the vast variety of forms and formats they can choose to write in and the defining features of each (Planning); they toil within a community that sustains them through reading, thinking, talking, and sharing (Acting); and they identify and strive to reach goals that will keep them developing their craft (Setting Goals). Learning and living the habits of a writer sets our students up to be capable, competent, and proficient writers. Experiencing this satisfaction and success, they come to see themselves as authors and their passion for writing flourishes. Nurturing proficiency and passion is our goal for our students.

Wilful Habits

We can't have a conversation about the habits of writers without acknowledging the pivotal work of numerous literacy leaders and authors. Graves, Murray, Calkins, Fletcher, Laminack, and Lamott have written and spoken extensively about developing a writing life. Their work influenced the daily decisions we made as teachers in developing our writing community and we have translated their thinking into the essential habits of a writer.

- Wilful writers **find** ideas to develop. Passionate writers are like detectives in their ability to sense which topics and ideas have potential. They have a heightened sense of awareness and keenly take in their surroundings. Being mindful of their writing territories, they use topics they know about, care about, and or wonder about as sources for their writing.
- Wilful writers **plan**. They consider all the different formats of text and determine which one best suits their purpose and audience. They come to know which text types they enjoy playing with and frequently explore its features and characteristics to deliver their message in a personal and unique way. They know the tools they like to use when writing. They dedicate specific times in their day for writing to develop stamina, and have their favorite spaces and places at school and home to write.
- Wilful writers **act** in specific ways. They think about their writing. We hear them talking fervently about their work. They enjoy sharing their writing with their community, friends, and family.
- Wilful writers **set goals**. As we support young writers in developing their writing skills and will, it is imperative that we guide them in setting appropriate, specific, and manageable goals that propel them as writers to new heights.

It is vital that we, as teachers, truly accept our responsibility to model and teach the habits that develop a passionate and capable writer. The habits look straightforward: Find, Plan, Act, Set Goals. But don't be fooled by their seeming simplicity. Developing entrenched and instinctive writing habits takes time, effort, and energy on behalf of the teacher in modeling these habits and on behalf of students in adopting them. We've heard it said that, while motivation gets you started, it's habit that keeps you going. This means we need to do intentional things to blatantly model, fully develop, and continue to grow writing habits in our students. It is not enough to merely identify the practices of a writer and expect students to emulate them. It is crucial that we provide our learners with regular and continual opportunities to recognize, cultivate, and internalize these actions.

EXIT TICKET

Reflecting on My Writing Module

Name _____ Date _____

1. a) A writing idea that I used successfully in my classroom was...

b) I felt this was successful because...

2. Somthing I learned from this professional resource was...

3. A quotation or idea about writing that was meaningful to me:

4. Complete the following prompts about teaching writing:

- One challenge I have concerning my writing program is...

- Two questions I would ask the author of a resource are...

- Three things I wonder about teaching writing to my students are...

5. Topics not covered that I would like to see added?

6. A goal(s) that I have for my future writing program...

7. What support will help me achieve that goal(s)?