

Old Tappan Parent-Student Guide to Writing and Reading



2010 Edition

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Introduction: The Writing Philosophy of the Old Tappan School System

The Old Tappan School System is dedicated to developing a community of writers and readers. We encourage our students to develop lifelong reading and writing habits to enable them to meet the demands of the twenty-first century. Writing is used in all areas of the curriculum to deepen understandings and make new connections. We strive to give students authentic purposes for writing and to allow their work to be shared with others. Students are immersed in a wide range of text genres and given opportunities to write in these text genres to increase their motivation to write.

We recognize that writing is a complex process that involves thinking, expressing ideas on paper, organizing and developing these ideas in a logical order, composing, revising, proofreading, editing, and rewriting. The writing process is recursive rather than linear. The student may find the need to return to a stage of writing as he strives to improve his craft. The process of writing is nearly as important as the



product. The student's writing skills are developed and refined through frequent practice, constructive feedback and revision. Writing is directly related to thinking, and good thinking helps develop good writing. Students are encouraged to master the writing process as they advance in their educational careers.

The Writing Process

In the Old Tappan School District, the process approach to writing is used across grade levels and disciplines. The five stages of the writing process are **prewriting, drafting, revising, editing, and publishing**. Writing is a recursive process, cyclical in nature, which enables students to develop as writers.

Prewriting consists of the mental, verbal, and physical experiences that lead to the drafting stage. The student may generate possible ideas for writing by recalling experiences, listening to stories, brainstorming, and engaging in discussions. The writer may conduct experiments, respond to reading, outline, draw/doodle, note take, and use graphic organizers, such as webs or story maps, as he/she explores ideas and thoughts on given topics.

Drafting is the stage of the composing process during which the writer develops a written text. The focus at this time is on the content of the message, not the conventions. However, at each grade level, students are expected to use the conventions with which they are familiar.

Revising is the stage of discovery. The writer “revisits” the text to evaluate the content and form of the draft and, perhaps, to reformulate the piece of writing by rereading for meaning, narrowing the focus, elaborating with details, improving openings and closings.

Editing is the stage during which the writer “polishes” the writing for reader understanding. The writer uses the editing checklist to check for and correct syntax, spelling, grammar, usage, and punctuation.



Publishing is the stage that focuses on the final draft resulting in a formal product or publication and/or the delivery of the student writing to a particular audience. This can be as elaborate as an author celebration or as simple as writing and mailing a letter (Northern Valley Language Arts Curriculum Guide).

Students engage in various types of writing for different purposes. In **narrative writing** the writer tells a story based on a real or imagined event or relates a personal or fictional experience. Ralph Fletcher in *A Writer's Notebook* explains, "Maybe the single most important lesson you can learn as a writer is to write small (23)." Writing about a particular moment, including gestures, sounds, feelings, helps the writing come alive and enhances its quality. **Non-narrative writing** is based on an idea and does not follow a specific sequence. In **persuasive writing**, the student attempts to convince the reader to accept a particular point of view or take a specific action. There has been a greater emphasis on **expository writing** in recent years. Expository writing is used to explain, describe, give information, or inform. There are five basic patterns incorporated in expository writing:

Description: The author describes a topic by listing characteristics, features, and examples.

Sequence: The author lists items or events in numerical or chronological order.

Comparison: The author explains how two or more things are alike and/or how they are different.

Cause and effect: The author lists one or more causes and the resulting effect or effects.

Problem and solution: The author states a problem and lists one or more solutions to that problem. A question and answer format may be used in which the author asks a question and then answers it.

For each pattern of expository writing there are cue words (sometimes called clue words) that are used when engaging in each type of writing. Using these cue words, not only improves the quality of writing, but also increases the depth of understanding about a topic.

Pattern	Cue Words
Description	for example; the characteristics are
Sequence	first, second, third; next, then, finally
Comparison/Contrast	alike; same as; on the other hand; different; in contrast
Cause and Effect	as a result; therefore; because; the reasons why
Problem and Solution	the problem is; the puzzle is solved; question ...answer

Many authorities in the area of literacy education agree upon six major qualities of good writing. These qualities are:

Ideas and Content: The developing writer needs to learn to make choices about his writing topic so that he knows how to focus his work. Ideas are the heart of the message; they are what the writer has to say and the reason for writing.

Sentence Fluency: Fluent writing has rhythm. Sentences vary in structure and length.

Word Choice: Using the right words in a precise manner enriches and enlivens the writing. Specific words create images, capture the attention of the reader and make the story memorable.

Voice: The writer develops his/her own writing style by including his/her personality in the writing.



Organization: The information the writer includes must be presented in the correct order, in the correct place, and with purpose.

Convention: The writer needs to use the conventions of the English language. The writer must demonstrate an understanding of grammar, capitalization, punctuation, usage, spelling and paragraphing. He/she plays with language, considers sentence structure, word choice, and rules of grammar to enhance meaning and make the story easy for others to read.

Spelling

Writers are encouraged to use inventive spelling in the beginning stages of development. At the start of the school year, a kindergarten student might write random letters (*bske*) for the word house. But as the school year unfolds, the student learns to say the word slowly and write down the letters for the sounds he hears. For example, in writing the word house, he may write *h*, then *hs*, then *hows* as he moves to conventional spelling. Young writers will develop through the following stages:

Pre-communicative: Children experiment with letters and string random letters together.

Semi-phonetic: There is some letter-sound correspondence. Typically words are represented by one or two letters (consonants) i.e. *DG* for *dog*.

Phonetic:
Children use letters systematically to represent the entire sound structure of a word (i.e. *stik* for *stick*) and there may be substitutions of incorrect letters (i.e. *chrain* for *train*).

Transitional:
Many words are spelled conventionally, but there are still some phonetic spellings.

Alternate examples of the same sound may be used (i.e. *bote* for *boat*).

Conventional: Standard spellings are used.

As writers move into the conventional stage, they spell most words correctly. They recognize when a word doesn't "look right" and experiment with alternative spellings.



Dr. J. Richard Gentry, who has studied the spelling abilities of students and written extensively about the topic, states that there are five basic spelling rules that a child needs to know in order to be a successful speller. These rules are:

1. “Q” should always be followed by “u,” with a few exceptions, such as Iraq.

2. In each syllable there must be a vowel. This can be taught simply by asking the student to pick out the vowel(s) in one and two syllable words. Rules one and two should be mastered in first grade.

3. The Silent “E” Rule involves dropping the “e” when adding endings that begin with a vowel, such as changing “have” to “having.” The student must remember to keep the “e” when adding endings that begin with a consonant. For example, “late” becomes “lately.” This rule is developmentally appropriate for children around grade 2.

4. In making words plural, the student needs to change the “y” to “i” and add “es” when the singular form ends with consonant + y. An example of this is changing “baby” to “babies.” When the singular form ends with a vowel + y, add “s” (boy, boys). Third and fourth graders should be able to learn this rule.

5. Rule 5 must be learned by repeating this phrase over and over- “Write ‘i’ before ‘e’ except after ‘c’ or when sounded like ‘a’ as in ‘neighbor’ and ‘weigh.’ ‘Weird’ and ‘neither’ aren’t the same ‘either.’” This rule is not learned until fifth grade because of the difficulty of the words it affects as well as the many exceptions to the rule. Exceptions include: caffeine, codeine, Fahrenheit, etc.



One technique for learning new words is to:

LOOK at the word

SAY the word

COVER the word

WRITE the word

CHECK the word with the original word

TRY IT AGAIN if it is not correct

The Northern Valley Language Arts Curriculum Guide lists the following ways to learn to spell. The memorization of letter sequences is the least effective way to learn spelling. The student needs to be willing to take risk and invent spellings.

1. **Visualization:** Students learn to create visual images and read the letters seen.

2. **Auditory cueing and patterning:** Students use rhyming word patterns to generate alternate spellings (i.e. *please - knees, please - tease, please - these*).

3. **Articulation:** It is useful for young children to produce invented spellings. Sometimes the articulation of sounds produces the wrong letter. (i.e. *jr* for *dress*). More effective articulation strategies need to be demonstrated.

4. **Use tactile cueing:** Words need to be written to use visual memory and determine whether a word looks correct.

5. Discuss and study sound/symbol relationships, the probability of letter sequences, the likely position of letters in a word and possible letter patterns.

6. Look for patterns and apply generalizations.

7. Develop and use mnemonics or memory aids (i.e. a *piece* of *pie*).

Writing Checklists and Rubrics

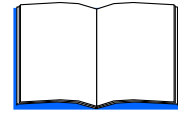
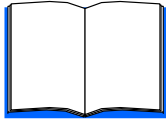
After the student has brainstormed an idea and written a first draft, it is time to engage in the revision and editing stages of the writing process. Revision focuses on the content of the piece. Did the writer include enough details? Are there unimportant or irrelevant details that may be omitted? Did the writer consider the audience and purpose of the piece? Are there any changes needed to improve the intended content and message? The editing stage requires the writer to correct the usage, mechanics, and spelling of the piece. The stages of the writing process are cyclical, and the writer may repeat the stages and procedures of the writing process indefinitely and without a specified sequence until a desired standard of writing is attained.



The ultimate responsibility for revising and editing a piece rests in the writer's hands. On the following pages you will find the District's checklists and rubrics* that were devised to help students self-assess their written work and teach them guidelines to improve their writing. These checklists and rubrics are generic; specific ones may be created incorporating assignment or content area expectations in addition to these basic requirements. As students use writing checklists and rubrics regularly to evaluate their own work, they begin to accept more responsibility for their end product and become more independent. In addition, teachers use the rubrics to grade written work.

*A rubric is a scoring tool that lists the criteria for a piece of work or "what counts" according to Heidi Goodrich, a rubrics expert. A checklist is a written record of skills/concepts the student needs to include when writing to communicate with others.

T.B.D. School
"Conquering the Challenges"



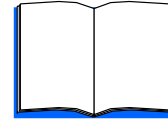
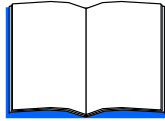
Writer's Checklist
Kindergarten

Name: _____ **Date:** _____

Writing

- I wrote my name on the paper.
- I drew a picture.
- I wrote words to go with my picture.
- I have spaces between my words.

T.B.D. School
"Conquering the Challenges"



Writer's Checklist
Grade 1

Name: _____ Date: _____

Writing

- My writing has an opening sentence.
- My writing stays on one topic.
- My story has a beginning, middle, and end.
- My story makes sense.
- I begin my sentences in different ways.

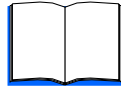
Editing

- Every sentence begins with a capital letter.
- The word I and names of people and special places begin with capital letters.
- I check my spelling and circle words I am not sure about.
- Every sentence ends with a punctuation mark (. ? !).

I like my writing because _____

Next time I write I will _____

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Writer's Checklist
Grade 2

Name: _____ Date: _____

Writing

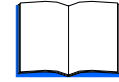
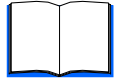
- My writing has an opening sentence.
- My writing stays on one topic.
- My writing has a closing sentence.
- I begin my sentences in different ways.
- I use adjectives.

Editing

- I write in complete sentences.
- Every sentence begins with a capital letter.
- Every sentence ends with a punctuation mark (. ? !).
- Names of people and places begin with capital letters.
- I have checked my spelling and circled words I am not sure about.

One thing I am proud of is _____

One thing I can improve is _____



Writer's Checklist
Grade 3

Name: _____ Date: _____

Writing

- My writing makes sense.
- My writing stays focused on the topic.

My expository writing includes:

- a topic sentence details and a conclusion.

My narrative writing includes:

- events and actions

- I use strong verbs.
- I vary my sentences.

Editing

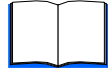
- Every sentence is a complete sentence
- I use capital letters.
 - * Beginning of a sentence
 - * I and Proper nouns
 - * Proper adjectives
 - * Titles (Dr., Mrs.)
 - * First letter in a quotation
 - * Words in a title of a written work
- I indent at the beginning of every paragraph.
- I use punctuation marks correctly (. ? ! , " -)
- I have checked my spelling, circled words I am not sure about and corrected my spelling.

I am proud of my writing because _____

Next time I write I will _____

T. BALDWIN DEMAREST SCHOOL

"Conquering the Challenges"



Writer's Checklist - Grade 4

Name: _____ Date: _____

Writing

- My writing makes sense.
- My writing focuses on the main idea.
- My expository writing/story includes an attention-getting opening.

My expository writing includes a topic sentence
 details and a conclusion

My story includes events and actions.

- I use strong adjectives.
- I use strong verbs.
- I vary my sentences.

Editing

- Every sentence makes sense.
- I use capital letters.

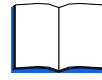
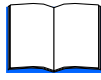
* Beginning of a sentence * Proper Nouns
* Proper adjectives * Titles (Dr., Mrs.)
* Words in a title * First letter in a quotation

- I indent at the beginning of every paragraph.
- I use punctuation marks (. ? ! , ' - "")
- I check and correct my spelling.

I am proud of my writing because _____

Next time I write I will _____

Charles DeWolf Middle School



Writer's Checklist - Grades 5 - 7

Name: _____ Date: _____

Writing

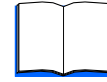
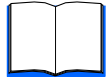
- My writing makes sense.
- My writing focuses on a central idea or topic.
- My expository writing has a thesis statement, examples, and a conclusion./My story has a setting, characters, a theme and a plot.
- I use descriptive/interesting words and figurative language.
- I use varied sentence structure (simple, compound, and complex sentences).

Editing

- Every sentence makes sense.
- I use capital letters.
 - * Beginning of a sentence
 - * Proper Nouns
 - * Proper adjectives
 - * Titles (Dr., Mrs.), Words in the title of a written work
 - * First letter in a quotation
- I indent at the beginning of every paragraph.
- I use punctuation marks (. ? ! , ' - "" :).
- I use the proper grammar.
 - * Verb tenses
 - * Subject-verb agreement
 - * Pronouns usage/agreement
- I check and correct my spelling.

I am proud of my writing because _____

Next time I write I will _____



Writer's Checklist - Grade 8

Name: _____ Date: _____

Writing

I use the five stages of the writing process: _____ prewriting
_____ drafting _____ revising _____ editing _____ publishing

My writing makes sense.

My writing focuses on a central idea or topic.

My expository writing/persuasive writing has a thesis statement, topic sentence, two major and two minor supports in each paragraph, and a conclusion.

My story includes a setting, characters, a theme, and a plot.

I use descriptive/interesting words and figurative language.

I use simple, compound, and complex sentences.

I write with an awareness of my audience.

Editing

I use capital letters.

* Beginning of a sentence

* Proper Nouns

* Proper adjectives

*Titles

* First letter in a quotation

I indent at the beginning of every paragraph.

I use punctuation marks (. ? ! , ' - " " ;).

I use the proper grammar.

* Verb tenses

* Subject-verb agreement

* Pronouns usage/agreement

I check and correct my spelling.

I am proud of my writing because _____

Next time I write I will _____

NAME _____

DATE _____

T. BALDWIN DEMAREST SCHOOL
FIRST GRADE WRITING RUBRIC

MORE PROGRESS NEEDED	MAKING PROGRESS	GOOD	EXCELLENT
1	2	3	4
I wrote 1 or 2 words about my idea.	I wrote a sentence about my idea.	I wrote some complete sentences about my idea.	I wrote many complete sentences with describing words about my idea.
My writing does not stay on my idea (topic).	Some of my writing stays on my idea (topic).	Most of my writing stays on my idea (topic).	My writing stays on my idea (topic).
I did not use capital letters.	I used capital letters some of the time.	I used capital letters most of the time.	I used capital letters all of the time.
I did not use punctuation marks.	I used punctuation marks some of the time.	I used punctuation marks most of the time.	I used punctuation marks all of the time.

NAME _____

DATE _____

T. BALDWIN DEMAREST SCHOOL
SECOND GRADE WRITING RUBRIC

MORE PROGRESS NEEDED	MAKING PROGRESS	GOOD	EXCELLENT
1	2	3	4
My writing does not stay on topic.	Some of my writing stays on topic.	Most of my writing stays on topic.	My writing stays on topic.
My writing does not have a beginning, middle, and end.	My writing does not have a beginning, middle, and end.	My writing has a beginning, middle, and end.	My writing has a clear beginning, middle, and end.
My writing has no describing words.	My writing has some describing words.	My writing has describing words.	My writing has many describing words.
Few sentences are complete.	Some of my sentences are complete.	Most of my sentences are complete.	All of my sentences are complete.
Few sentences make sense.	Some of my sentences make sense.	Most of my sentences make sense.	All of my sentences make sense.
Few words are spelled correctly.	Some of my words are spelled correctly.	Most of my words are spelled correctly.	All words are spelled correctly.
Few capital letters are used correctly.	Some capital letters are used correctly.	Most capital letters are used correctly.	I used capital letters appropriately.
Few punctuation marks are used correctly.	Some punctuation marks are used correctly.	Most punctuation marks are used correctly.	I used punctuation marks appropriately.

NAME _____

DATE _____

**T. Baldwin Demarest School
Writing Rubric, Grades 3 - 4**

	Inadequate Command 1	Limited Command 2	Partial Command 3	Adequate Command 4	Strong Command 5
Content and Organization	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> *Lacks an opening and/or closing * The writing does not have a focus * The writing does not make sense * The details are confusing or missing * The writing lacks an appropriate beginning, middle, and/or end * The writing does not move from idea to idea 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> * May lack an opening and/or closing * Tries to focus on the topic * The writing changes focus * Some of the writing makes sense * The writing includes few details, explanations, and examples * The writing may lack an appropriate beginning, middle, and/or end * Little of the writing moves from idea to idea 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> * May lack an opening and/or closing * Some of the writing has a single focus * Some of the writing makes sense * The writing includes some details, explanations, and examples *The writing may lack an appropriate beginning, middle, and/or end * Some of the writing moves from idea to idea 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> * Has an opening and closing * Single focus * The writing makes sense * The writing includes many details, explanations, and examples * The writing includes an appropriate beginning, middle, and end *The writing moves from idea to idea 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> * Has an attention-getting opening and closing * Single focus * The writing makes sense * The writing includes many details, explanations, and examples * The writing includes an appropriate beginning, middle, and end *The writing moves from idea to idea * The writer attempts different writing techniques
Usage	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> * Severe errors that interfere with meaning in <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - verb tenses - subject-noun agreement - pronoun agreement - word choice/meaning - proper modifier 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> * Many errors that interfere with meaning in <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - verb tenses - subject-noun agreement - pronoun agreement - word choice/meaning - proper modifiers 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> * Errors or patterns of errors that interfere with meaning in <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - verb tenses - subject-noun agreement - pronoun agreement - word choice/meaning - proper modifiers 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> * Some errors that do not interfere with meaning in <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - verb tenses - subject-noun agreement - pronoun agreement - word-choice/meaning - proper modifiers 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> * Few errors in <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - verb tenses - subject-noun agreement - pronoun agreement - word-choice/meaning - proper modifiers

Writing Rubric, Grades 3 - 4

	Inadequate Command 1	Limited Command 2	Partial Command 3	Adequate Command 4	Strong Command 5
Sentence Structure	<p>* Sentences are incomplete and/or incorrect</p>	<p>* Sentences have the same structure</p> <p>* Few sentences are complete</p> <p>* Few sentences make sense</p>	<p>* Little variety in type, structure, and length</p> <p>* Some sentences are complete</p> <p>* Some sentences make sense</p>	<p>* Some variety in type, structure, and length</p> <p>* Sentences are complete</p> <p>* Sentences make sense</p>	<p>* Sentences are varied in type, structure, and length</p> <p>* Sentences are complete</p> <p>* Sentences make sense</p>
Mechanics	<p>* Severe errors that interfere with meaning in</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - spelling - capitalization - punctuation <p>*Presentation/handwriting could have been neater</p>	<p>* Many errors that interfere with meaning in</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - spelling - capitalization - punctuation <p>*Presentation/handwriting could have been neater</p>	<p>* Some errors that interfere with meaning in</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - spelling - capitalization - punctuation <p>*Presentation/handwriting could have been neater</p>	<p>* Some errors that do not interfere with meaning in</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - spelling - capitalization - punctuation <p>*Presentation/handwriting is neat</p>	<p>* Few errors in</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - spelling - capitalization - punctuation <p>*Presentation/handwriting is neat</p>

NAME _____

DATE _____

CHARLES DEWOLF MIDDLE SCHOOL
Writing Rubric, Grades 5 - 8

	INADEQUATE COMMAND 1	LIMITED COMMAND 2	PARTIAL COMMAND 3	ADEQUATE COMMAND 4	STRONG COMMAND 5	SUPERIOR COMMAND 6
Content and Organization	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> * Lacks an opening and/or closing * Uncertain focus * Responds minimally to topic * No planning evident * Disorganized * Details are random, inappropriate, and/or missing 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> * May lack an opening and/or closing * Attempts to focus on topic * Writing does not move from the beginning to the end * Few, if any, transitions between ideas * Details lack explanation 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> * May lack an opening and/or closing * Usually has a single focus * Few ideas move from the beginning to the end * May lack some transitions between ideas * Repetitious details * Few details are explained 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> * May lack an opening and/or closing * Single focus * Some of the writing moves from idea to idea * Transitions evident between ideas * Some details are explained and varied 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> * Has an opening and closing * Single focus * Sense of unity and coherence * Key ideas developed * Logical progression of ideas with a beginning, middle, and end * Most of the writing moves from idea to idea * Attempts compositional risks * Details are appropriate and effective 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> * Has an attention-getting opening and closing * Single, distinct focus * Unified and coherent * Well-developed * Logical progression of ideas with a beginning, middle, and end * Writing moves from idea to idea * Compositional risks successful * Details are effective, vivid, explicit, specific to topic
Usage	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> * Severe errors that interfere with meaning in <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - verb tenses - subject-verb agreement - pronouns usage/agreement - word choice/meaning - proper modifiers 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> * Numerous errors that interfere with meaning in <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - verb tenses - subject-verb agreement - pronouns usage/agreement - word choice/meaning - proper modifiers 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> * Errors or patterns of errors that interfere with meaning in <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - verb tenses - subject-verb agreement - pronouns usage/agreement - word choice/meaning - proper modifiers 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> * Some errors that interfere with meaning in <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - verb tenses - subject-verb agreement - pronouns usage/agreement - word choice/meaning - proper modifiers 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> * Few errors in <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - verb tenses - subject-verb agreement - pronouns usage/agreement - word choice/meaning - proper modifiers 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> * Very few, if any, errors in <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - verb tenses - subject-verb agreement - pronouns usage/agreement - word choice/meaning - proper modifiers

Writing Rubric, Grades 5 - 8

	INADEQUATE COMMAND 1	LIMITED COMMAND 2	PARTIAL COMMAND 3	ADEQUATE COMMAND 4	STRONG COMMAND 5	SUPERIOR COMMAND 6
Sentence Structure	* There is an assortment of incomplete and/or incorrect sentences	* Sentences have the same structure * Some sentences are complete * Some sentences make sense	* There is little variety in type, structure, and length * Some sentences are complete * Some sentences make sense	* There is some variety in type, structure, and length * Most sentences are complete * Most sentences make sense	* Sentences are varied in type, structure, and length * Sentences are complete * Sentences make sense	* Sentences are varied in type, structure, and length * Sentences are complete * Sentences make sense
Mechanics	* Severe errors that interfere with meaning in - spelling - capitalization - punctuation * Presentation/handwriting could have been neater	* Numerous errors that interfere with meaning in - spelling - capitalization - punctuation * Presentation/handwriting could have been neater	* Some errors that interfere with meaning in - spelling - capitalization - punctuation * Presentation/handwriting is neat	* Some errors that do not interfere with meaning in - spelling - capitalization - punctuation * Presentation/handwriting is neat	* Few errors in - spelling - capitalization - punctuation * Presentation/handwriting is neat	* Very few errors in - spelling - capitalization - punctuation * Presentation/handwriting is neat

The Reading-Writing Connection

According to Lucy Calkins in *Raising Lifelong Learners*, it is the role of parents to co-create their children's lives as readers, writers, and players. Rich learning environments need to be fostered where "initiative, thoughtfulness, curiosity, resourcefulness, perseverance, and imagination" are nurtured (3). Reading, writing, and talking are a natural part of daily life. Although talking is sometimes overlooked and taken for granted, it is at the foundation of a child's learning as he develops meaning through language.



The U.S. Department of Education Commission on Reading, after evaluating 10,000 research findings, issued a report, "Becoming a Nation of Readers (1985)" stating "the single most important activity for building the knowledge required for eventual success is reading aloud to children." The report continued ... "it is necessary for adults to read aloud to children not just when children can't yet read on their

own, but throughout all the grades " (as quoted in Calkins, 31). A U.S. Department of Education analysis found that children who were read to at least three times a week by a family member were almost twice as likely to score in the top 25% in reading than children who were read to less than three times a week (2000). According to author Jim Trelease, "the experts were saying reading aloud was more important than worksheets, homework, assessments, book reports, and flashcards. One of the cheapest, simplest, and oldest tools to teaching was being promoted as a better teaching tool than anything else in the home or classroom (3)."

Unfortunately, children often do not choose reading as a leisure time activity. The average kindergarten student has seen more than 5,000 hours of television- more than the time needed to earn a bachelor's degree. A U.S. Department of Education longitudinal study of almost 25,000 8th graders found

that students watched television an average of 21.2 hours a week, but spent only 1.9 hours a week outside of school reading, excluding homework (Calkins, 33). If we could only encourage our students to read more as a leisure time activity, just think of the improvement they would make in developing their reading skills, in addition to the adventures and horizons that would open up to them. As students read more, they are exposed to different genres and writing styles, expand their vocabularies, and improve both their reading and writing skills. As they read, they become part of the community of readers.



While reading is the construction of meaning from the text, writing involves putting meaning on the page by relating prior knowledge and experiences. What students write in the classroom are texts to be read by other students. When students engage in writing stories, there is a natural connection to the books they have read. Writers use the stories they read as models for their writing. Renowned and beloved author Cynthia Rylant has written, “I learned how to write from writers. I didn’t know any personally, but I read” (as quoted in Buckner, 55). Reading and writing are reciprocal activities: as students read they also improve their writing and as they write they improve their reading. Using authors as mentors, students learn valuable lessons to improve their craft and structure. They need to regard themselves as writers and linger over the small events and find significance in the commonplace occurrences of their lives. As Ralph Fletcher states in *Writer’s Notebook*, “Writers are like other people, except for at least one important difference. Other people have daily thoughts and feelings, notice this sky or that smell, but they don’t do much about it ... Not writers. Writers react. And writers need a place to record those reactions (3).” From the preschooler who draws a picture and scribbles or writes random letters to the eighth grader who composes a short story, all students are writers - part of the community of writers.

The Reading Process

Two important predictors of early reading success are phonemic awareness and alphabet recognition (Chall & Popp, 1996; Beck & Juel, 1995; Stanovich, 1992; and Adams, 1990). Phonemic awareness is the ability to hear and manipulate sounds. Phonemic awareness instruction focuses on the oral aspects of words- the sounds that letters and letter combinations make.

Phonemic awareness occurs in five separate, yet progressive stages:

Stage 1: Rhyming and Alliteration- The student hears and appreciates the rhyming (i.e. cat - fat) and alliterative nature of selected words (i.e. silly Sam).

Stage 2: Word Parts- The student listens to sound units within words. He learns that words can be divided in onsets (sound units that occur at the beginning of a word, before the vowel) and rimes (sound units that occur at the end of words and include a vowel). For example, the word *get* has an onset of *g*- and a rime of *-et*. The child becomes aware of syllables and learns the individual sounds that correspond to individual letters.

Stage 3: Sound Positions- The student is exposed to the positional nature of individual sounds within a word- what sound comes at the beginning, what sound comes in the middle, and what sound comes at the end of a word.

Stage 4: Sound Separation- The student separates the sounds within a word.

Stage 5: Sound Manipulation- The student adds, deletes, or rearranges sounds in some words to create new words.

The child does not need to establish complete competency before progressing to the next stage. Phonemic awareness is the precursor for later reading success.

As a child reads, he uses three cues (strategies) or a combination of these cues to help him get meaning from the text:

Meaning- The child uses the meaning or message of the story. Does what he reads make sense? (i.e. The child reads the word *hippo* because he sees the picture of the hippo)

Structure- The child uses the syntax of our language as he reads. Does what he reads sound right? (The child reads *The boys are running*, not *The boys is running*.)

Visual Information- The child uses the visual information from the letters written. Does what he reads look right? (i.e. The child reads *rabbit*, not *bunny*, because the word starts with the letter *r*.)

It is essential for the child to read fluently, using the punctuation. He needs to put his words together to make the reading sound like talking. This helps him anticipate the word that comes next. In addition, stopping at periods, not at the end of the line of print, aids the reader in detecting the structure (syntax) of the text and figuring out new words.



It is also helpful for the child to make analogies when figuring out new words. For example, if the child knows *cow*, he should be able to figure out the new word *flower*. The child needs to think if he knows a word or a part of a word that looks like the unknown word. As an example, if he knows *will*, he can use the *-ill* part to figure out *still*. Making connections between known words and new words is a powerful tool.

Reading involves getting meaning from the text, not merely word calling. Focusing on literary elements, including characters, setting, events, problem and

solution enhances comprehension. As the student relates what happened at the beginning, middle, and end of the story he will gain more meaning from the story. We speak of three levels of comprehension:

literal- requires the reader to use the information stated in the passage

inferential- requires the reader to read “between the lines” and to combine prior knowledge and experience with passage information to figure out what is implied.

critical- requires the reader to extend the concepts beyond the situation, using what is stated or implied to make evaluations and applications.

We encourage our students to go beyond what is actually stated in the text to extend their reading and thinking skills. Students are more able to understand what they read by making connections to the text. Keene and Zimmerman concluded that students comprehend better when they make different kinds of connections: text-to-self, text-to-text, text-to-world. They use their background knowledge and think about what they already know. Text-to-self connections are connections that a reader makes between a piece of reading material and the reader’s own personal experiences. Text-to-text connections occur when the reader is reminded of other things that he has read, including books by the same author, stories of a similar genre or about the same topic. Text-to-world connections are larger connections that go beyond the reader’s own personal experiences into the world around them (45-71). By making these connections, students enhance their understanding.

In the primary grades, the focus of reading instruction is learning how to read- learning letters and sounds, problem solving new words, developing sight vocabularies, and learning how to express one’s ideas in writing. The next phase in the child’s educational career is reading to learn, where the child uses these fundamentals to learn new information about topics and make connections. We are equipping our students with these powerful tools!

Ways to Encourage Readers and Writers

- * **Be a good role model.** Let your child see you read and write.
- * **Sing songs and recite poems and rhymes that have repetitive sounds.** Repetition makes it easier for your child to pick up the patterns in the sounds you make.
- * **Read aloud daily to your child- no matter the age.** Share the illustrations as you read. Reread interesting pages or passages. Make connections to other stories or experiences. According to Mem Fox, renowned children's author, use your voice in these ways: make it loud, make it fast, make it high, make it soft, make it slow, make it low, pause. Include both fiction and nonfiction books. Remember- just have fun!
- * **Encourage your child to read on his own at home.** Reading at home can help your child do better in school.
- * **Keep a variety of reading materials in the house.** Make sure to have reading materials for enjoyment as well as for reference.
- * **Encourage your child to practice reading aloud.** Listen to your child read out loud and praise her often as she reads. Model reading with fluency. Offer to read every other page or even every other chapter to your child. Have conversations and discussions about the book with your child.
- * **Write short notes for your child to read.** Put a note in his lunch bag or write down his weekly household responsibilities for him to remember.
- * **Encourage activities that require reading.** Cooking (reading a recipe), constructing a kite (reading directions), or identifying a bird's nest or a shell at the beach (reading a reference book) are some examples.
- * **Establish a reading time, even if it's only 10 minutes each day.** Make sure there is a good reading light in your child's room and stock her bookshelves with books and magazines that are easy to both read and reach.
- * **Talk with your child and create a climate of words at home.** Talking makes children think about their experiences more and helps them expand their vocabularies. Ask your child to give detailed descriptions of events and to tell complete stories.

- * **Restrict television time.** The less time your child spends watching television, the more time he will have for reading-related activities.
- * **Visit the library once a week.** Have your child apply for her own library card so she can check out books on her own for schoolwork and for pleasure reading. Ask your child to bring home a library book to read to a younger sibling and encourage him to check out books on tape that he can listen to on long car trips.
- * **Work in partnership with your child's school.** The more you know about the type of reading program her school follows, the more you can help by supplementing the program at home. Offer to volunteer in her classroom or school library as often as your schedule allows.
- * **Give your child writing material.** Reading and writing go hand in hand. Children want to learn to write and to practice writing. If you make pencils, crayons, and paper available at all times, your child will be more inclined to initiate writing activities on his own.
- * **Encourage everyday writing.** Regular household activities are a great way to put children's writing skills to good use. For example, ask your child to write a shopping list, or take messages when we can't get to the phone, or write letters regularly to a grandparent or other family members or friends.
- * **Encourage your child to write requesting information, free samples, or travel brochures.**
- * **Purchase a journal or diary for your child** and encourage him to write daily. The main way for beginning writers to become more fluent and improve writing skills is to practice.
- * **Praise your child's writing efforts.** Emphasize your child's successes. Remember that correct spelling begins with inventive spelling.

Glossary

checklist - a written record of skills/concepts the student needs to include when writing to communicate with others. The writer can compare his writing to this record to see what changes are needed.

coherence - the unifying element in good writing. It means that all the ideas in a paragraph flow smoothly from one sentence to the next sentence and from one paragraph to the next. Coherence is what gives the writing its flow. It gives the reader a sense of what to expect and makes the reading easier to follow.

Coherent is the adjective. It means that the writing has the above characteristics.

compositional risks - the techniques a good writer incorporates in his or her writing that attract the reader's attention and express the ideas in a novel and creative manner. Examples of compositional risks include similes, metaphors, personification, full-circle stories, alliterations, rhetorical questions, onomatopoeia, hyphenated modifiers, hyperbole, irony, flashbacks, foreshadowing, imagery, character traits, infinitives, gerunds, interjections, unusual and sophisticated word combinations, and dialogue.

focus - the author's main idea

proper modifier - the appropriate describing (adjective or adverb) word

rubric - a scoring tool that lists the criteria for a piece of work or "what counts"

transitions - words and phrases that serve as bridges from one idea to the next, one sentence to the next, or one paragraph to the next. They help to organize the parts of a story. Transitions keep the reader from having to find his or her way and possibly getting lost in the reading. They are the glue that holds the ideas together. Some common transitions are: for example, for instance, one example of (this) is, first, second, third, and another example, finally, in conclusion, to summarize, on the one hand, on the other hand, however, ..., but..., also.

Appendix A: Spelling Tips 100 Most Commonly Used Words*

a about after all an and are as at
back be because big but by
came can Christmas could
day did do dog down
for from
get go going good got
had have he her him his home
I if in into is it
just
like little
man me morning mother my
night not
of off on one our out over
people play
ran
said saw school see she so some soon started
that the their them then there they this three time to
too two
up us
very
was water we went were what when will with would
you

**Teaching Spelling, 1993*

The Ten Most Commonly Misused Words

1. **accept** (verb): to receive with consent; to give approval to
except (verb): to leave out from a group
(preposition): other than, but
2. **advice** (noun): a recommendation about a course of action
advise (verb): to recommend a course of action; to give advice
3. **affect** (verb): to influence; to produce an effect upon
effect (noun): the result of an action; consequence
4. **all right** (adjective): satisfactory
(adverb): satisfactorily
alright: NOT A WORD
5. **its** (possessive form of it): belong to it
it's (contraction): it is or it has
6. **passed** (verb, past tense of pass): went by
past (noun): that which has gone by
(preposition): beyond
(adjective): ended
7. **than** (conjunction): used for comparisons
then (adverb): at that time
8. **their** (possessive form of they): belonging to them
there (adverb): at or in that place
they're (contraction): they are
9. **to** (preposition): in the direction of; toward
too (adverb): also, more than enough
two (noun): cardinal number between one and three
(adjective): one more than one
10. **your** (possessive form of you): belonging to you
you're (contraction): you are

Appendix B: Popular Educational Web Sites

Beginning Reading Activities

www.starfall.com

This site presents a systematic phonics approach to reading with phonemic awareness and makes learning fun.

Beginning and Ending Sounds, Sounds in Isolation

www.professorgarfield.org

Work with Garfield to learn beginning and ending sounds, sounds in isolation, and beginning phonics.

Early Literacy Work

www.literacycenter.net

This site is geared to the preschool-age child and follows a modified Montessori approach to teach reading.

Handwriting Without Tears

www.hwtears.com

This site provides letter formation charts and other information about handwriting.

Language Arts and Math Skills

www.4kids.org

Use this site for language arts and math practice.

Mathematics Skills

www.AAAMath.com

www.factmonster.com

Students from K to 8th grade can practice all math skills and concepts.

www.nationallibraryofvirtualmanipulatives

Students can use these manipulatives in extending math concepts.

Reading Stories

www.kizclub.com

Stories with common sight words are read to the students. Students can go back and reread the stories independently. In addition, students can extend their phonics skills.

Researching Topics

www.kidsclick.org

This web search was prepared by librarians for students to use when researching various topics of interest.

Spelling

www.spellingcity.com

This site helps children of all ages improve their spelling skills and improve their vocabularies.

Appendix C: Citing Sources

Students in grades 5 - 8 will follow the MLA (Modern Language Association) format when required to cite references. The following are the most frequently used citations:

1. Citing material from books

Author's Last Name, First Name*. *Title of Book*. City of Publication, State of Publication: Publisher, Year of Publication. Print.

*If you have two authors, invert only the first name, i.e. Smith, Tom, and Marcy Jones.

2. Citing material from a magazine or newspaper

Author's Last Name, First Name. "Title of Article." *Title of magazine or newspaper*. Day Month Year of Publication: Page(s). Print.

3. Citing from a journal

Author's Last Name, First Name. "Title of Article." *Name of Journal*. vol. issue (Date of Publication): Page. Print.

4. Citing an encyclopedia or reference book

Author's Last Name, First Name. "Title of Article." *Title of Encyclopedia*. Edition. Volume. City of Publication: Publisher, Year of Publication. Print.

5. Citing a Web Document

Last Name, First Name. "Title of Article." *Name of Site*. Day Month Year of resource creation (if available). Web. Day Month Year of access. URL optional <http://www. >

6. Citing an Online Journal

Author's Last name, First Name. "Title of Article." *Journal* vol. issue (Year of Publication): Pages. Web. Day Month Year of access. URL optional <http://www >

7. Citing an Online Magazine

Author's Last name, First name. "Title of Article." *Name of Magazine* Day Month Year of Publication: Page. Web. Day month year of access. URL optional <http://www. >

8. Citing an Online Encyclopedia or Reference Work on Web or CD-ROM

Author's Last Name (if given) or Organization, First Name. "Title of Article." *Title of Encyclopedia*. Edition. Volume. City of Publication: Publisher, Year of Publication. Web. URL optional <http://www. >

If you need to cite any other sources, please consult the [MLA Handbook for Writers of Research Papers, 7th Edition](#). Ed. Joseph Gibaldi. New York: Modern Language Association of America, 2009. Print. You may wish to refer to the MLA's web site at <http://www.mla.org/style/sources.htm> or an online bibliographic tool www.citationmachine.net

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