

CHAPTER ONE

The Elements of Writing as Learning

Strategies, Genres, Topics, and Tools

Student writers need a whole array of organizational strategies from which to choose in order to make their idea shine.

~Ruth Culham (2003, p. 73)

THE WRITING TEACHER AND THE WRITING CLASSROOM

In the introduction, we pointed out that writing is strongly linked to improved academic performance in all subjects. The implication of this linkage is that all teachers in all subjects need to include writing in their teaching. By extension, we believe that all teachers need a repertoire of effective writing strategies that can be applied across the curriculum. Finally, we advise that all teachers in a school (or school system) share a set of common strategies that students recognize and learn to use flexibly. Essentially, according to VanTassel-Baska (1996), the teacher teaches writing so that writing becomes “a part of an integrated comprehensive set of activities used to enhance student learning” (p. 144). Hopefully, if writing is taught as a way of learning throughout the school, all students are continuously engaged in both instruction and practice with all teachers.

While we recognize that teachers often see themselves as specialists in specific subject areas, writing promotes, develops, organizes, and enhances all learning, and every subject has its own literature—from mathematics to sports. Writing defines subject areas, deepening one’s knowledge and recall (Kennedy, 1996). The sports writer, for example, touches upon statistics, history, geography,

**Strategies, Genres,
Topics, and Tools**

Words Are Free!

*Have Words,
Can Write*

Writing Is Thinking

Write to a Martian

*Every Word
Has a Story*

*Organize
Your Writing*

*Know Who You
Know and Know
Who You Are!*

Think in Threes

*Everybody Has
to Be Someplace*

*Let’s Make
a Movie!*

Words Inspire

Know Thyself

Writers Are Editors

*A Goal for
Every Student*

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health, character behaviors, and values. As stated by Nancy Atwell, “Writing is basic to thinking about and learning knowledge in all fields as well as communicating that knowledge” (1998, p. xiii).

The first indicators of good instruction throughout a school are the walls. The slogan “the walls talk” reflects an active visualization of what students are doing and learning. Commercial posters and signs on the walls tell one story about instruction, while students’ writings and projects tell a different story. Educators, parents, and other visitors should be able to walk into a classroom after the students have left and know from the walls what the students have learned. A classroom should be a living panorama where the visitor is invited to comment and marvel at the students’ work, especially at what students have written about their learning or their insights into their learning. The classroom and hallway walls are the visual representation of what has been taught and what has been learned.

STRATEGIES FOR WRITING

Today most schools accept writing as a process, in contrast to the older rule-bound, product-oriented approach in which the student writes and the teacher corrects (Kennedy, 1996). In a process environment, students are guided through successive, and possibly recursive, steps of prewriting, drafting, revising, editing, and if possible or appropriate, publishing. This arrangement of steps is probably a good description of what a writer might do in the development of a piece of writing, but what is often missing are the instructional strategies that guide the student toward the fulfillment of these steps.

Some questions are central to this process. What is prewriting? Does it mean discussion? Research? Interviewing? Outlining? How does a writer organize material before drafting? How does a student write a draft, and what are the elements of a good draft so that it becomes an excellent final product? What steps of the writing process does the student have to practice? Expansion of ideas? Use of transitional words? Reduction of clutter? How does one *teach* the concept of voice?

One way to think of writing is as a way of generating meaning through fluency plus organization. A writer needs the words and the organizational structures that convey the ideas or message coherently (Spivey, 1996). The strategies outlined in this book build fluency for the topic or content and provide the students with organizational schemata for specific genres and various audiences. As the students learn and practice a strategy, they use and integrate one or more of these schemata to prewrite, plan, draft, and revise. In addition, students become aware that “writing is the process of selecting as well as organizing” (Spivey 1996, p. 38).

To build these factors of fluency, organization, development, and coherence, students need to start with

- A Notebook specifically for writing and keeping track of strategies, illustrated in Figure 1.1.
- An understanding of genres and their organizational formats (see Figures 1.2 and 1.3).
- Slogans for strategies and displays of writing (Figure 1.4).
- Nontechnological and technological materials (Figures 1.5 and 1.6).
- Topics for writing (Figures 1.7–1.9).

- Resources for writing (Figure 1.10).
- Guidelines for writing a draft copy (Figure 1.11).
- Guidelines for editing (Figure 1.12).
- Skills for writing on the computer (Figure 1.13).

By providing students with the above materials and information, the classroom becomes a workshop for teaching and learning writing and makes writing the centerpiece for instruction.

SETTING UP THE NOTEBOOK

Even with a computer, a writer still needs a notebook for keeping track of and easy referral to information relating to writing. Because the Notebook is so essential to writing, we have capitalized the word—Notebook—which is how it is written throughout this book. Provide your students (or have them get) a simple composition book, preferably *not* spiral, and begin your writing instruction by giving students the directions below for using the Notebook (Figure 1.1):

Figure 1.1 Setting Up the Notebook

• TABLE OF CONTENTS •			
Date	Topic or Subject	Strategy	Page
9/12/year	Weather, Science	Taxonomy of Terms	8
9/15	Weather, Science	Composing With Keywords	10
9/19	The Early Greeks, Social Studies	Metacognition on Ancient Greece	12
9/22	Myth of the Sun, Reading	Defining Format—What is a Myth?	14
9/27	Vocabulary on Weather, Science	Taxonomy of Weather Terms	16

- Open the composition book to the first page opposite the cover.
- Number that page 1, and continue numbering on both sides of each page until you get to page 9. (Later you will continue to number the pages as needed.) All of these pages will be used for the Table of Contents.
- Go back to page 1 and head it *Table of Contents*.
- Under *Table of Contents*, write the following headings with spacing as illustrated and examples of entries. (Note that all entries follow the Table of Contents and begin on even-numbered pages and use a double-page spread—even number on the right, odd number on the left. For example, the first entry after the Table of Contents would begin on page 10.)

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THE GENRES OF WRITING

All writing of consequence has what is called *genre* or *form* that follows a recognizable organizational scheme. A genre refers to a specific, definable type of writing (or art) with noticeable attributes. A novel is organized quite differently from a research paper. A haiku is set up differently from a ballad. Writing genres may be fiction, non-fiction, or poetry. Experienced writers learn to mix their genres, so that in addition to myth, legend, fairy tale, novel, essay, and so forth, there is biographical fiction, descriptive narrative, and personal essay.

Despite the need for understanding and writing within a genre, many students remain unaware of genre formats and how to write within the parameters of their structures. Many times this lack of awareness results from being assigned writing topics such as, "Write an essay about . . .," which either is too global or lacks format specificity. Such topics cause students to be uncertain as to whether the essay is to be persuasive, explanatory, or personal.

When students are asked, without instruction, to write about a famous person, they often end up creating a piece that strings facts together and is likely to resemble an obituary. Writing assignments that begin with words such as *discuss*, *tell*, or *describe* often result in students rambling, digressing, switching voices, or changing from objective to personal or vice versa. Writers must learn what genres are and how they are structured or organized. Learning about genres is developmental, so that young writers (and probably inexperienced writers) are limited in what they can write. Even at adult levels, few people can write well in a variety of genres. Nevertheless, in a school with a systematic, strategy-based writing program, students can learn to write fables, legends, news reports, plays, and other genres.

Figures 1.2 and 1.3 show two lists, or Taxonomies, that contain examples of the types of genres that students can learn to write. One list contains fiction and nonfiction formats, and the other list has different poetry genres. The lists can be used by teachers as planning and organizational tools. You may also want to have your students enter these genres in their Notebooks. (Follow the plan for entering Taxonomies given in Chapter 2). You can add other genres to these lists and place checkmarks in the "Plan to Teach" column.

Figure 1.2 Fiction and Nonfiction Genres

	Genres	Appropriate Grades	Plan to Teach
A	autobiography animal story (fiction) animal story (factual) ABC book adventure story	3+ 1+ 1+ 1+ 3+	
B	biography business letter	3+ 4+	
C	comedy skit character sketch comics	5+ 3+ 3+	

Figure 1.2 (Continued)

	Genres	Appropriate Grades	Plan to Teach
D	descriptive essay	3+	
E	explanatory essay editorial	4+ 5+	
F	fairy tale folk tale friendly letter	2+ 2+ 1+	
G	ghost story greeting card	2+ 1+	
H	humorous story how-to piece history article	1+ 1+ 3+	
I	interview instructions	3+ 2+	
J	jokes journal	1+ 1+	
K			
L	legend laboratory report learning log	4+ 4+ 1+	
M	mystery myth metacognitive statement	3+ 3+ 1+	
N	novel narrative	7+ 2+	
O	opinion statement	1+	
P	personal essay persuasive essay play	2+ 3+ 3+	
Q			
R	research report recipe	4+ 1+	
S	short story script science fiction speech	6+ 3+ 4+ 2+	
T	travelogue technical report tall tale	3+ 6+ 3+	
U			
V			
W	wildlife story	3+	
X, Y, Z			

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Figure 1.3 Poetry Genres

	Genres	Appropriate Grades	Plan to Teach
A	acrostic	1+	
B	ballad	3+	
C	couplet cinquain	1+ 2+	
D	diamante	2+	
E	epic	4+	
F	free verse	1+	
G			
H	haiku	2+	
I			
J			
K			
L	lyric(s) limerick	4+ 3+	
M			
N			
O			
P			
Q	quatrain	3+	
R	rap	4+	
S	sonnet	6+	
T			
U			
V			
W			
X, Y, Z			

With the classroom as a showcase of student accomplishment, all work is displayed aesthetically and invitingly. A simple frame of construction paper and a statement about the work announces the importance of what is being displayed. The suggested phrases for bulletin board displays shown in Figure 1.4 serve as both announcements and invitations to writers and observers alike. Many students enjoy creating their own witty or catchy phrases, and teachers can encourage student suggestions and provide opportunities for brainstorming bulletin board captions.

Figure 1.4 Bulletin Board Invitations for Students' Writing

Writers Under Construction	Need a Good Definition? Ask a Writer.
Writers Meet Here	Powerful Persuasions and Exacting Explanations
Author's Column	Writers Never Forget
Writers' Convention—Stop and Browse	Need a Friend? Write a Letter.
Mathematicians' Write-Abouts	Write? Right!
Writers Wanted—Space Available	Write Today. Write Tomorrow. Write Forever.
Writer's Scene	We're in the Write Company.
A World of Writers	
Publisher's Place	

TOOLS AND MATERIALS FOR WRITING

The easy availability or accessibility of writing tools and materials is essential to helping students write better and maintain motivation for ongoing writing. Some writers need different kinds of writing paper—yellow pads for drafts and white or special paper for final and published copies. Most writers need and love different kinds of writing implements—well-sharpened, good lead pencils, easily flowing pens, and colored markers. And, of course, there is the computer, with its word processing and graphics programs—and the Internet. All of these features are easily accessible and user-friendly tools for writing. Writers also need spell-checkers, age-appropriate and unabridged dictionaries, atlases, globes, and reference material.

Of course, not all classrooms or schools may be able to provide all of these tools, but having them should be a goal. Think of how difficult writing is without them. Imagine building a house without plans and with only a small hammer and a few nails. Without the necessary tools, writing can be equally difficult. Figures 1.5 and 1.6 provide suggestions for the basic writing materials needed to support good writing instruction. Adjustments and substitutions will need to be made based upon available resources and budgetary constraints. Figure 1.5 lists items that a school should provide for elementary students. While materials for writing are often the responsibility of the students themselves in middle and high school, whenever possible schools should supply the basic writing materials needed to provide motivation for writing for publication or presentation to other students. The materials listed in Figure 1.6 are also helpful.

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Figure 1.5 Nontechnological Materials to Support an Instructional Writing Program—Elementary Grades

Draft paper—yellow and white pads

Final copy paper—white, lined and unlined

Publishing paper—colored construction paper

Writing implements—soft-lead pencils, pens and markers of various colors

Spiral notebook(s) for journals, lists, and writing strategy models

Grade-appropriate dictionaries and thesauruses

Unabridged dictionary (for grades 3 and up)

Wall of topics

Story frames and sentence starters

Charts of editing and proofreading rules

Labels, sticky notes, and glue sticks

Files of magazines and pictures

Blank greeting cards and envelopes

Blank bound books

Bookbinder and laminator

Anthologies of nursery rhymes, fairy tales, myths, folk tales, and legends

Globes and maps

Wall of words, including months, days of the week, seasons, colors, animals, names of classmates, mathematical terms, occupations, or whatever is needed for the students' writing

Figure 1.6 Nontechnological Materials to Support an Instructional Writing Program—Middle School and High School

Unabridged dictionary	Books of word histories and origins
Style manuals	Globes and maps
Alphabetical thesaurus and topic thesaurus	Book of concise biographies
Spell-checkers	Appropriate magazines, periodicals, and newspapers

WHAT SHOULD I WRITE ABOUT?

William Zinsser has stated that “the only way to write is to force yourself to produce a certain number of words on a regular basis” (1980, p. 53). To many teachers, this statement, while probably correct, may seem absurd or impossible: “I’m a mathematics teacher with a year’s curriculum to cover” or “My students are just learning to read and can barely hold a pencil” or “Zinsser is talking about professional writers, not young students.” Yet, one learns to write by writing, just as one learns to bowl by bowling. Following are suggestions to get students to want to engage in the practice of writing.

First, have students create a list (called a Taxonomy in this book—see Chapter 2) early in the school year of topics they might write about in class. Obviously, the list will vary depending on whether the class is a second grade class or a high school chemistry class. Have the students set up the list alphabetically as shown in Figure 1.7, and ask them to brainstorm for topics. Ask students what they think they will learn about, and have them turn their answers into topics. A third grader might answer, “How to multiply.” Under M, the student would write “multiplication.” In a chemistry class, suggested topics could be “contributions of chemists,” “discoverers of elements,” “alchemy and chemistry,” and “careers in chemistry.” Lists of possible writing topics can be generated at the beginning of the year or course and modified, updated, and otherwise revised throughout the year or program. Figures 1.7–1.9 show three samples of lists of topics.

Figure 1.7 Suggested Topics for Primary Grades

• TAXONOMY •	
A	autumn, animal habitats
B	baby animals, books, baseball
C	cats, cars, colors, Christmas
D	dreams, dogs, dinosaurs
E	Easter
F	friends, farms, food, family
G	games, gifts
H	home, houses, helping, holidays, Halloween, Hanukkah
I	ice skating, insects, Indians, ice cream
J	jokes, jobs
K	kites, kittens, Kwanzaa
L	ladybugs
M	music
N	names, numbers
O	owls
P	pets, Passover
Q	questions
R	reading, running, Ramadan
S	swimming
T	television, trucks, teachers
U	uncles and aunts
V	visitors, valentine’s day
W	weather, water, whales
X	xylophones, x-rays
Y	yesterday
Z	zero, zoos, zippers

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Figure 1.8 Suggested Topics for Intermediate Grades

• TAXONOMY •	
A	Africa, Antarctic, Asia, art, animals of the jungle, astronomy
B	basketball, books, babies, birds, butterflies
C	cats, cars, Christmas, cities, climate, cameras
D	dreams, dogs, dinosaurs, deserts
E	Easter, explorers, Eskimos
F	friends, farms, food, family
G	games, gifts, geography, geometry
H	home, houses, helping, Halloween, Hanukkah, health, horses
I	ice skating, insects, Indians
J	jokes, jobs, jogging
K	kites, kittens, kings, karate
L	leaders
M	music, musical instruments, mathematics
N	names, nocturnal animals
O	oceans, oceanography
P	pets, Passover, plants
Q	questions, quilting
R	reading, running, rivers, Ramadan
S	swimming, senses, sports, songs
T	television, transportation
U	uncles and aunts, United States of America
V	values
W	weather, water, whales, Washington, DC
X	xylophones, x-rays, xeriscapes
Y	yachts
Z	zero, zoography

Figure 1.9 Suggested Topics for Chemistry

• TAXONOMY •	
A	agriculture and chemistry, atoms in our lives
B	blood chemistry
C	chemistry in the news, chemists of accomplishment, chemical warfare
D	DNA in medical treatment, detectives and chemistry, drug abuse
E	elements and their names
F	forensics, food chemistry
G	gold as a commodity of greed, gold as a commodity of medicine
H	history of chemistry
I	inventions of chemists
J	jokes for chemists
K	krypton as material and as birthplace of Superman
L	luminescence in our lives
M	mathematics and chemistry
N	nuclear chemistry
O	osmosis for living
P	plastics—past and future
Q	quinine and the story of malaria
R	radiation and cancer
S	silicones in the news
T	turpentine—home and medicine product
U	uranium and its discovery
V	vitamins for health
W	whiskey—product and history
X	xerography
Y	yeast for the baker
Z	zinc for health

Students also need to know the resources for writing and becoming a writer—tools beyond the encyclopedia and copying articles off the Internet. Figure 1.10 shows a Taxonomy for these resources.

THE STUDENT AS WRITER

Perhaps the greatest benefit derived from the shift of the teacher-correction model of writing to the writing process has been the teachers' and (hopefully) students' understanding that a writer is his or her own editor—at least initially. Many persons can probably remember receiving writing assignments that they wrote under duress, either in class or at home, and then handing in what they presumed were finished copies. Then, unless they were both gifted writers and mind readers, many got their papers back from their teachers red-inked with uncomplimentary comments on their grammar, spelling, and organization (or lack thereof). Hopefully, most teachers today have rethought this unpleasant and unhelpful system and see themselves as writing mentors, coaches, and counselors.

In order to facilitate writing and move students from draft to publication, several procedures are essential. First, students need to understand the concept of a draft copy. A draft copy is an initial effort and implies that the writer has done little or no editing. On the other hand, it is not, as some teachers indicate, a "sloppy copy." A draft copy is a work in progress that temporarily frees the writer from worrying too much about the conventions of spelling, grammar, and format. It also may free the writer from worrying about appropriate or upgraded word choices, so that she or he can just get the essential ideas down. Draft writing also allows the writer, as Zinsser states, to "summon out of the brain some cluster of thoughts or memories" (1980, p. 57) that previously had not been anticipated. It is important to distinguish between a draft copy and a sloppy copy. Good draft writing results in a well-thought-out piece that is organized and ready for improvement. Figure 1.11 provides a sample set of basic guidelines for writing a draft copy that can be given to students at the beginning of the school year.

Figure 1.10 Resources for Writing

• TAXONOMY •	
A	articles, advertisements, aunts
B	books
C	catalogs, colleges, commercials, citizens, cousins, custodians
D	documentaries
E	editorials
F	family members, friends, field trips, filmstrips, firefighters
G	grandparents, guest speakers
H	how-to manuals, health professionals
I	Internet
J	journals
K	
L	letters, libraries
M	movies, magazines
N	newspapers, neighbors, neighborhood stores
O	
P	parents, police officers
Q	
R	relatives
S	siblings, seniors, security guards, stores, street signs
T	television, teachers
U	uncles
V	visitors, videos
W	
X	
Y	yellow pages
Z	

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Figure 1.11 To the Student: Guidelines for Writing a Draft Copy

The draft copy is the first of several copies you will use in your writing. After you have written your draft copy, you may go on to revise your draft either by hand or by computer. You might have one or two more revisions before someone else edits it. Then you may be ready for a final or even published copy. The number of copies you write depends on the importance of the piece of writing to you personally, to getting a certain grade, or to being recognized as a good writer. To get started in this writing process, you should begin with the best possible draft you can write. Here are some guidelines to help you.

1. Mark your paper "Draft Copy" so that the reader knows you have a work in progress.
2. If you are writing by hand, be sure to skip lines on your paper. If you are writing with a computer, set the computer file for double line spacing.
3. Before beginning to write, prepare some "notes," such as a web or cluster, Taxonomy, Defining Format, Profile, Essay outline, Venn diagram, or whatever else you know or your teacher has shown you.
4. Review and keep in mind the guidelines for the assignment: its length, audience, purpose, and any elements you are asked to include.
5. If you are writing by hand, cross out your changes and avoid erasing. Erasing interrupts your thinking and keeps you from moving ahead. Remember, you are making a draft copy, so you don't have to worry too much about neatness.
6. Read your draft copy aloud to anyone willing to listen, keeping a pencil or pen in your hand to make changes.
7. Ask someone you know to read your paper aloud to you. After it is read, make any desired changes as soon as possible.
8. Listen to suggestions for improving your writing, and make the changes you agree with. You also might want to get a second opinion on some suggestions.
9. Above all, be patient with yourself and your writing. You will be rewarded with having written great pieces.

GUIDELINES FOR REVISING AND EDITING

Everyone who has written knows that almost as much time must be devoted to the editing process as to the writing itself. Teachers who assign writing and collect their students' papers to "correct" them also know that they are in for a tiring and tedious job that rarely is appreciated by the students, except possibly for those who get high grades. In Chapter 14, we focus on how to teach students strategies to incorporate editing with writing and also how to help teachers lighten their own editing role while helping their students become better writers. A summary of these guidelines is in Figure 1.12 on the next page; the details are in Chapter 14.

Figure 1.12 To the Student: Guidelines for Revising and Editing

Ask yourself these questions when you are revising and editing your writing:

Did I keep to the topic?

Do I have an order or sequence that my reader can follow?

Have I given my reader details and information?

Have I used the written conventions of capitalization and punctuation?

Have I checked my spelling?

Have I checked my grammar for the voice I want to use (formal or informal)?

Use these improvers to revise and edit your writing:

Add words, phrases, and punctuation that you have missed the first time.

Delete or remove words, phrases, and punctuation that are unnecessary or repetitious.

Substitute words that will make your writing more interesting or stronger.

Move or rearrange words, phrases, or sentences that will help your reader better understand your writing.

WRITING AND THE COMPUTER

It is almost impossible to imagine any writer of the future not using a computer. Although the common writing implements—pens and pencils—still have a place, today's students will be, at least until the next monumental invention, computer-bound. Hopefully, all schools are providing computers and computer instruction, especially in word processing, graphics, and using the Internet.

As teachers begin their writing programs, it is useful for them, or the computer specialists, to introduce students to what is truly the writer's best friend—the word processor. Although teaching word processing is beyond the scope of this book, introducing some basic word processing skills to students using computers to compose will help them learn to use the computer with ease. Figure 1.13 lists many skills students should have in order to write using a computer. Students who know these computer functions will learn to accept writing as a process that moves from draft copy to publication. With mastery of word processing, students will be less likely to hand in draft copies filled with spelling, grammar, and other errors that require the markings of the teacher's dreaded red pen. And for the teacher, there is the glory (or at least the pleasure) of the reduction of eyestrain brought on by unreadable handwriting.

Figure 1.13 What You Need to Know for Writing on the Computer

Setting margins

Line spacing

Paragraph formatting

Keyboarding capital and lowercase letters

Setting font styles and sizes

Using spelling and grammar checkers

Using the thesauruses

Knowing how to highlight, cut, copy, and paste

Creating and saving files

Printing documents