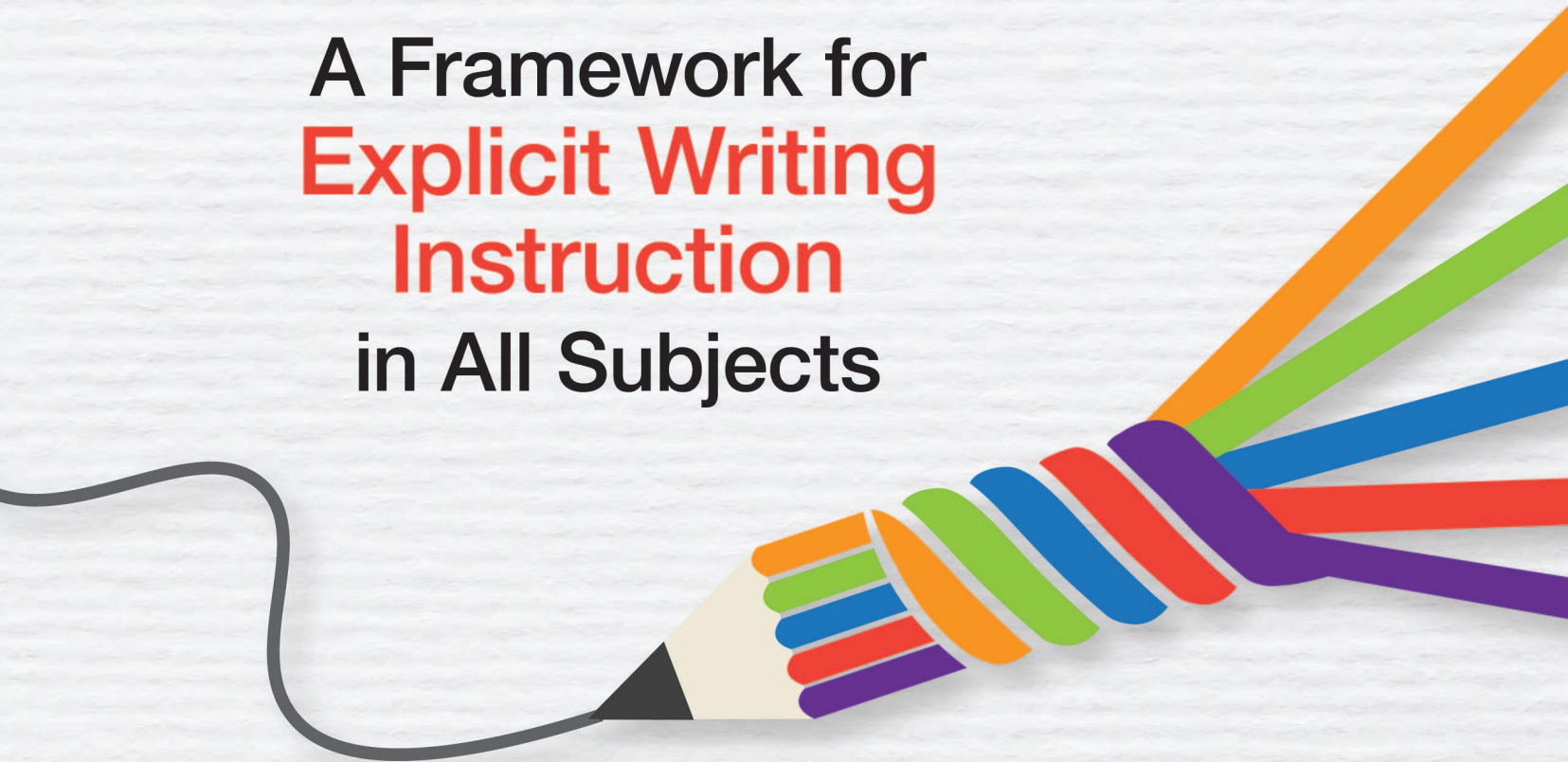


The Writing Rope

A Framework for
**Explicit Writing
Instruction**
in All Subjects



Joan Sedita

Foreword by Jan Hasbrouck

The Writing Rope

A Framework for Explicit Writing Instruction in All Subjects

by

Joan Sedita, M.Ed.

Keys to Literacy
Rowley, Massachusetts



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About the Downloads

Purchasers of this book may download, print, and/or photocopy the teacher and student resources in selected chapter and book appendices for educational use.

To access the materials that come with this book:

1. Go to the Brookes Publishing Download Hub: <http://downloads.brookespublishing.com>
2. Register to create an account (or log in with an existing account).
3. On the top navigation bar, click Redeem Code and enter the code in the box below to access the locked materials.

Code: included with purchase
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About the Author

Joan Sedita, M.Ed., Founder and President, Keys to Literacy, 319 Newburyport Turnpike, Suite 205, Rowley, Massachusetts 01969

Joan Sedita has been in the literacy education field for more than 40 years. She began her career at the Landmark School in Massachusetts for students with reading and learning disabilities, where she worked from 1975 to 1998 as a teacher and administrator. Joan was Founder and Director of the Landmark College Preparation Program and the Landmark Outreach Training Program. While at the Landmark School, she also was a member of a team that conducted psychoeducational evaluations at Boston Children's Hospital. From 1998 to 2007, as Founder of Sedita Learning Strategies, Joan trained educators and consulted with schools and literacy organizations throughout the country. During this time, she was Lead Developer and Trainer for the Massachusetts Reading First initiative and Consultant to the state's Secondary Reading initiative. Joan also authored several guides for using the Kurzweil text-to-speech software to support reading and study skills, and she was a national author and trainer for *LETRS: Language Essentials for Teachers of Reading and Spelling*, published by Voyager Sopris Learning. She was a member of the Educational Testing Service Praxis National Reading Advisory Committee and a board member of Learning Disabilities Worldwide.

Joan is currently President of Keys to Literacy, a literacy professional learning company she founded in 2007 that develops, publishes, and delivers reading and writing professional development to educators across the country. Joan has authored numerous books, book chapters, and articles related to literacy instruction. She has also authored several professional development programs that include online courses, training manuals, and professional development delivery materials, including these titles published by Keys to Literacy: *Keys to Beginning Reading*, *The Key Comprehension Routine*, *The Key Vocabulary Routine*, *Keys to Content Writing*, and *Keys to Early Writing*. She oversees the hiring and supervision of Keys to Literacy trainers and the literacy professional development plans for school districts and state departments of education, and she continues to develop the content for literacy trainings, books, and online courses. Joan received her B.A. from Boston College and her M.Ed. in reading from Harvard University.

Foreword

Writing is hard, even for authors who do it all the time. Less frequent practitioners—the job applicant; the business executive with an annual report to get out; the high school senior with a Faulkner assignment; the graduate-school student with her thesis proposal; the writer of a letter of condolence—often get stuck in an awkward passage or find a muddle on their screens, and then blame themselves . . . Why can't I get this right?

—Roger Angell, Foreword to *The Elements of Style, Fourth Edition*
(Strunk & White, 2000, p. ix).

Reading this paragraph about the challenges of writing resonates with me. I write a lot. I am the author or coauthor of several books, with two more currently in production. I have written numerous chapters for textbooks and many specialized articles on a variety of topics. I have written training manuals, grant applications, book reviews, conference proposals, as well as curriculum materials and assessments for teachers of reading. I write emails and texts daily to colleagues, friends, and family. Writing is a significant part of my professional and personal life, and I still find it challenging!

In this wonderful book, *The Writing Rope*, Joan Sedita offers clear, evidence-based, and, so importantly, highly *useful* information and guidance so that teachers can successfully teach the complex process of writing to all their students, including those with learning challenges and disabilities, and in every content area. To serve our students well, we must get this right. In modern life, the ability to write is as important as the ability to read. And, as Joan notes: “Writing, like reading, is a relatively new cultural development. It does not come naturally the way speaking does, and it is a demanding and highly complex process” (p. 11). Yes indeed, writing is demanding and complex—and teaching students *how* to write is equally demanding and complex! We should all be grateful to Joan for laying out such well-organized and detailed guidance for doing that work. I know I am.

I have known Joan for many years, and from the start I knew I was in the presence of a special colleague. No one spends more than four decades working with some of the students who can be most challenging to teach—those with learning disabilities—if they don't feel they have both a calling to do this work and an interest and motivation to figure out how to teach these students well. This certainly describes Joan. In the Acknowledgments to this book, Joan notes the drive she saw in her students to learn how to write. Joan herself has an equally strong drive both to learn for herself the best ideas, strategies, and resources for teaching all students to be good writers, and also to learn how to effectively share this information with her teacher colleagues to help them all be successful at teaching this essential skill.

Joan is brilliant, curious, and analytical, and I'm certain that much of what she shares in this book was learned “in the trenches,” through her own experiences as a teacher in the varied clinical settings in which she has worked. However, as professional educators, we are lucky that we have a growing body of research in this area that provides solid evidence to support and guide our planning and implementation of writing instruction and the assessment of the written product. Joan is clearly familiar with this research and includes findings from some of the top researchers in this field, including Berninger, Graham, Harris, Hayes, Wiggins, and others in the various sections of this book. I am impressed by the solid, scientific basis for practical recommendations included in *The Writing Rope*.

I assume most educators who provide reading instruction these days are familiar with the infographic created by Dr. Hollis Scarborough in 2001 that serves as an elegant metaphor representing the

intricate nature of the act of reading. Scarborough characterized the multiple components of reading as “strands” in a rope that can, over time, become woven together ever more tightly, to ultimately result in fluent, skillful reading. It makes so much sense that Joan uses the same analogy of a “rope” to represent the five components necessary for skillful writing that include the thinking processes that are needed to motivate, inspire, and organize writing efforts and the craft and structure of writing, from the sentence to the paragraph and beyond. As she explains, “Becoming a skilled writer begins with the acquisition of foundational skills, such as spelling, handwriting, and sentence writing. This leads to the acquisition of more sophisticated writing skills, strategies, and techniques” (p. 11).

I especially appreciate that Joan includes in those five strands the element of transcription—the spelling, handwriting, or keyboarding that are foundationally necessary for basic, and ultimately skillful writing. I have found too many materials that ostensibly were created to help teachers teach writing to their students that completely ignore this crucial initial step! Unfortunately, the end result that I observe in schools much too often is students who tell their teachers that they “don’t like to write,” but I suspect many simply don’t have the necessary skill or stamina simply to get their thoughts, opinions, or feelings down on paper because of a lack of basic transcription skills. Joan so accurately states that writing is a complex task requiring students to integrate many different skills and strategies. Using the metaphor of the writing rope can help teachers emphasize the multiple individual components that will need to be addressed in their instruction while also focusing on the necessity to continuously have students work to “weave” them together.

As I read through the chapters of *The Writing Rope*, I could clearly see how well Joan accomplished her goal of showing how ALL teachers of students in Grades 4–12 (and beyond), regardless of the content area they teach, can benefit from this book. We often think about “teaching writing” as the responsibility of the English/language arts and writing teachers. Many of the writing standards can be addressed in those ELA classes, and this book will be a tremendous support for those teachers. But most U.S. states are using some form of the Common Core State Standards that are organized around an integrated vision of English Language Arts and Literacy in History/Social Studies, Science, and Technical Subjects. Joan makes a compelling argument that there is a role for writing instruction and writing practice in all classes, every day. She states that “[c]ontent writing is a way to promote and deepen content learning” (p. 6) and that teachers in every subject area can and should play a role in developing students’ writing ability. And, once again, she provides specific ideas for how to do this using Quick Writes, Content Learning Tasks, and Formal Writing Tasks in science (experimental lab reports, field notes), history (analysis of a speech or historical event), and mathematics (describing the steps used to solve a problem). I know as you read this book you will be amazed and appreciative of the wealth of resources Joan and the publisher have provided to support this work, from checklists to charts to templates to specific ideas for activities and practice cards.

My entire career has been focused on trying to help students who have difficulties learning to read. The vast majority of them also have difficulty learning to write. I have to say, I thought I knew quite a bit about how to effectively teach writing to students before reading *The Writing Rope*. Perhaps I did, but after reading this book I feel like I have substantially increased and broadened my skills (and confidence!) about teaching writing. Every educator who works with students in Grades 4–8 and beyond will find great value in this informative and highly practical book. Well done, Joan!

—Jan Hasbrouck, Ph.D.

Author of *Student-Focused Coaching* (with Daryl Michel; Brookes Publishing, 2022),
Conquering Dyslexia (Benchmark Education, 2020), and
Reading Fluency (with Deborah Glaser; Benchmark Education, 2019)

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Acknowledgments

I started teaching basic writing skills to struggling readers and writers with learning disabilities in 1975 at the Landmark School. The drive these students had to learn to write, despite the challenges they faced, made me realize how fortunate I was to have the ability to communicate with written language. I would like to thank these students for showing me that learning to write is not natural and that teaching writing is not easy. I would also like to thank the many educators I have had the privilege to support through professional development who take on the challenge of writing instruction because they recognize the power they can give students when they teach them how to write. Finally, I would like to thank the dedicated training consultants at Keys to Literacy who have shared their experience and insight related to literacy instruction over the past several years, including Shauna Cotte, Lisa Klein, Donna Mastrovito, and Melisa Rice.

Introduction

The ability to write is as essential to learning as the ability to read. As Graham and Perin noted in *Writing Next*, summarizing the writing research for 4th- to 12th-grade students,

Writing is not just an option for young people—it is a necessity. Along with reading comprehension, writing skill is a predictor of academic success and the basic requirement for participation in civic life and the global economy . . . All students need to become proficient and flexible writers. (2007, p. 19)

Not only do students use writing to communicate, but writing also improves their reading comprehension. Students who receive the opportunity to write in conjunction with reading show more evidence of critical thinking about reading. Many of the skills involved in writing, such as sentence and paragraph writing, notetaking, summarizing, and spelling, improve reading comprehension and reinforce fluency and word reading skills (Biancarosa & Snow, 2006; Graham & Hebert, 2010).

This book was written for teachers of all subjects in Grades 4–8 who seek to integrate writing instruction into their content teaching with the combined goals of improving students’ writing ability and content learning. It includes evidence-based instructional practices that support learning to write (the skills and strategies needed to be a proficient writer) and writing to learn (the use of writing to enhance comprehension and mastery of subject-area content). The suggested writing scaffolds enable educators to support students who have difficulty writing, including students beyond Grade 8.

ABOUT THIS BOOK

The content of this book is organized as follows.

Section I: Laying the Foundation for Teachers and Students

This section provides background knowledge about writing development, the role of fluent transcription skills in proficient writing, and the intentional choices proficient writers make related to writing craft. Chapter 1, “Introduction to The Writing Rope,” summarizes the five components that lead to proficient writing identified in *The Writing Rope*™ (Sedita, 2019b), as well as the important role that writing plays in learning content in any subject area.

Chapter 2, “What Do We Know About Effective Writing Instruction?,” reviews the research on effective writing instruction and presents teaching principles based on this research. These principles include teaching the stages of the writing process, delivering explicit instruction of writing skills and strategies, and providing sample mentor text as writing models. They also include planning writing tasks that include clear guidelines and requirements for students, asking students to write for authentic audiences when possible, and creating opportunities for peer collaboration and for students to revise their writing based on actionable feedback. This chapter also emphasizes the importance of asking students to write on a regular basis and summarizes research findings related to student motivation and engagement in writing.

Chapter 3, “Transcription Skills,” highlights the need for fluency with transcription skills (spelling, handwriting, and keyboarding), basic skills needed to transcribe the words a writer wants to put

into writing. If these skills are not fluent and require considerable effort, students cannot focus on higher level composing skills.

Chapter 4, “Writing Craft,” explains writing craft, often referred to as writer’s moves. These are techniques that proficient writers employ to affect writing style, text structure, and word choice. This includes purposeful use of specific vocabulary and techniques to show emotion, personality, or point of view. It also includes use of common literary elements (e.g., plot, setting, characters) and literary devices (e.g., imagery, figurative language, personification, alliteration). The chapter emphasizes the value of using mentor text as models of writing craft that students emulate in their own writing.

Section II: Skills and Strategies: Learning to Write

This section offers suggestions for evidence-based instructional practices for the basic skills that students must learn to become proficient writers. Chapter 5, “Critical Thinking: Stages of the Writing Process,” presents a model for helping students learn and apply the stages of the writing process when writing: Think, Plan, Write, Revise. This chapter introduces several scaffolds that support the writing process: two-column notes, topic web graphic organizers, writing templates, and sets of steps.

Chapter 6, “Syntax and Sentence Skills,” and Chapter 7, “Text Structure: Paragraph Skills,” present instructional practices for sentence and paragraph writing. These include activities that help students develop syntactic awareness (awareness of English grammar) and the ability to write longer, more sophisticated sentences. They also include instructional suggestions for combining sentences into well-structured paragraphs and the use of transition words and phrases to link sentences and paragraphs. Reproducible paragraph templates to support writing are provided in the appendix to Chapter 7 and may also be accessed through the Brookes Download Hub.

Chapter 8, “Text Structure: Three Types of Writing,” offers suggestions for teaching students the text structure for the three types of writing—informational, opinion/argument, and narrative. This includes introductions, conclusions, and body development. Reproducible templates and checklists for the three types of writing are provided in the appendix to Chapter 8; again, these are also available on the Brookes Download Hub.

Section III: Application: Writing to Learn

This section focuses on teaching students how to use writing to enhance learning of content material for all subject areas. Students’ comprehension improves when they write about what they read and learn from content classroom instruction. This section provides suggestions for teaching students to follow the stages of the writing process and incorporate the writing scaffolds that were introduced in Chapter 5.

Chapter 9, “Critical Thinking: Summary Writing,” offers suggestions for teaching students how to summarize. Chapter 10, “Critical Thinking: Writing From Text Sources,” shares instructional practices for writing about narrative and expository text. This chapter includes a Writing Assignment Guide teachers can use for planning; the appendix to this chapter provides sample Writing Assignment Guides for assignments spanning a range of grade levels and subject areas. Finally, Chapter 11, “Putting It All Together,” provides activities to help teachers reflect on their own writing instruction and, with their colleagues, develop a consistent approach across grade levels and subject areas.

Connect to Your Classroom

The goal for the professional development provided in this book is growth in students’ writing skills and ability. Quality professional development for teachers has an effect on students only if teachers apply the knowledge gained about effective writing instruction to their teaching. To support implementation of the instructional practices that are suggested in this book, Connect to Your Classroom activities are integrated into the chapters. These tasks help readers connect what they are learning to their work with students.

Teacher and Student Resources

The end-of-book appendix gathers a number of reproducible teacher and student writing resources presented throughout the chapters. These resources may also be accessed through the Brookes Download Hub.

CONNECTIONS TO RESEARCH, LITERACY STANDARDS, AND PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT

Decades of research related to effective writing instruction yielded a number of consistent findings. Similar to the research base that has come to be known as the science of reading (research on how students learn to read and effective instructional practices), a body of research is accumulating that can be described as the science of writing. Much of this research has been reported in four reports based on research meta-analyses:

- *Writing Next* (Graham & Perin, 2007)
- *Writing to Read* (Graham & Hebert, 2010)
- *Teaching Elementary School Students to Be Effective Writers* (Graham, Bollinger, et al., 2012)
- *Teaching Secondary Students to Write Effectively* (Graham et al., 2016)

Chapter 2, “What Do We Know About Effective Writing Instruction?,” summarizes recommendations from these reports. References to this research appear throughout this book.

State Writing Standards

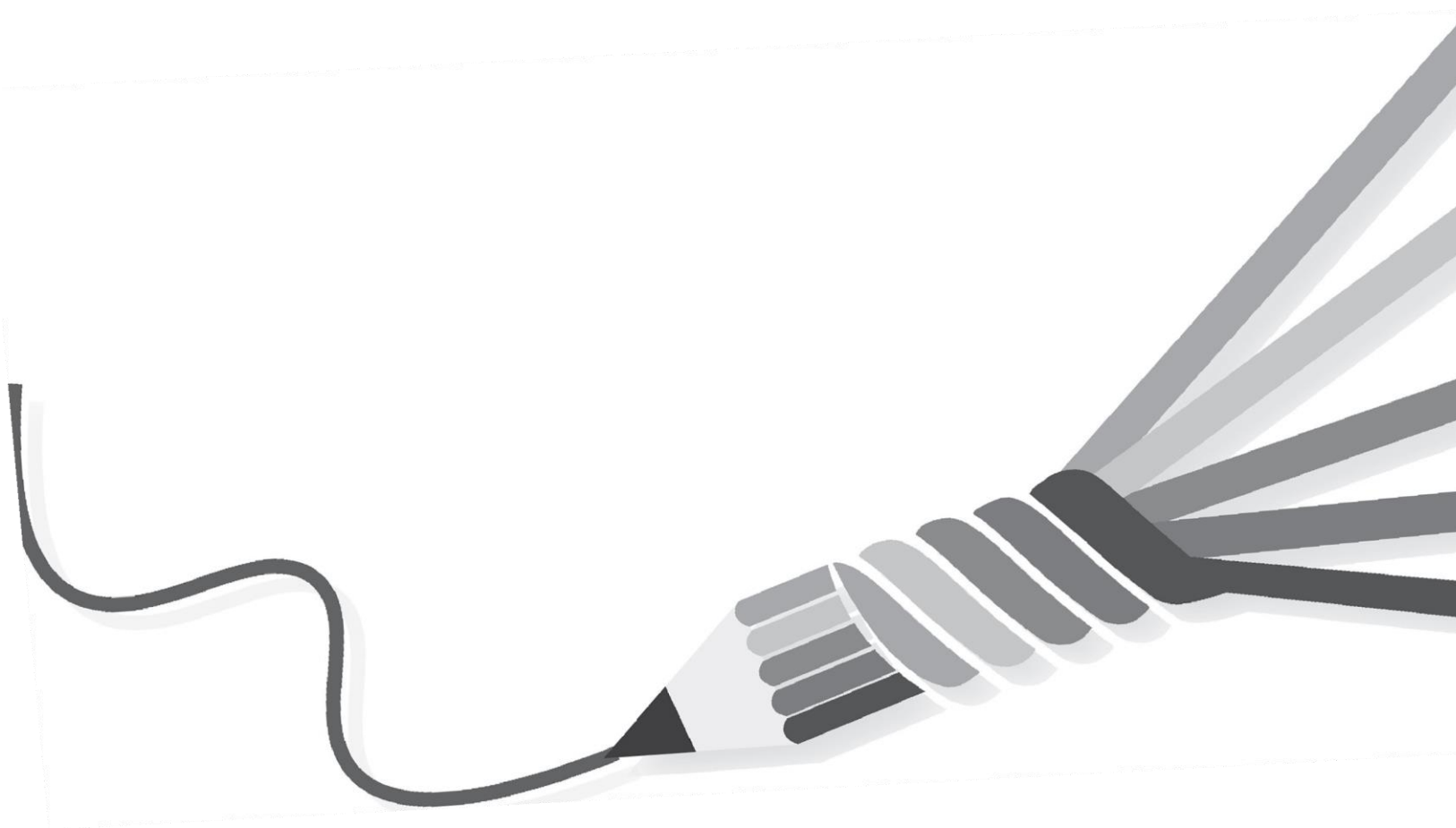
The National Reading Panel Report (2000), followed by the Reading First part of the national No Child Left Behind Act of 2001 (PL 107-110), cast a spotlight on evidence-based practices for teaching reading, shepherding in more than a decade of emphasis on reading instruction, including core reading programs and multiple options for reading assessment. Unfortunately, instructional time and focus on writing instruction was often neglected. The good news is that the Common Core State Standards (National Governors Association Center for Best Practices & Council of Chief State School Officers, 2010) identified 10 writing standards as being equally important as the 10 reading standards. This has caused educators to recognize the need for quality, evidence-based writing instruction that is integrated into all subjects. References to Common Core writing-related standards appear throughout this book.

Professional Development

In addition to writing research and the writing-related requirements of state literacy standards, decades of experience with literacy teacher training inform the contents of this book. For more than 30 years, I have developed and delivered professional development for effective writing instruction, most recently as the founder of Keys to Literacy, a literacy professional development company that trains educators across the United States. I drew many of the instructional suggestions and classroom examples from this experience. In particular, the Connect to Your Classroom suggestions and activities help the reader implement instructional recommendations.

I

Laying the Foundation for Teachers and Students





Introduction to The Writing Rope

The literature and discourse related to literacy instruction tend to focus on reading, even though writing is just as important for student literacy achievement. Much has been written about the multiplicity of skills involved in reading, beginning with the “five components” necessary for skilled, fluent reading that became popular after the 2000 report of the National Reading Panel (i.e., phonemic awareness, phonics, fluency, vocabulary, comprehension). On the other hand, when attention is paid to writing instruction, teachers are not sure what to include. Many educators who are knowledgeable about effective reading instruction are not able to identify the components of skilled writing or essential elements of a curriculum for teaching writing.

THE WRITING ROPE

With a nod toward Hollis Scarborough’s (2001) *Reading Rope*, in 2019, I developed a model that identifies five components that are necessary for skilled writing, titled The Writing Rope™. Scarborough’s graphic depicts multiple components of language comprehension (i.e., background knowledge, vocabulary, language structures, verbal reasoning, literacy knowledge) and word recognition (i.e., phonological awareness, decoding, sight recognition) as strands in a rope. As students develop skills in these components, they become increasingly strategic and automatic in their application, leading to fluent reading comprehension. The Writing Rope employs a similar metaphor, using strands of a rope to represent five components of writing that contribute to fluent, skilled writing.

The Writing Rope organizes multiple writing skills, strategies, and techniques into five components that represent the elements of a comprehensive writing curriculum: critical thinking, syntax, text structure, writing craft, and transcription. Instruction for some elements can be readily integrated into content instruction in any subject area—for example, stages of the writing process, explicit instruction of strategies for writing about reading, activities to improve sentence and paragraph writing, and text structure for the three types of writing (informational, opinion/argument, and narrative). Other elements are primarily taught in English language arts classrooms (e.g., writing craft, spelling, handwriting/keyboarding). The instructional

suggestions provided in Sections II and III focus on the first three strands in The Writing Rope: critical thinking, syntax, and text structure.

The Writing Rope model is shown in Figure 1.1. (A reproducible version of this graphic is included with the resources in the appendix to this book; it can also be accessed via the Brookes Download Hub.) Details about each component or strand follow, including a description of where the components are addressed in this book.

The Critical Thinking Strand

This component draws significantly on critical thinking and executive function skills, as well as the ability to develop background knowledge about a writing topic. Students engage in critical thinking as they reflect on what they want to communicate through their writing. If they are composing an informational or opinion/argument piece, they will need to incorporate comprehension skills to gather information from sources. Writing tasks related to this strand include writing summaries, writing personal responses to narrative text, writing responses to prompts based on sources, and research-writing tasks.

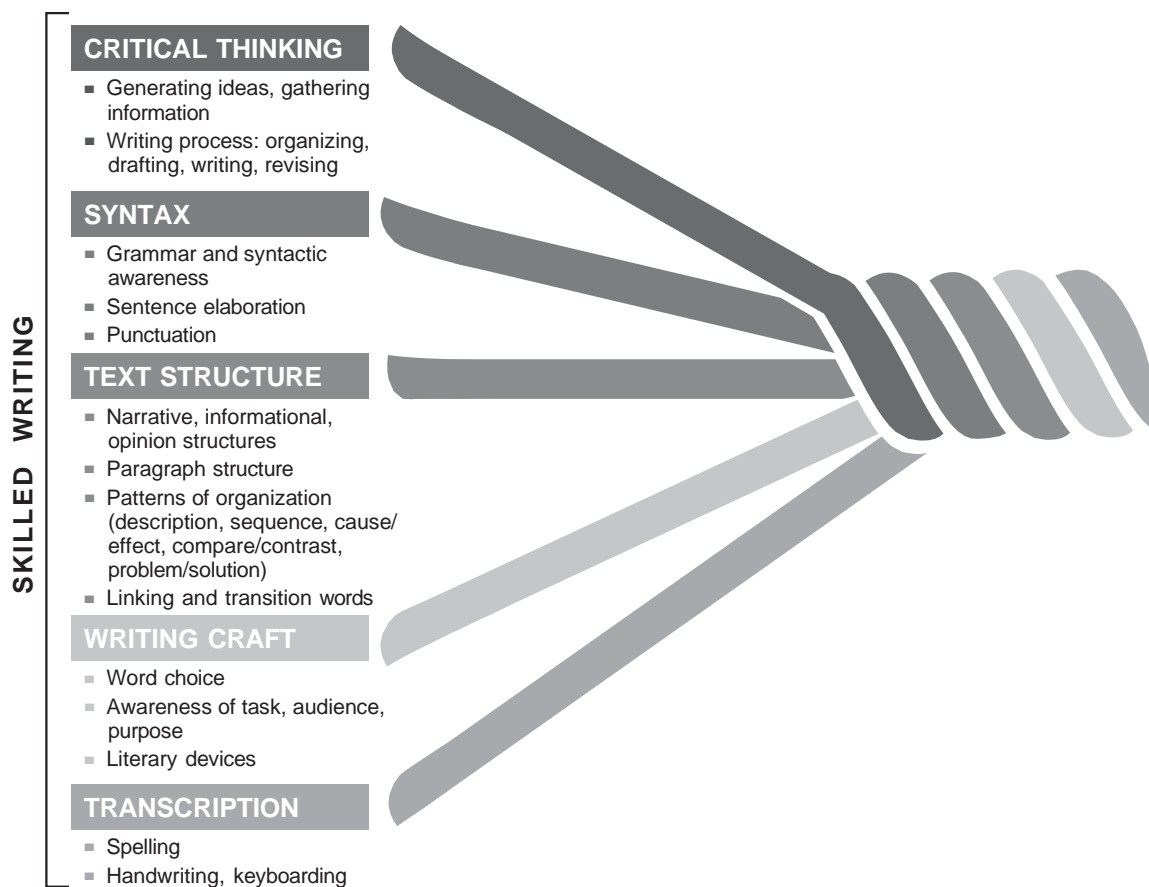


Figure 1.1. The Writing Rope™ framework depicting the components of fluent, skilled writing. (From *The Writing Rope™: The strands that are woven into skilled writing* [online article]. <https://284ivp1abr6435y6t219n54e-wpengine.netdna-ssl.com/wp-content/uploads/2021/03/Article-The-Strands-That-Are-Woven-Into-Skilled-Writing.pdf>); adapted by permission. © 2019 by Joan Sedita, www.keystoliteracy.com. All rights reserved.)

This strand also includes awareness of the writing process, the stages of which were first identified by Hayes and Flower (1980) as pre-writing, text production, revising, and editing. Sed-ita (2013) proposed a model that includes four stages: Think, Plan, Write, Revise. For the Think stage, students benefit from explicit instruction on brainstorming strategies and skills for gathering information from written and multimedia sources, such as notetaking. They also need to learn planning strategies for organizing their thoughts, including the use of pre-writing graphic organizers. Students need to be metacognitive (thinking about their thinking) and purposeful about working recursively through the stages of the writing process, and they benefit from explicit instruction in revising and editing strategies.

Chapter 5, “Critical Thinking: Stages of the Writing Process”; Chapter 9, “Critical Thinking: Summary Writing”; and Chapter 10, “Critical Thinking: Writing From Text Sources,” address this component of The Writing Rope.

The Syntax Strand

Individual sentences communicate ideas that add up to make meaning. Efficient processing of sentence structure is necessary for listening and reading comprehension, as well as for communicating information and ideas in writing. Syntax is the study and understanding of grammar—the system and arrangement of words, phrases, and clauses that make up a sentence. Students develop syntactic awareness as they learn the correct use and relationship of words in sentences. This begins with exposure to Standard English by listening to people talk and by reading or listening to written text. Students benefit from explicit instruction focused on building sentence skills, including activities such as sentence elaboration and sentence combining.

Chapter 6, “Syntax and Sentence Skills,” addresses this component of The Writing Rope.

The Text Structure Strand

Text structure is unique to written language, and awareness of text structure supports both writing and reading comprehension. Students benefit from explicit instruction for several levels of text structure.

- *Informational, opinion/argument, and narrative text structure:* knowledge of the different organizational structures for these three types of writing, including introductions, body development, and conclusions
- *Paragraph structure:* understanding that written paragraphs are used to group text into manageable units that are organized around a main idea and supporting details
- *Patterns of organization:* understanding that sentences and paragraphs can be organized to convey a specific purpose, including description, sequence, cause and effect, compare and contrast, and problem and solution
- *Transition words or phrases:* the use of words or phrases to link sentences, paragraphs, or sections of text—including knowledge of transitions associated with specific patterns of organization

Chapter 7, “Text Structure: Paragraph Skills,” and Chapter 8, “Text Structure: Three Types of Writing,” address this component of The Writing Rope.

The Writing Craft Strand

This strand addresses skills and strategies often referred to as *writer's craft* or *writer's moves*. This includes a number of techniques that writers employ that affect writing style, text structure, and choice of words. Students benefit from explicit instruction in the following:

- *Word choice*: purposeful use of specific vocabulary and word placement to convey meaning and create an effect on the reader
- *Writer's voice*: the techniques and style of writing an author uses to show emotion, personality, or point of view
- *Literary devices*: understanding and use of common literary elements (e.g., plot, setting, narrative, characters, theme) and literary techniques (e.g., imagery, dialogue, personification, figurative language, allegory) that can be included in narrative and expository text

When teachers share examples of mentor text that show clearly how authors use techniques, students are able to imitate them in their own writing.

This strand also addresses the importance of being mindful of the task, audience, and purpose when writing. Awareness of these elements influences decisions about word choice, tone, length, and style of a writing piece.

Chapter 4, "Writing Craft," addresses this component of The Writing Rope.

The Transcription Strand

This strand addresses spelling and handwriting/keyboarding skills. They are basic skills that transcribe the words a writer wants to put into writing. Once students become automatic and fluent with spelling and handwriting/keyboarding, they can focus their attention on the other strands of The Writing Rope. If students do not develop fluency with these skills by Grade 3, this will put a constraint on writing development as they move into the later grades.

Chapter 3, "Transcription Skills," addresses this component of The Writing Rope.



CONNECT TO YOUR CLASSROOM

1. Does the writing curriculum used in your school include instruction for all five components of The Writing Rope?
 2. Which writing components do you feel most confident about teaching, and which areas do you want to learn more about?
-

TEACHING WRITING IN ALL SUBJECT AREAS

Content writing is a way to promote and deepen content learning. When students write about what they are reading and learning, they are "thinking on paper." As they write, they concentrate on the information and ideas they are learning and make connections to their existing knowledge. Writing about content also helps students clarify and organize their thoughts, solidify the material they are learning, and place that learning into their long-term memory.

Writing has been shown to be an effective tool for enhancing students' learning of content material for all subject areas. Students' comprehension of science, social studies, and language

arts texts improves when they write about what they read, including writing personal reactions, analyzing and interpreting the text, writing summaries and notes, and answering and creating questions about text in writing (Graham & Hebert, 2010; Graham & Perin, 2007).

Lehr, Osborn, and Hiebert (2005) noted that writing about reading improves students' comprehension in two ways:

- *Reading and writing are composing processes:* Readers compose meaning as they read, and expressing opinions and interpretations in writing helps readers organize their thoughts about a text.
- *Writing provides insight about literacy tools:* Writing enables students to understand how an author's choices about type of writing, vocabulary use, and text structure help make text understandable.

Barbara Walker, Former President of the International Reading Association, wrote the following in a letter to President Obama in 2009, where she summarized the importance of teaching students to write about what they are learning:

As students write about science, math, and social studies, they elaborate and clarify their ideas. It is not just an act of expression of what you know. In the act of writing, students also form new relationships among ideas. Writing helps students integrate their thoughts. Each day, students should write meaningful ideas. Writing is another way to think which often results in deep, complex thinking. When students are involved in writing about crucial ideas, they rethink their understanding and integrate their thinking with new information. They finally look at the idea in a new way, creating multiple ways to think about issues. (p. 16)

The Role of Content Teachers

Teaching students to write is often considered the job of English language arts and writing teachers. Although some writing skills, strategies, and techniques are typically taught by the English language arts teacher during time dedicated to writing instruction, students need to practice writing on a frequent basis throughout the school day, in all subjects.

Understanding Connections to State Literacy Standards Most states have adopted the Common Core State Standards (CCSS; National Governors Association Center for Best Practices & Council of Chief State School Officers [NGA/CCSSO], 2010) or a similar version of literacy standards. The title of the literacy standards emphasizes the major shift that they represent regarding reading and writing instruction embedded in content instruction: *English Language Arts and Literacy in History/Social Studies, Science, and Technical Subjects*. The standards signal a collective responsibility on the part of all educators to improve the literacy skills of students across the grades, as indicated in the introduction to the CCSS:

The Standards insist that instruction in reading, writing, speaking, listening, and language be a shared responsibility within the school. The K–5 standards include expectations applicable to a range of subjects, including but not limited to ELA. The grades 6–12 standards are divided into two sections, one for ELA and another for history/social studies, science, and technical subjects. This division reflects the unique, time-honored place of ELA teachers in developing students' literacy skills while at the same time recognizing that teachers in other areas must have a role in this development as well. (NGA/CCSSO, 2010, p. 4)

In particular, anchor writing standard 10 of the CCSS (NGA/CCSSO, 2010) requires students to "Write routinely over extended time frames (time for research, reflection, and revision) and shorter time frames (a single sitting or a day or two) for a range of discipline-specific tasks, purposes, and audiences."

Science and social studies standards also incorporate writing skills. The national *College, Career & Civic Life C3 Framework for Social Studies State Standards* (National Council for the Social Studies, 2013) notes:

The C3 Framework fully incorporates and extends the expectations for literacy learning put forward in the Common Core Standards for ELA/Literacy. . . The authors of the C3 Framework view the literacy skills detailed in the CCSS as establishing a foundation for inquiry in social studies, and as such all CCSS Anchor Standards should be an indispensable part of any state's social studies standards. (p. 20)

For science, the national *Next Generation Science Standards* (2013) explain how literacy and writing must be integrated into learning science:

Literacy skills are critical to building knowledge in science. Reading in science requires an appreciation of the norms and conventions of the discipline of science, including understanding the nature of evidence used, an attention to precision and detail, and the capacity to make and assess intricate arguments, synthesize complex information, and follow detailed procedures and accounts of events and concepts. Likewise, writing and presenting information orally are key means for students to assert and defend claims in science, demonstrate what they know about a concept, and convey what they have experienced, imagined, thought, and learned. (p. 1)

Teaching Discipline-Specific Writing Many general writing skills and strategies can be applied to a variety of content-area writing tasks, such as note taking, summarizing, and writing from sources. However, as students move into upper grades, they also need to learn disciplinary writing skills, which tend to be more unique and specific to certain subject areas. For example:

- *Science*: experimental lab report, field notes
- *History*: analysis of a political speech or historical event
- *Mathematics*: description of the steps used to solve a problem; an algebraic proof
- *English*: literary analysis, poetry, playwrighting

The content teacher is often best suited to teach students to write about content—how to write like a scientist, historian, mathematician, poet, or novelist.

THREE TYPES OF CONTENT WRITING TASKS

Content writing in any subject can be sorted into three types of tasks. Quick Writes are very short writing tasks that can be integrated frequently into classroom instruction (i.e., at least two or three times per week). Content Learning Tasks, which require a bit more time and effort, are the kind of writing that content teachers will most likely use to support content learning. These kinds of tasks should be assigned on a regular basis (i.e., at least once every 2 weeks). Because Formal Writing tasks take a significant amount of time and effort on the part of students and teachers, these kinds of writing assignments will most likely be used on a more infrequent basis (i.e., one or two per semester). Figure 1.2 provides details about each.



CONNECT TO YOUR CLASSROOM

1. How often do you assign Quick Writes, Content Learning Tasks, and Formal Writing Tasks?
2. For each of the three types of content writing tasks, identify at least one example of a writing task that you have assigned to your students.
3. Next, for each type of task, generate at least one new example of a writing task you might assign to your students.

Three Types of Content Writing Tasks

<p><i>Quick Writes</i> Typically assigned at least twice per week</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Take less than 10 minutes to complete. • Task is related to content learning. • The objective is to help students process and reflect on content learning. • Can be used to informally assess content learning. • Typically, the writing is not revised. • Typically, the task is not graded. 	<p>Examples:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Admit or exit tickets • List of words, phrases • Drawing, labeling, or explaining pictures or graphics • 1- to 3-sentence reflections or responses to a question • Free writing for a specified, short amount of time • Margin notes while reading
<p><i>Content Learning Tasks</i> Typically assigned at least once every two weeks</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Take 1 to 3 classroom or homework sessions to complete. • Task is related to content learning. • Length is up to one or two pages. • The objective is to deepen understanding and reflection. • Can be used to informally assess content learning. • The writing may be revised. • May be informally evaluated or may be graded. 	<p>Examples:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Summary of reading • 1- to 3-paragraph response to a question • Personal response to narrative text • Subject-specific writing task
<p><i>Formal Writing Tasks</i> Typically assigned once per semester</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Completed over multiple days or weeks. • Task is related to content learning. • Length is one or more pages. • The objective is to learn and explore content more deeply, and to practice advanced writing skills. • Can be used to formally assess content learning and writing skills. • The writing should be revised, possibly multiple times. • Formally evaluated and graded. 	<p>Examples:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Research report • Multi-page literary analysis

Figure 1.2. Three types of content-writing tasks: Quick Writes, Content Learning Tasks, and Formal Writing Tasks. (From Sedita, J. [2020]. *Keys to content writing* [4th ed.]. Keys to Literacy; reprinted by permission.)

SUMMARY

Chapter 1 introduces The Writing Rope and the five components that represent the elements of a comprehensive writing curriculum. The chapter points out that content writing promotes and deepens content learning, and that teachers of all subjects play an important role in improving students' writing ability. Connections are made to state standards related to all subject areas. The chapter ends by identifying three types of writing tasks that range from short, quick writes to longer, more formal writing assignments.

