

## CHAPTER 1

# Introduction

## Why You Need a Writing Revolution in Your Classroom

At the beginning of the school year, Ms. Cappiello was about to give her ninth graders their first writing assignment. Her expectations were low because in previous years, she'd found that students might have no trouble carrying on a conversation, but it was a different story when it came to writing. Even by the end of a school year, the papers they turned in just didn't make sense.

"It's not like there are good papers and bad papers," she had confided to a colleague the previous spring. "It's like, I can't even understand most of these papers."

According to the curriculum, her students were supposed to write an essay at the end of every unit. They would also be expected to answer essay questions on state tests. But how was she supposed to teach them to do that, Ms. Cappiello wondered, if they couldn't even write a paragraph? In the past, many of her students had still struggled to produce coherent sentences. And Ms. Cappiello's training hadn't included anything about how to teach writing.

To gauge her new students' writing abilities, Ms. Cappiello asked them to compose a paragraph about how a character changes in a novel, story, or play. Most of their paragraphs started with a sentence that sounded like something they would have said if they were answering orally.

A student named Michael wrote:

*In Star Wars There's a character named Anakin Skywalker who changed over time in a very dark way*

A girl named Maria wrote:

*I have been reading a book about a kid who is in school.*

Most of the paragraphs went downhill from there. The sentences were in random order, and some of them weren't actually sentences. Even when they were, they all had the same simple structure. Only one or two students had tried to finish the paragraph with something that resembled a concluding sentence.

Ms. Cappiello sighed. It seemed as though this year would be like all the others. She wanted so much to help her students learn to express themselves in writing, but she had no idea where to begin.

## What Teachers Need: A Road Map for Explicit Writing Instruction

---

Ms. Cappiello's class is not unusual. Across the country, countless students have problems expressing themselves clearly and coherently in writing. On nationwide tests, only about 25 percent of students are able to score at a proficient level in writing.<sup>1</sup>

And yet, **expository writing**—the kind of writing that explains and informs—is essential for success in school and the workplace. Students who can't write at a competent level struggle in secondary school and in college. No matter what path students choose in life, the ability to communicate their thoughts in writing in a way that others can easily understand is crucial.

The problem is not that students are incapable of learning to write well. Rather, the problem is that many schools haven't been teaching students how to write. Teachers may assign writing, but they may not know how to explicitly teach it in a careful sequence of logical steps, beginning at the sentence level.

Just as with Ms. Cappiello, most teachers' training didn't include instruction in how to teach writing. The assumption has been that if students read and write enough, they'll simply pick up writing skills, through a kind of osmosis. Sometimes this is called the "writing is caught" approach. But there's little evidence to support it. A recent two-year study done with young children in Norway, for example, found that just having students write *more* had no effect on the quality of their writing.<sup>2</sup>

There's ample evidence that very few students become good writers on their own. Many students—even at the college level—have difficulty constructing a coherent **sentence**, let alone a fluid, cohesive **essay**. Perhaps at least some of your students, maybe most, fall into that category.

To be effective, writing instruction should start in elementary school. However, when students do get a chance to write in elementary school, they're often encouraged to write at length too soon. They don't learn how to construct interesting and grammatically correct sentences first, and they aren't encouraged to plan or outline before they write longer pieces. The idea is that later on they'll refine their writing, under the teacher's guidance, bringing coherence and—perhaps—correct grammar and punctuation to what they've produced. But after getting feedback, students may be reluctant to rewrite a multi-page essay that they've already worked on for hours. And teachers, confronted by pages of incoherent, error-riddled writing, may not know where to begin.

When students get to middle school or high school, it's assumed that they've already learned the basics of writing. As secondary teachers like Ms. Cappiello know, that assumption has little to do with reality. But rather than beginning with teaching the fundamental skills their students lack—by, for example, guiding students through the process of writing well-crafted sentences—teachers feel pressured to have their students meet grade-level expectations and produce multi-paragraph essays.

High school teachers have long been expected to ask students to write analytically about the content of the courses they're taking. But in years past, many students had written nothing except narratives in elementary and middle school, often about their personal experiences. That kind of writing didn't prepare them for the demands of high school, college, or the workforce.

Many states have revamped their standards. As a result, teachers at almost all grade levels are now expected to have students write not just narratives, but also informative and argumentative essays. The result is that websites abound with worksheets designed to teach these skills—for example, an “opinion essay” worksheet asking first graders to write about which they like better, M&M's® or Skittles®.

It's unlikely those kinds of activities will prepare students to write the analytical and argumentative essays they'll be expected to produce at higher grade levels, but there's been little reliable guidance on what to do instead.<sup>3</sup>

The writing standards tell teachers where their students should end up, but what teachers need is a road map that tells them how to get there.

The Writing Revolution (TWR), a nonprofit organization, offers such a road map by disseminating the Hochman Method to educators around the world. The Hochman Method provides a clear, coherent, evidence-based method of instruction that you can use no matter what subject or grade level you teach. The method has demonstrated, over and over, that it can turn weak writers into strong ones by focusing students' writing practice on specific techniques that match their needs and providing them with prompt and clear feedback. Insurmountable as the writing challenges faced by many students may seem, TWR's method can make a dramatic difference. (We will be using the terms "Hochman Method" and "TWR" interchangeably.)

## What Writing Instruction Can Do for You and Your Students

---

Explicit writing instruction will help you and your students in the following ways:

- **Identifying comprehension gaps.** When you ask your students to write about what they're learning, you may uncover significant gaps in their knowledge that are preventing them from accessing grade-level material.
- **Familiarizing students with complex syntax.** The vocabulary and syntax, or sentence structure, of written language is more complex than that of spoken language, and students who are unfamiliar with it often struggle with comprehension. The problem is widespread: One large-scale, long-term study found that fewer than 10 percent of U.S. eighth graders can "evaluate complex syntax."<sup>4</sup> And, as reading expert Timothy Shanahan has observed, "There is now a slew of rigorous studies revealing that an understanding of syntax is correlated with reading comprehension."<sup>5</sup> When students learn to use more sophisticated syntax and vocabulary in their own writing, they become better able to understand it when they encounter it in their reading.<sup>6</sup>

- **Boosting reading comprehension and learning.** Studies have found that when students at any grade level write about texts they have read and content they have been taught—not just in English, but also in social studies, science, and math—their reading comprehension and learning is enhanced.<sup>7</sup> Writing across the disciplines “can improve reading comprehension, critical thinking, and disciplinary content knowledge,” according to a panel of experts convened by the U.S. Department of Education.<sup>8</sup> For example, one study done with students who were English-language learners and had also been diagnosed with math disabilities found that when they were taught to rewrite word problems, they made significant, lasting gains in math ability.<sup>9</sup>
- **Enhancing speaking abilities.** As students begin to use more complex terms and sentence constructions in their written language, many of them begin to incorporate those features into their spoken language as well.
- **Improving organizational and study skills.** TWR activities teach students to paraphrase, take notes, summarize, and make **outlines**. These techniques help them absorb and retain crucial information. In particular, studies of summarizing have found strong effects for struggling readers. After reviewing the research, the National Reading Panel concluded that summarizing helps students integrate ideas, generalize, and retain information.<sup>10</sup>
- **Developing analytical capabilities.** The process of writing requires even young students to organize their ideas and sequence information. As they move through the grades, they have to sift through more material, deciding for themselves what’s important, which facts and ideas are connected to one another, and how to organize their thoughts into a logical progression. **When done in a systematic and sequenced way, teaching students to write is equivalent to teaching them how to think.**

Students who have the opportunity to learn TWR strategies and practice them through carefully scaffolded activities become better at understanding what they read, expressing themselves orally, and thinking critically.

# A Brief History of The Writing Revolution

---

Years ago, like most classroom teachers, I would assign writing activities that focused on my students' experiences, creativity, and feelings: a visit to an imaginary country, a meaningful moment in their lives. My undergraduate and graduate training hadn't included any preparation for teaching writing, nor had I been asked to read any research on effective writing instruction. (*I* refers to Judith Hochman.)

Later, as an administrator, I observed many similar lessons. In the higher grades, when teachers assigned compositions, they assumed that students would intuitively know how to sequence and organize information, relate it to a reader with clarity and coherence, and develop sound introductions and conclusions. The results consistently and dramatically disproved these assumptions.

I was struck by the difference in how our school taught writing as opposed to reading. When I taught reading, I didn't just give my students a book and say, "Read this." I used a well-researched approach to teaching reading based on the Orton-Gillingham method.<sup>11</sup> It provided explicit phonics instruction in decoding and used carefully sequenced activities that scaffolded skills until students read fluently and accurately. But when it came to writing, arguably a far more difficult task, I had no way to give students the tools they needed. If their writing fell short, as it often did, we simply told them things like "you can do better" or "add more details." Clearly, that wasn't enough.

Then as now, academic researchers were paying far more attention to reading than writing. As a result, I began to experiment. First as a director of curriculum, and later as head of the school, I asked teachers to stop teaching the mechanics of writing in isolation. Instead, we asked students to write about the content they were learning. Our feedback might be "put your strongest argument last," "use transitions when presenting your points," or "try starting your thesis statement with a subordinating conjunction." Since we had explicitly taught them how to use these strategies, they were able to respond correctly.

As I saw that these techniques were working for our students, I noticed that researchers who were looking into best practices for teaching writing

were finding evidence that supported what we were doing. The techniques we were using weren't just turning our students into better writers. We also saw improvements in their analytical thinking, reading comprehension, and oral communication.

In 2012, an article appeared in the magazine *The Atlantic*<sup>12</sup> about how this method produced dramatic results at a low-performing high school in New York City. As the article describes, before the school adopted the Hochman Method, many students didn't know how to construct sentences using conjunctions such as *but* and *so*—not to mention words such as *although* and *despite*. After the school had implemented these new writing strategies for a couple of years, various measures of achievement there rose sharply.

The article spurred a tremendous amount of interest in the method, and in response, I founded a nonprofit that used the title of the *Atlantic* article: The Writing Revolution.

Educators from around the country—in fact, from around the world—have been learning the method and how to implement it through courses provided by TWR. We've found that teachers are eager for guidance in how to explicitly teach writing—something that still isn't covered in most teacher-prep programs.<sup>13</sup> Many educators who take TWR's courses find that their students benefit from explicit, scaffolded writing instruction. The Hochman Method—and the principles that underlie it—can benefit any student in any grade at any school.

## Why Many Students Don't Get the Benefits of Writing

---

Earlier, we listed many potential benefits of writing, noting that it can boost reading comprehension, oral expression, and learning in general. Unfortunately, though, many if not most students aren't getting those benefits.

A basic reason is that writing is extremely difficult. In fact, it may be the hardest thing we ask students to do. That's because it imposes a heavy burden

on **working memory**, the aspect of our consciousness that takes in and tries to make sense of new information.

Working memory can hold only a few new items of information—maybe just four or five—for about 20 seconds before it starts to become overwhelmed. Inexperienced writers are trying to juggle many different things in working memory at the same time—everything from letter formation, if they're young, to word choice, to organizing their thoughts. As a result, they may not have the capacity in working memory to learn how to write well or to analyze the content they're writing about. That's especially true if the content is relatively unfamiliar—and if inexperienced writers are asked to write at length. They miss out on the opportunity to learn to write well and on all those other benefits that writing can offer.

Different individuals have different working memory capacities, but there's no reliable way to expand any individual's working memory. There is, however, a reliable way around its constraints: if you have relevant information stored in **long-term memory**, you don't need to juggle it in working memory. That opens up more capacity in working memory to take in new information.

Long-term memory can store an unlimited amount of information for an indefinite period of time. When it comes to writing, that information includes not only knowledge of the content you're writing about, but also knowledge of various writing strategies: how to vary your sentence structure, how to connect your thoughts, or how to organize a paragraph or essay. Once students have acquired knowledge of those strategies, that knowledge will be stored in long-term memory, ready to be drawn on when needed.

Before you can tap into the power of long-term memory, though, two things need to happen. First, you need to transfer the new information from working memory to long-term memory, generally by attaching meaning to it. A powerful way of doing that is to explain the information to another person in our own words—as we do when we write.

Second, you need to be able to *retrieve* the information from long-term memory when you need it. The more you practice retrieving it, the more accessible the information will be. Studies have shown that **retrieval practice** is a great way to commit new learning to memory for students of all ages, from elementary school through college. And one highly effective form of retrieval practice is writing.<sup>14</sup>

The fact that writing is both a form of transfer and retrieval practice helps explain why it can provide such a powerful boost to learning. But it can only provide that boost if a learner’s working memory isn’t overwhelmed by the act or writing itself.

Writing is double-edged. It can impose a crippling burden on working memory—and it can provide a way around its limitations. The key to unlocking its potential is to break down the writing process into manageable components—and guide students to practice each one.

## Deliberate Practice Makes The Writing Revolution Revolutionary

---

Unlike most other approaches to writing instruction, TWR is as much a method of teaching content as it is a method of teaching writing. There’s no separate writing block and no separate writing curriculum. Instead, teachers of all subjects can and should adapt TWR’s strategies and activities to their preexisting curriculum and weave them into their content instruction.

But perhaps what’s most revolutionary about TWR’s method is that it takes the mystery out of learning to write well. In other approaches, a teacher might give students a description of the elements of a good paragraph or essay, or perhaps present a model piece of writing and have them try to emulate it. For many students, that’s not enough. They may be able to read and appreciate writing that flows well and uses varied sentence structures, but that doesn’t mean they can figure out how to write that way themselves. For them, the techniques of good writing are a secret code they just can’t crack.

TWR’s method lets them in on the secret. It breaks the writing process down into manageable chunks and then has students practice the chunks they need, repeatedly, while also learning content. For example, many students don’t fully understand what makes a sentence a sentence. Giving them a definition—a group of words that contains a subject and a predicate and expresses a complete thought—is not enough. What they need is lots of practice distinguishing between groups of words that form complete sentences

and groups of words that are sentence fragments. If you embed this activity in content students have recently learned and ask them to add the information needed to turn the fragments into sentences, they will not only be learning the basic skill of forming a complete sentence but also reinforcing their knowledge of that content.

This kind of practice—**deliberate practice**, as some cognitive scientists call it<sup>15</sup>—is different from having students practice writing by giving them a half an hour to write and simply turning them loose. Merely doing the same thing over and over is unlikely to improve their performance. To make their writing better, they need a series of exercises that specifically target the skills they haven't yet mastered, while building on the skills they already have, in a gradual, step-by-step process. In addition, they need clear, direct feedback to help them identify their mistakes and monitor their progress.

Although you will be the ultimate judge of exactly what your students need and when they need it, TWR provides activities that will enable them to engage in deliberate writing practice—along with vocabulary that you can use to give them prompt, effective feedback.

## The Six TWR Principles

---

TWR's method rests on six basic principles:

1. Students need explicit instruction in writing, preferably beginning in the early elementary grades.
2. Sentences are the building blocks of all writing.
3. When embedded in the content of the curriculum, writing instruction is a powerful teaching tool.
4. The content of the curriculum drives the rigor of the writing activities.
5. Grammar is best taught in the context of student writing.
6. The two most important phases of the writing process are planning and revising.

# Principle 1: Students Need Explicit Instruction in Writing, Preferably Beginning in the Early Elementary Grades

Most students won't pick up writing skills just by reading. Many students who are good readers struggle when it comes to writing. Unlike reading, writing involves deciding what to say, which words to use, how to spell them, perhaps how to form the letters, and what order to place the words in—and that's just at the sentence level. Writing a paragraph or an entire essay requires even more decision-making, planning, and analysis.

Just as good readers aren't necessarily good writers, students who can speak coherently often write incoherently. Far too many students write the way they speak, using simple sentences, rambling ones, or fragments. That kind of communication may work when we're speaking to someone in front of us: the listeners' facial expressions and gestures indicate whether they're following what we're saying, and we may already be aware of how much they know about the subject we're discussing.

However, when we write, we don't have visual cues to draw on, and we often don't know exactly who the audience is. We need to express ourselves with far more precision and clarity, anticipating the facts and details a reader will require to grasp our meaning. We also need to rely on words and punctuation rather than intonation and pauses to indicate nuances in meaning or breaks in the narrative. We have to abide by conventions of spelling and grammar to ensure that mistakes don't distract a reader from the content.

Although good writing should be clear and direct, it almost always involves more complex sentence structures and a more varied and precise vocabulary than spoken language. When we speak, we rarely begin sentences with words such as *despite* or *although*, but they can be extremely useful in written language. And connecting our thoughts with phrases like *as a result* or *specifically*, although unnecessary in most conversational speech, can be vital in creating a fluid piece of writing.

More generally, when we write, our words are preserved on paper or on a screen, making not just grammatical and syntactical errors but also logical flaws far more glaring than in spoken language. And we rarely sustain spoken language for the equivalent length of a paragraph, let alone an essay, unless we're delivering a speech or participating in a formal debate. Shaping a logical,

unbroken narrative or argument in writing requires far more thought and planning than having a conversation or making a contribution to class discussion.

The elementary grades are the ideal time to begin writing instruction. If we assign only stories, journal entries, and poems in the early grades—as I did as a young teacher—we’re wasting precious time. Although it’s certainly possible to introduce expository writing skills at higher grade levels, it’s much easier to begin the process in elementary school. Even children in the earliest elementary grades can engage in TWR activities orally, under a teacher’s guidance, laying the groundwork for actual writing. Later, elementary students can practice their spelling and vocabulary words by completing thoughtfully focused writing activities related to the content they’re learning about. At the same time, they can hone their handwriting skills.

We need to equip children with the tools that will give them confidence as writers and enable them to express themselves in a way that others can understand. And far from feeling that practicing the mechanics of writing is drudgery, students often gain a sense of pride and mastery from learning to craft well-constructed sentences and logically sequenced paragraphs.

## **Principle 2: Sentences Are the Building Blocks of All Writing**

In many schools, the quantity of writing has long been valued over its quality. Teachers often feel pressure to assign essay-length writing well before students are capable of producing coherent text. If students haven’t learned how to write an effective sentence, that is where instruction needs to begin—no matter what the student’s age or grade level.

Of course, students must learn to write at length, and TWR includes strategies and activities designed to guide them through that process. But a writer who can’t compose a decent sentence will never produce a decent essay—or even a decent paragraph. And if students are still struggling to write sentences, they have less brain power available to do the careful planning that writing a good paragraph or composition requires. A sentence-level assignment is manageable for students who are still grappling with grammar, syntax, spelling, and punctuation.

Sentence-level writing shouldn’t be dismissed as something that’s too basic for older students to engage in. As Bruce Saddler has observed, sentences

“are literally miniature compositions.”<sup>16</sup> Producing even a single sentence can impose major cognitive demands on students, especially if it requires them to explain, paraphrase, or summarize sophisticated content. Many kinds of sentence-level activities, including most described in this book, develop knowledge and analytical abilities while simultaneously enabling students to learn the mechanics of sentence construction.

Even at the sentence level, students need appropriate guidance if their writing skills are to improve. TWR gives teachers an array of activities that guide students to use complete sentences, vary their structure, and employ complex syntax and new vocabulary—while at the same time ensuring that they master content.

As students begin to acquire basic sentence-level skills, TWR also provides structured support for lengthier writing. But crafting an effective sentence is a useful and important exercise, no matter the skill level of the student, and teachers should continue to assign sentence-level activities even after students have moved on to writing paragraphs and compositions. **TWR’s method is meant to be recursive, with students returning to activities that have previously been introduced—and not necessarily waiting for “mastery” of one kind of strategy before moving on to another.**

That means that you don’t need to wait until your students have mastered *all* the TWR sentence-level strategies before allowing them to move on to lengthier writing. They can begin to develop simple outlines and compose single paragraphs, depending on their ability level. Ideally, however, you won’t ask them to write independently at length until after they have learned some basic skills. Those include distinguishing sentences from fragments; using simple conjunctions like *because*, *but*, and *so*; and using simple subordinating conjunctions like *before* and *when*. Students should also have learned how to outline a paragraph or an essay before being asked to write one independently.

## **Principle 3: When Embedded in the Content of the Curriculum, Writing Instruction Is a Powerful Teaching Tool**

When schools do focus on expository writing, the assignments are often on topics that draw only on students’ personal experiences or opinions rather than on the content of what they are actually studying in English, history,

science, math, or other subjects. Students may, for example, practice persuasive writing by taking pro or con positions on school uniforms or they may learn to write a compare-and-contrast essay by weighing the benefits and disadvantages of being famous.

Such general topics can be useful for introducing students to a particular aspect of writing—say, creating topic sentences or learning how to develop outlines. But until students have had quite a bit of systematic and targeted instruction, the writing skills they develop when writing about one subject are unlikely to transfer to another. Even if students learn to write a decent persuasive essay on why they should have a bigger allowance, they probably won't be able to apply those skills to an essay arguing that the Civil War was fundamentally about slavery.

Another frequent practice is to have students write about topics in a separate writing curriculum. Often that curriculum provides students with very little information on the topic they're supposed to write about. There are two fundamental problems with that approach.

One is that having students write about topics unrelated to the core curriculum—whether they're grounded in personal experience or opinion or in a separate writing curriculum—represents a huge wasted opportunity to boost their learning. Writing isn't merely a skill; it's also a powerful teaching tool. When students write, they—and their teachers—figure out what they don't understand and what further information they need. And, as we have observed in many classrooms, when students write about the content they're studying, they learn to synthesize information and produce their own interpretations. If students are learning about Ancient Egypt or about tornadoes and hurricanes, part of the instruction in those subjects should include having students write about them.

The other problem is that writing and content knowledge are intimately related. **You can't write well about something you don't know well.** The more students know about a topic before they begin to write, the better they'll be able to write about it. At the same time, the process of writing will deepen their understanding of a topic and help cement that understanding in their memory.

An even more fundamental problem in many elementary schools, and sometimes middle schools, is that the curriculum doesn't go deeply into *any* content. The school day is devoted almost entirely to reading and math, and the reading block often consists mostly of practice in reading comprehension

skills, using texts on a random variety of topics. Not only is this an ineffective way to boost reading comprehension,<sup>17</sup> it can make it difficult if not impossible to teach writing. If students are jumping from one topic to another, because the focus is on comprehension skills rather than content, they may not have enough information about any one topic to write coherently about it. If your school isn't covering topics in any depth, don't despair: you can still use TWR's method to develop your students' abilities to write and to learn in general. But you'll probably need to bring in additional materials to enrich the content of the curriculum.

For students to become proficient readers and writers, all subjects, including English language arts, must include substantial content. And all teachers, no matter their subject area, must be writing teachers. Teachers of history, science, world languages, math, and even music, art, and physical education have learned to incorporate TWR activities into their instruction. Although schools may exercise some flexibility in deciding which classes will adopt TWR, keep in mind that the more teachers who use a common language for writing instruction within a given school, the better the results.

Teachers of subjects other than English may be apprehensive about incorporating the teaching of writing into their curricula. They may feel that they never signed up to be writing teachers. However, in our experience most of them find that rather than detracting from their instruction, implementing TWR actually enhances their ability to teach and boosts their students' grasp of the content they're studying. And although the strategies should be practiced daily, they may take only 5 to 15 minutes of class time. They can be used as quick comprehension checks, **do-now activities**, and **exit tickets**.

## Principle 4: The Content of the Curriculum Drives the Rigor of the Writing Activities

If you follow Principle 3 and connect your students' writing activities with the subject matter that you're teaching, you'll find that you can use the same activities for any grade level or content area and still challenge your students. The format of the activity will stay the same, but the content is what makes it more or less rigorous. In addition, when the same kind of activity is embedded in different content, it will help build and deepen different bodies of knowledge.

As an illustration, one of TWR's sentence-level strategies uses the conjunctions *because*, *but*, and *so* to encourage extended responses. The teacher gives students a **sentence stem**, which is an independent clause, and asks them to finish it in three different ways, using each of the three conjunctions.

If you're reading *The Real Story of Stone Soup*<sup>18</sup> with young students, the activity might look like this:

The uncle believes the boys are lazy because he thinks he does all the work.

The uncle believes the boys are lazy, but the boys really do all the work.

The uncle believes the boys are lazy, so he calls them mean names and complains about them.

In math, instead of asking, "Why is the square root of two irrational?" you can give your students the same activity embedded in that content:

The square root of two is irrational because two is a non-square number.

The square root of two is irrational, but the value can be approximated on the number line.

The square root of two is irrational, so it cannot be written as a ratio of two integers.

Here's that same activity adapted to a high-school global history class:

The Mongol Empire collapsed because it was too large to control.

The Mongol empire collapsed, but areas in Russia remained under Mongol control for centuries.

The Mongol Empire collapsed, so trade declined between Asia and the Middle East.

If you're teaching science, the activity might go like this:

Wind energy is a sustainable resource because it does not require fuel.

Wind energy is a sustainable resource, but it can be harmful to some wildlife.

---

Wind energy is a sustainable resource, so more companies are investing in wind turbines.

---

In each of these cases, students need to return to the material they have been studying and look carefully for information to complete the stems. The activity can be challenging. If you think sentence-level activities are just for elementary students, try finishing this stem: “Immanuel Kant believed that space and time are subjective forms of human sensibility, but \_\_\_\_\_.”

No matter what content you use with these kinds of activities, the specificity of the prompts makes them far more powerful than an open-ended question such as, “Why did the Mongol Empire collapse?” The conjunction *but*, for example, demands that students hold two contrasting ideas in their minds and find evidence to support one of them. Your students will be deciding how to complete the sentence stems independently, but in a way that gives them the structure they need to engage in focused, rigorous thinking.

## Principle 5: Grammar Is Best Taught in the Context of Student Writing

Research has found that students who have a better understanding of grammar are better writers.<sup>19</sup> But it has also consistently found that teaching the rules in isolation doesn't work. That doesn't mean teachers can't, or shouldn't, teach grammar. As we've seen over the years, what does work is to teach writing conventions and grammar in the context of students' own writing.<sup>20</sup>

Just as skills developed in writing about one subject may not transfer to another, many students won't be able to apply rules they've learned in the abstract to their own writing. Although it's useful for students to have a general familiarity with basic concepts such as **noun** and **verb**, that won't necessarily prevent them from writing “sentences” that lack one or the other.

Some people swear by sentence diagramming—often, those who feel that they themselves learned to write by using the technique. And it may work for some students. But for many, and especially those who struggle with language, breaking sentences into their component parts, labeling them as parts of speech, and plotting them on a diagram just adds to the confusion.

TWR’s method doesn’t teach grammar for the sake of teaching grammar. You won’t find, for example, lessons on prepositional phrases and their use—although students will undoubtedly be using such phrases in their writing. Instead, students are taught a select number of grammatical terms and functions that appear frequently in written language but rarely in conversation. Students need to become familiar with these grammatical concepts to become proficient writers—and readers.

That’s why TWR strategies focus on teaching students how to do things like use **appositives**, which are phrases used to describe nouns, and use **subordinating conjunctions** to introduce **dependent clauses**. Those grammatical terms are discussed in Chapter 4 and found in the glossary. They can serve as a kind of shorthand when teachers are giving feedback. Instead of vague feedback such as “Vary your sentence structure,” teachers can say “Add an appositive”—and be confident that students will understand what to do and how it will improve their writing.

## Principle 6: The Two Most Important Phases of the Writing Process Are Planning and Revising

When students are ready to tackle longer pieces of writing—paragraphs and compositions—they’ll need to go through four steps before producing a final copy: planning, drafting, revising, and editing. But the critical phases are planning and revising.

All students need to plan before they write. This is especially true of expository writing. Although experienced writers may be able to turn out a well-developed paragraph or essay on the fly, most of the students we work with find it overwhelming to organize their thoughts at the same time that they’re choosing words and figuring out the best way to structure their

sentences. They may forget what they were planning to say next, or they may need to check to see if they're repeating themselves. Again, this is a matter of having too many things to juggle in working memory.

Partly as a result, beginning or non-expert writers may simply put down whatever comes into their heads about a given topic. Here, for example, is how one sixth grader explained his strategy in writing an essay:

*I have a whole bunch of ideas and write them down till my supply of ideas is gone. Then I might try to think of more ideas up to the point where you can't get any more ideas that are worth putting down on paper and then I would end it.<sup>21</sup>*

Expert writers, on the other hand, decide on their purpose before they begin to write: who their audience is, what they want a reader to learn, and what ideas they want to introduce. They make a plan, listing the points they want to include and the order in which to present them. They may show an outline or draft to a reader or editor and find that they need to modify it. As they try to make their explanations clearer, they may come up with new insights and make new connections between their ideas.

Even young children can learn how to outline paragraphs with a teacher's guidance, if the activity is done orally and collaboratively. In one first-grade classroom using the Hochman Method, a teacher led the children through outlining a paragraph about how they successfully planted seeds and grew vegetables. That kind of activity fosters logical thinking and analytical abilities in a cognitively manageable way, preparing the groundwork for later independent writing.

For students who are ready to engage in this process in written form, we provide multiple basic outline templates: one for planning paragraphs and several for planning compositions. The lion's share of the work of writing occurs at the planning stage, as students identify the main idea or theme of their writing, the points they will make, and the order they will make them in. As they do this work, students are discovering what further information or clarification they need, making the necessary connections between ideas or claims and relevant details or evidence and ensuring that they don't wander off into irrelevancy or repetition.

Once students have a well-organized outline, it's usually a simple matter to translate it into a rudimentary draft. Then comes the next major phase of writing: revising the draft so that it reads smoothly and coherently. This is where students will draw on the sentence-level skills they've acquired, which include using subordinating conjunctions and appositives to vary their sentence structure and inserting transition words and phrases to make their sentences and paragraphs flow.

---

Teachers who adhere to these six principles while implementing TWR have found it to be a powerful way not only of teaching writing skills, but also of ensuring their students are grasping content and thinking analytically. They've learned to give students clear, explicit writing instruction and feedback, using sentence-level activities regardless of what grade or subject they're teaching. They ground the TWR strategies in whatever content the class is learning, enabling students to deal with text more effectively and using the complexity of the content to ratchet up the activities' rigor. Teachers provide instruction in the correct use of grammar, punctuation, capitalization, and other conventions by embedding those practices within the assignments they give students. And they break the writing process into manageable steps, with particular attention to planning and revising, so that students don't become overwhelmed by all the factors that writing requires them to juggle.

## How to Use This Book

---

*The Writing Revolution 2.0* will guide you through a carefully scaffolded sequence of strategies and accompanying activities that you can adapt to any content area, grade level, or ability level. Whether you're teaching large classes, small groups, or tutorials, you'll be able to find many ways to use them. The activities also easily lend themselves to differentiation, enabling you to modify them for a range of ability levels within your classroom.

This book provides you with numerous examples of how the strategies can be implemented, along with a glossary of key terms at the end and an appendix of resources. As a reminder, you'll also find additional resources, including customizable templates, sample activities, posters, and sample pacing guides, at [www.thewritingrevolution.org/resources/book-resources](http://www.thewritingrevolution.org/resources/book-resources).



# Key Points

---

Before we describe the organization of the book, we'd like to highlight some points that you should keep in mind as you read it.

- We use the term *strategy* to refer to an overarching technique and the word *activity* to refer to scaffolds that support instruction in the strategy. For example, summarizing is a strategy, whereas giving students an article and having them write a sentence that summarizes it is an activity that supports it.
- Every strategy and many of the supporting activities begin with a bulleted list explaining **WHY** it is important for you to provide explicit instruction for these techniques.
- Although this book presents the strategies one after another in a linear sequence, in practice you'll be using *several different* strategies at the same time. For example, you might first ask students to write a one-sentence summary of a news article. That sentence could become the topic sentence in a Single-Paragraph Outline (SPO), which could become the basis for the draft of a paragraph. Students don't have to master all of the sentence strategies before learning how to develop a Single-Paragraph Outline (SPO).
- Follow the sequence we suggest in introducing new strategies, but *have students practice previously taught strategies recursively*. In particular, the sentence-level activities continue to be important when students move on to revising paragraphs and compositions.
- When introducing a strategy, it's best to *model an activity for the class and then have students practice it orally*. This is certainly true for younger students, but older students also need to have demonstrations and participate in whole-class activities. Once students understand the concept, you can have them try the activity on their own in writing.
- When demonstrating a strategy for the first time, it's also best to ground the activity in a topic that all students are familiar with, so that they're not trying to juggle new content in working memory

along with a new writing strategy. You could use a topic that has already been covered in class, or you could use one from outside the curriculum, like “winter.”

- When you model an activity for the whole class, make sure that you’re displaying your work in a way that enables all students to see what you’re doing by using a chalkboard, whiteboard, chart paper, SMART Board, projector, or document camera to do this.
- As you adapt TWR strategies and activities to the content of your curriculum, *always anticipate student responses* to the questions you pose or activities you create. It’s surprisingly easy to create an activity that is clear to you but confusing to students. Make sure you are certain about what you want your students to understand about the content the activity is focused on, and plan backward from there.<sup>22</sup>
- When we provide examples of activities, we usually include one version for Level 1 students and another for Level 2. These categories apply to students with more basic and more advanced writing skills, respectively, and to some extent they correspond to grade levels in terms of the subject matter we have used in the examples. Level 1 examples tend to focus on elementary-level material, and Level 2 examples focus on secondary-level material. However, even students in high school often lack basic writing skills, so we have avoided using grade-level designations. You will need to use your knowledge of your students’ needs and abilities when adapting TWR activities to the content you’re teaching.
- As you progress through the school year, you should be giving students *prompt feedback* on their writing and regularly *assessing their progress* to determine what strategies to focus on, how quickly to move through the sequence, and which students need modifications suited to their individual needs.
- The Hochman Method works best when it is implemented *across the curriculum* in as many subject areas as possible. In secondary schools and elementary schools where different subjects are taught by different teachers, this approach requires coordination among teachers and common planning time. To facilitate collaboration, we have provided key terms that all teachers can use as a common

language and to share tips about the best ways to introduce and implement TWR strategies and activities. These terms are boldfaced in the text, and their definitions are found in the glossary.

- When we use the word *differentiate*, it means *adapting* an activity to make it less or more challenging.

## How This Book Is Organized and What It Covers

This book is divided into three sections. The first section focuses on sentences and a system of note-taking. The second section addresses longer forms of writing—paragraphs, compositions, revision, and summarizing. The third section covers how to assess students’ writing and adapt TWR to your classes.

### Sentences

The strategies in this section will help your students understand the purpose and structure of sentences and develop the ability to compose complex sentences that reflect extended thinking.

They include:

- Understand the concept of a sentence by distinguishing between sentences and fragments, and unscrambling words to make a sentence
- Expand a basic **kernel sentence** with details
- Use the four types of sentences (statements, questions, exclamations, and commands)
- Develop questions
- Extend responses using basic conjunctions (*because, but, so*)
- Use subordinating conjunctions to reflect written language structures
- Insert appositives to describe a noun
- Combine two or more short sentences into a longer one
- Use transitions to connect thoughts and sentences

These strategies will encourage students to think analytically, enable them to give more information to a reader, and make their writing more engaging.

In addition, this section will introduce a system of abbreviations and symbols your students can use to take notes on their reading. You'll find activities that give your students practice in converting text they have read into notes, using key words and phrases, which they'll later convert back into text they write themselves. This process ensures that your students will actually process and understand what they read, rather than merely copying it.

## **Writing at Length**

In this section, you'll learn why it's important for students to plan before they tackle longer forms of writing. You'll be introduced to an outlining process that will enable your students to shape coherent paragraphs through the use of topic sentences, supporting sentences that provide key details, and concluding sentences. TWR's revision activities will provide your students with the techniques they need to make their writing flow.

We'll also cover the powerful strategy of summarizing and then move on to the challenges of writing compositions: selecting a topic, developing a thesis statement, crafting introductions and conclusions as well as body paragraphs, and incorporating quotations.

TWR covers four types of paragraphs and, ultimately, compositions: expository, narrative, descriptive, and opinion or argumentative. We have a separate chapter (Chapter 10) devoted to writing argumentative essays, given the complexity of that particular genre and the emphasis that has recently been placed on it in many state standards.

## **How to Assess Writing and Adapt the Hochman Method to Your Classroom**

The final section will guide you through the sometimes tricky process of assessment, which involves collecting writing samples early in the school year in order to set goals for individual students and for the class. (Bear in mind that you'll need to be familiar with the contents of this entire book before you'll be able to set those goals.) It's important to administer similar assessments at the middle and end of the year to see how your students are progressing.

The final two chapters provide suggestions about how to easily “revolutionize” your existing instructional materials so that they support the TWR strategies you are teaching. We also detail the sequence in which the strategies should be taught.

All of the activities in this book, when embedded in content that has been taught, are also highly effective tools for assessing students’ comprehension and retention of material in the curriculum.

It turned out Ms. Cappiello was wrong: this year *was* different for her ninth graders. She ended up teaching them a number of TWR strategies, embedded in the content of the curriculum

At the end of the year, she gave her students another writing prompt. This one asked them to produce a paragraph about a person they had learned about and their impact.

Several students created topic sentences that used an appositive. Michael’s first sentence, for example, was: “Martin Luther King Jr., a celebrated leader, taught and inspired people to follow him.”

Students’ sentences weren’t perfect, but they were far more complex and detailed than what they had produced at the beginning of the year.

Sentence-level instruction had also dramatically boosted their reading comprehension, helping them understand complex syntax. And it had deepened their understanding of the content in the curriculum.

Over the course of the year, Ms. Cappiello had also taught her students how to construct outlines and use them to write paragraphs. Once they learned how to plan before writing, their paragraphs became more coherent. When they drafted and revised the paragraphs, she saw students drawing on their newly acquired sentence-level skills to vary their sentence structure and connect their thoughts.

That spring, she told her colleague that TWR had been transformative for her and her students. “It was a real game-changer,” she said.

## To Sum Up

As you introduce the sentence activities in these chapters to your students, you should keep the following points in mind:

- When introducing a new activity, model it for students first.
- Have students practice sentence-level activities orally as well as in writing, even if you're teaching older students.
- Have younger students (K-2) engage in sentence-level and outlining activities orally and as a whole class, for the most part.
- At any grade level, introduce new writing strategies or concepts orally and as a whole class, using familiar content.
- Once students have grasped a new writing concept, embed writing activities in the content you're teaching.
- Adapt activities for students at varying ability levels while covering the same content.
- When planning activities, write out the responses you anticipate getting from students.
- Plan your instruction so that your students will have the content knowledge they need to practice the activity successfully.
- As you progress through the sequence of activities, have students keep practicing TWR activities you've already covered to build on the skills they've acquired. You can use several different sentence activities at the same time, and you can have students move on to outlining and possibly writing paragraphs while they're still working on sentence activities.

## BOOK DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

---

1. What kind of preparation did you get to teach writing, if any?
2. What kinds of writing approaches have been used in the school(s) you've taught in and how successful do you think they were?
3. Why do many students struggle to learn to write?
4. What are the benefits of embedding explicit writing instruction in the content of the curriculum?
5. Why should the Hochman Method be implemented beginning in elementary school when possible?
6. What role does working memory play in writing?
7. How do each of the six principles contribute to positive learning outcomes?

## Notes

1. National Center for Education Statistics, *The Nation's Report Card: Writing 2011* (Washington, DC: Institute of Education Sciences, US Department of Education, 2012), <https://nces.ed.gov/nationsreportcard/pdf/main2011/2012470.pdf>.
2. G.B. Skar, S. Graham, A. Huebner, et al., "A Longitudinal Intervention Study of the Effects of Increasing Amount of Meaningful Writing across Grades 1 and 2," *Reading and Writing* (2023), <https://doi.org/10.1007/s11145-023-10460-0>.
3. J. Gilbert and S. Graham, "Teaching Writing to Elementary Students in Grades 4–6: A National Survey," *The Elementary School Journal* 110(4), <https://www.journals.uchicago.edu/doi/10.1086/651193>.  
G. Troia and S. Graham, "Common Core Writing and Language Standards and Aligned State Assessments: A National Survey of Teacher Beliefs and Attitudes," *Reading and Writing* (2016), 29, 10.1007/s11145-016-9650-z.  
M. Brindle, S. Graham, K.R. Harris, and M. Hebert, "Third and Fourth Grade Teacher's Classroom Practices in Writing: A National Survey," *Reading and Writing: An Interdisciplinary Journal* (2016), 29(5): 929–954, <https://doi.org/10.1007/s11145-015-9604-x>.
4. S.F. Reardon et al., "Patterns of Literacy among U.S. Students," *The Future of Children* (2013), 22: 17–37.
5. T. Shanahan, "Trying Again—What Teachers Need to Know about Sentence Comprehension," (13 August 2022), <https://www.shanahanonliteracy.com/blog/trying-again-what-teachers-need-to-know-about-sentence-comprehension>.
6. M. Hebert, A. Simpson, and S. Graham, "Comparing Effects of Different Writing Activities on Reading Comprehension: A Meta-Analysis," *Reading and Writing* (2013), 26: 111–138, doi:10.1007/s11145-012-9386-3.  
S. Graham, X. Liu, A. Aitken, C. Ng, B. Bartlett, K.R. Harris, and J. Holzapfel, "Effectiveness of Literacy Programs Balancing Reading and Writing

- Instruction: A Meta-Analysis," *Reading Research Quarterly* (2018), 53(3): 279–304, <https://doi.org/10.1002/rrq.194>.
7. C.M. Scott and C.H. Balthazar, "The Role of Complex Sentence Knowledge in Children with Reading and Writing Difficulties," *Perspectives on Language and Literacy* (2013 Summer) 39(3): 18–30, PMID: 25821532; PMCID: PMC4373700.  
G. Gillon and B. Dodd, "The Effects of Training Phonological, Semantic, and Syntactic Processing Skills in Spoken Language on Reading Ability," *Language, Speech, and Hearing Services in Schools* (1995), 26: 58–68.  
E.A. Stevens, S. Park, and S. Vaughn, "A Review of Summarizing and Main Idea Interventions for Struggling Readers in Grades 3 through 12: 1978–2016," *Remedial and Special Education* (2018), 40(3), <https://doi.org/10.1177/0741932517749940>  
S. Graham and M.A. Hebert, "Writing to Read: Evidence for How Writing Can Improve Reading [A Carnegie Corporation Time to Act Report]," (Washington, DC: Alliance for Excellent Education, 2010).  
S. Graham, S.A. Kiuahara, and M. MacKay, "The Effects of Writing on Learning in Science, Social Studies, and Mathematics: A Meta-Analysis," *Review of Educational Research* 90(2), <https://journals.sagepub.com/doi/abs/10.3102/0034654320914744?journalCode=rera>.
  8. S. Graham, J. Bruch, J. Fitzgerald, L. Friedrich, J. Furgeson, K. Greene, J. Kim, J. Lyskawa, C.B. Olson, and C. Smither Wulsin, "Teaching Secondary Students to Write Effectively (2016), NCEE 2017-4002.
  9. M.J. Orosco and D.K. Reed, "Effects of Professional Development on English Learners," *Journal of Learning Disabilities* (2023), 56(4): 324–338, <https://doi.org/10.1177/00222194221099671>.
  10. National Reading Panel, "Teaching Children to Read: An Evidence-Based Assessment of the Scientific Research Literature on Reading and Its Implications for Reading Instruction," Reports of the Subgroups (2000), <https://www.nichd.nih.gov/sites/default/files/publications/pubs/nrp/Documents/report.pdf>.
  11. Orton-Gillingham: *The Orton-Gillingham Approach*. (2022 May 11). <https://www.orton-gillingham.com/approach/>.
  12. P. Tyre, "The Writing Revolution," *The Atlantic* (October 2012), [www.theatlantic.com/magazine/archive/2012/10/the-writing-revolution/309090/](http://www.theatlantic.com/magazine/archive/2012/10/the-writing-revolution/309090/).
  13. *Ibid.*, p. 3.
  14. J. Karpicke and J.R. Blunt, "Retrieval Practice Produces More Learning than Elaborative Studying with Concept Mapping," *Science* (2011), 331: 772–775, <https://doi.org/10.1126/science.1199327>.
  15. M. Neelen and P.A. Kirschner, "Deliberate Practice: What It Is and What It Isn't," <https://3starlearningexperiences.wordpress.com/2016/06/21/370/>.  
K.A. Ericsson and R. Pool, *Peak: Secrets from the New Science of Expertise* (New York: Houghton Mifflin Harcourt, 2016).
  16. B. Saddler, *Teacher's Guide to Effective Sentence Writing* (New York: The Guilford Press, 2012), p. 6.
  17. N. Wexler, *The Knowledge Gap: The Hidden Cause of America's Broken Education System—and How to Fix It* (New York, Avery, an imprint of Penguin Random House LLC, 2019).
  18. M. Brown, *Stone Soup: An Old Tale* (New York, Charles Scribner's Sons, 1947).
  19. J. Marjokorpi, "The Relationship between Grammatical Understanding and Writing Skills in Finnish Secondary L1 Education," *Reading and Writing* (2023), 36: 2605–2625, <https://doi.org/10.1007/s11145-022-10405-z>.
  20. S. Graham and D. Perin, *Writing Next: Effective Strategies to Improve Writing of Adolescents in Middle and High Schools. A Report to Carnegie Corporation of New York* (Washington, DC: Alliance for Excellent Education, 2007).
  21. M. Scardamalia and C. Bereiter, "Knowledge Telling and Knowledge Transforming in Written Composition." In S. Rosenberg (ed.), *Advances in Applied Psycholinguistics* (1987), Vol. 1. *Disorders of First-Language Development*; Vol. 2. *Reading, Writing, and Language Learning* (Cambridge University Press), pp. 142–175, p. 149.
  22. For more on this kind of "backward planning" and how it relates to writing instruction, see J. Hawkins, E. Ginty, K. LeClaire Kurzman, D. Leddy, and J. Miller, *Writing for Understanding* (South Strafford, VT: Vermont Writing Collaborative, 2008).