

Writing Workshops that Work: Supportive Instruction for Upper Elementary Students



Everyone Reading Annual Conference
New York, NY
March 13, 2019
Presenter: Abigail Helfat, Ed.M.
abigail.goen@gmail.com



Providing Supportive Writing Instruction

What are we asking when we ask kids to write? **Writing is a complex task!** Children must integrate two sets of skills rapidly and efficiently. **Transcription skills** include lower level processes like letter formation, spelling and mechanics. **Higher-level language skills** such as audience awareness, genre knowledge, expressive ability and organization are also essential. Students may struggle with a few, many or even all of these skills.

In spite of the many skills writing requires, we often label kids who don't write well as **unmotivated** or **uncooperative**. To help **ALL** students improve, we need to shift our thinking to ask, "**How can I meet my students' needs?**" rather than expecting all students to meet the same expectations independently. This involves flexible grouping, a commitment to skill instruction and sustained guidance throughout the writing process.

For older students who haven't mastered the basics, make a **plan to teach missing skills** and **structure writing time** with guided practice and collaboration. With the right support, **all students can meet expectations** and achieve high standards. This packet contains materials and strategies that you can implement right away, but you should get ready to experiment and create materials that will meet your students' needs.

Remember that students will likely need a variety of **instruction** and **supports** –

- Handwriting, spelling and grammar
- Help choosing topics and getting started
- Sentence and paragraph work
- Supportive groupings, templates and structured activities

Kids who struggle to write will benefit from **structured lessons** that **teach skills** directly. They need ongoing modeling and guided practice to master skills at the sentence and paragraph level before moving on to longer written pieces. I hope some of the materials here will help you consider new ways to target writing instruction for the diverse learners in your classroom.

Please stay in touch if you have questions or comments—

Abigail Helfat

abigail.goen@gmail.com



1. Guiding questions-

<p>•Some students are reluctant to write because_____</p> <hr/>
<p>•Writing workshop is successful when_____</p> <hr/>
<p>•Writing time would be more effective if_____</p> <hr/>
<p>•My struggling writers need_____</p> <hr/>

2. Framing Writing Instruction

Teacher Control	Student Control
Mechanics	Process

Name: _____

Date: _____

Day: _____

Picture prompt brainstorm:

Who	What	Where	How

Sentence building:

1. _____

2. _____

3. _____

Name: _____

Date: _____

Day: _____

I had a _____ weekend with my family. First we _____
_____. Next we _____
_____. Another fun part of the weekend was _____
_____. The best part was when we _____
_____. The weekend was _____.

Name: _____

Date: _____

LIST at least five things you did over the break:

1. _____

2. _____

3. _____

4. _____

5. _____

WRITE your favorite one here: _____

Now give four **DETAILS** to describe what you did (WHERE did you go? WHO was there? WHAT did you do? WHAT did you see, hear, or taste? HOW did it feel?)

1. _____

2. _____

3. _____

4. _____

Now use this information to write a paragraph on the next page.

Name: _____

Date: _____

Title: _____

Name: _____

Date: _____

Day: _____

Paragraph Writing



Topic: _____

1. _____

2. _____

3. _____

4. _____

REVISING - Teach techniques in isolation through modeling and oral language.

- | | |
|----------------------------|---|
| 1. Improve topic sentences | 6. Vary sentence starters |
| 2. Add words | 7. Use connecting words |
| 3. Delete words | 8. Rearrange ideas |
| 4. Combine short sentences | 9. Substitute words, phrases or clauses |
| 5. Add descriptive words | 10. Improve concluding sentence |

Use **sample texts** that reflect common challenges to model and practice techniques.

I went to the playground. I went with my sister. My dad took us. There is a slide. It was sunny. It was fun.

I would like to visit Antarctica. I would see the penguins. It would be cold. Only scientists live there. It would be fun.

WORKSHOP SURVEY - WRITING WORKSHOPS THAT WORK

For the first section, please rate each on a scale of 1 -5 (5 is best).

1. How well did the session match the description in the conference materials?
2. Please rate the overall format of the session.
3. How helpful were the sample activities that were demonstrated today?
4. How did this session compare to others you have attended?

5. What elements of the session were most helpful?

6. What recommendations can you make to improve future presentations?

7. Share one current teaching/learning dilemma in your classroom that you would like to learn more about.