



K12 Coalition



Keys to
Literacy
A Division of K12 Coalition

THE ESSENTIALS OF EFFECTIVE WRITING INSTRUCTION



A Guide

Produced & distributed by K12 Coalition
Authored by Joan Sedita



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Foreword



The ability to write is as essential to learning and academic achievement as the ability to read. Moreover, the availability of AI neither eliminates the need for students to learn how to write nor diminishes the importance of explicit writing instruction. Writing is a foundational skill for postsecondary education, careers, and civic engagement, and it serves many purposes in everyday life. People write to communicate with family, friends, and colleagues; share personal stories; inform others through articles and blog posts; persuade; and entertain. In an age increasingly shaped by rapid information exchange and digital communication, the ability to communicate clearly and effectively through writing has become more important—not less.

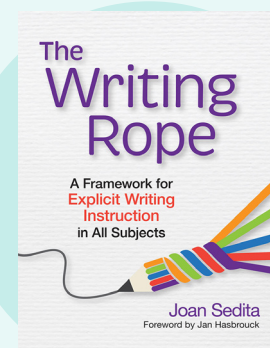
Writing is not merely a final product—it is a process and a powerful tool for critical thinking that enhances students’ understanding of content across all subject areas. Research shows that students who have opportunities to write alongside reading demonstrate evidence of critical thinking about what they read (Graham & Hebert, 2010). Many skills involved in writing—such as sentence and paragraph construction, note-taking, summarizing, and spelling—also improve reading comprehension and reinforce reading fluency and word recognition. Writing further serves as a demonstration of learning; it functions as a form of formative assessment that allows teachers to evaluate students’ depth of understanding. Although AI can support the writing process, it cannot replace the deep learning that occurs when students engage in the work of writing themselves. For these reasons, writing instruction is more essential than ever.

Over the past two decades, research literature, professional discourse, state legislation, policy, and funding related to literacy instruction have tended to focus primarily on reading, particularly in the elementary grades. By contrast, writing has not received the attention it deserves. In elementary classrooms, writing is often taught separately from school reading instruction and is assessed less frequently.

Research indicates that students spend very little time writing in classrooms, and teachers often devote insufficient time to writing instruction (Graham, 2019). Additionally, many teachers report that their preparation to teach writing effectively is inadequate (Graham, 2024), citing limited pre-service coursework and minimal professional development once in the classroom.

While many educators are familiar with the five components of reading necessary for skilled, fluent reading (i.e., phonemic awareness, phonics, fluency, vocabulary, and comprehension) they are often unable to identify the components of skilled writing or the essential elements of an effective writing curriculum. One reason I developed *The Writing Rope* framework, described in this guide, was to clarify the multiple skills and strategies students must learn to become proficient writers.

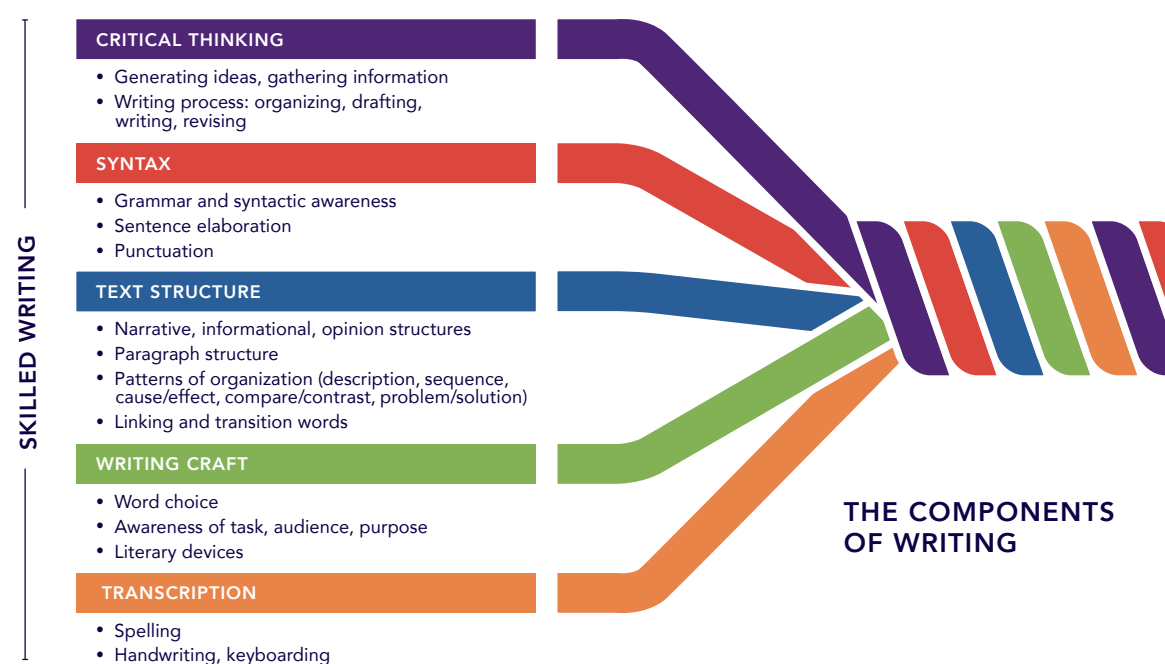
The information and instructional suggestions in this guide are designed to help educators incorporate evidence-based practices for teaching writing across all grades and integrate writing into all subject areas. It is intended for use by teachers, intervention educators, administrators, and higher education professionals. I hope you find the information and links to accompanying resources valuable as you work to improve student writing proficiency.



A handwritten signature of Joan Sedita in black ink.

Joan Sedita
Founder of Keys to Literacy,
Author of *The Writing Rope: A Framework for
Explicit Writing Instruction in All Subjects*

The Writing Rope: A Framework for Writing Instruction



The *Writing Rope* framework (Sedita, 2019, 2023) is an instructional framework for teaching writing across all grade levels. It identifies the skills and strategies students need in order to become proficient writers, organizing them into components represented as strands in a rope:

- ➔ **Critical Thinking:** This strand encompasses the skills and strategies required to write about texts and to use writing as a tool for learning. These include note taking and summarizing. It also includes strategies related to the stages of the writing process.
- ➔ **Syntax:** This strand focuses on sentences—the building blocks of written communication. Syntax, which involves the study and application of grammar as well as the arrangement of words, phrases, and clauses, plays a central role in both reading and writing.

- ➔ **Text Structure:** This strand addresses the organization of various types of writing (narrative, informational, and opinion/argument), paragraph structure, patterns of organization, and the use of transition words and phrases to connect ideas and signal those patterns. Text structure supports both comprehension and writing development.
- ➔ **Writing Craft:** This strand emphasizes the skills, techniques, and stylistic choices that make writing engaging and effective. It includes word choice, voice, the use of literary devices, and attention to task, audience, and purpose.
- ➔ **Transcription:** This strand focuses on foundational skills such as spelling, handwriting, and keyboarding, which are essential for translating ideas into written language.



The *Writing Rope* framework is not a program or curriculum. Rather, it serves as a tool for educators to evaluate whether their instruction, curricula, and writing programs address all essential components of writing. It can also function as a formative assessment tool for educators to analyze student writing to identify strengths and areas for improvement, provide feedback, and guide instructional decisions.

In the elementary grades, students must learn a wide range of skills, strategies, and techniques within each strand. As they progress into grade 4 and beyond, they begin to integrate these skills to produce writing that effectively communicates their ideas—much like weaving strands together into a rope. Some elements of writing instruction can be readily integrated into content-area teaching across subjects. These include the stages of the writing process, strategies for writing about reading, text structure, and activities that strengthen sentences and paragraphs. Other elements—particularly writing craft and transcription skills—are most often taught within English language arts classrooms.

The Writing Rope: Guidelines for Instruction

It is important to note that the skills represented by the strands in the rope should not be taught in a specific sequence; instead, they should be taught simultaneously. For example, in the early elementary grades, students develop transcription skills (spelling and handwriting) while also learning to write sentences and paragraphs, as well as to distinguish among narrative, informational, and opinion text structures.



Additionally, with the exception of the transcription strand, most skills and strategies that are in the other strands should be addressed across multiple grade levels. For instance, basic sentence-writing skills are introduced in the primary grades, but students benefit from continued instruction as they progress through school, enabling them to write increasingly more complex and elaborated sentences into high school.

Suggested guidelines for instruction in each strand across the grades are provided on the following pages. The colors used in the charts represent the following: dark orange indicates formal instruction and learning, orange indicates refinement, and yellow indicates ongoing and advanced use. Teachers can use these guidelines to determine whether their writing instruction covers all essential skills, and administrators can use them to ensure that the writing curriculum addresses all essential skills. These guidelines are flexible; educators should consider state literacy standards and students’ needs when making decisions about writing instruction and curriculum.



CRITICAL THINKING	K	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12
Beginning awareness of the stages of the writing process (think, plan, write, revise)													
Using all stages of the writing process													
Skills & strategies for generating ideas & gathering information prior to writing (e.g., note taking)													
Skills & strategies used to write about text & other sources (e.g., synthesizing, summarizing, responding to prompts)													

SYNTAX	K	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12
Basic grammar (fragment vs. complete sentence, 4 types of sentences)													
Advanced grammar (clauses, phrases)													
Basic punctuation													
Advanced punctuation (e.g., quotations, semi-colon)													
Sentence elaboration													



TEXT STRUCTURE

	K	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12
Awareness of different purposes of the 3 types of writing (opinion/argument, informational, narrative)													
Structure (body development) for the 3 types of writing (opinion/argument, informational, narrative)													
Writing introductions, conclusions													
Paragraph structure													
Patterns of organization (description, sequence, cause & effect, etc.)													
Linking & transition words													

WRITING CRAFT

	K	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12
Word choice													
Awareness of task, audience, purpose													
Literary devices: basic (use of dialogue, figurative language)													
Literary devices: advanced (use of allegory, allusion, flashback, hyperbole, etc.)													

**TRANSCRIPTION**

	K	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12
Spelling: basic phonics (letter-sound correspondences)													
Spelling: rules & generalizations													
Spelling: advanced word study (multisyllabic words, morphology)													
Handwriting: letter formation													
Handwriting/keyboarding: fluent print/cursive writing or keyboarding													

Learn More:**ARTICLE:**

[The Writing Rope: The Strands That Are Woven Into Skilled Writing](#)
(Sedita, 2019, Keys to Literacy)

**BOOK:**

[The Writing Rope: A Framework for Explicit Writing Instruction in All Subjects](#) (Sedita, 2023, Brookes Publishing)

**SHORT VIDEO:**

[What is the Writing Rope?](#) (Sedita, Reading Universe)

**RECORDED WEBINAR:**

[The Writing Rope: A Framework for Evidence-Based Writing Instruction](#) (Sedita, 2022, edWeb)

Writing Research

Several reports present findings from meta-analyses of writing research. These resources are particularly valuable because they draw on consistent results across multiple studies. Links to these reports are listed on the following page. In the most recent of these, Graham, Collins, and Ciullo (2024) offer evidence-based recommendations for teaching writing from primary through secondary grades, drawing on six meta-analyses and one meta-synthesis:

- 1 Students need to write, but writing is not enough—they need to learn and use multiple writing practices.
- 2 Students need to be supported as they write.
- 3 Foundational writing skills (handwriting, spelling, and sentence construction) need to be taught.
- 4 Students become better writers when strategies for planning, revising and editing are taught.
- 5 Teaching creativity, critical thinking and imagery can enhance writing.
- 6 Teach students how to write summaries.
- 7 Enhance students' knowledge about writing—including language, audience, the characteristics of good writing, and various genres by using mentor texts and explicitly teaching the structure of different types of text.
- 8 Use twenty-first century writing tools in the classroom (digital writing tools).
- 9 Have students write across the curriculum.
- 10 Connect reading and writing instruction.
- 11 Create a motivating writing environment.

Learn More:

Research Reports, Articles, and Guides

→ [Evidence-based Recommendations for Teaching Writing](#)
(Graham, Collins, & Ciullo, 2024)

→ [Teaching Secondary Students to Write Effectively](#)
(Graham et al., 2016)

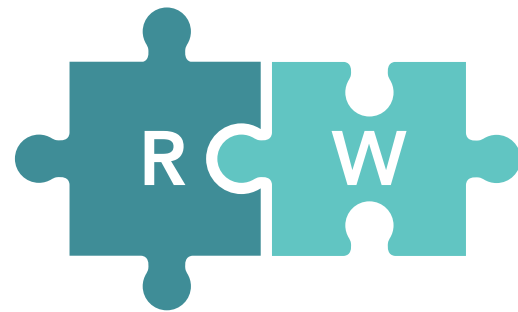
→ [Teaching Elementary School Students to Be Effective Writers: A Practice Guide](#) (Graham et al., 2012)

→ [Writing to Read: Evidence for How Writing Can Improve Reading](#)
(Graham & Hebert, 2010)

→ [Writing Next: Effective Strategies to Improve the Writing of Adolescents in Middle and High Schools](#) (Graham & Perin, 2007)



The Reading and Writing Connection



There are significant benefits to teaching reading and writing in a connected way. Both literacy components are built on the same foundation of oral language and share many cognitive processes. Although reading is a receptive use of language and writing is a generative one, they are closely aligned and draw on similar knowledge, skills, and strategies.

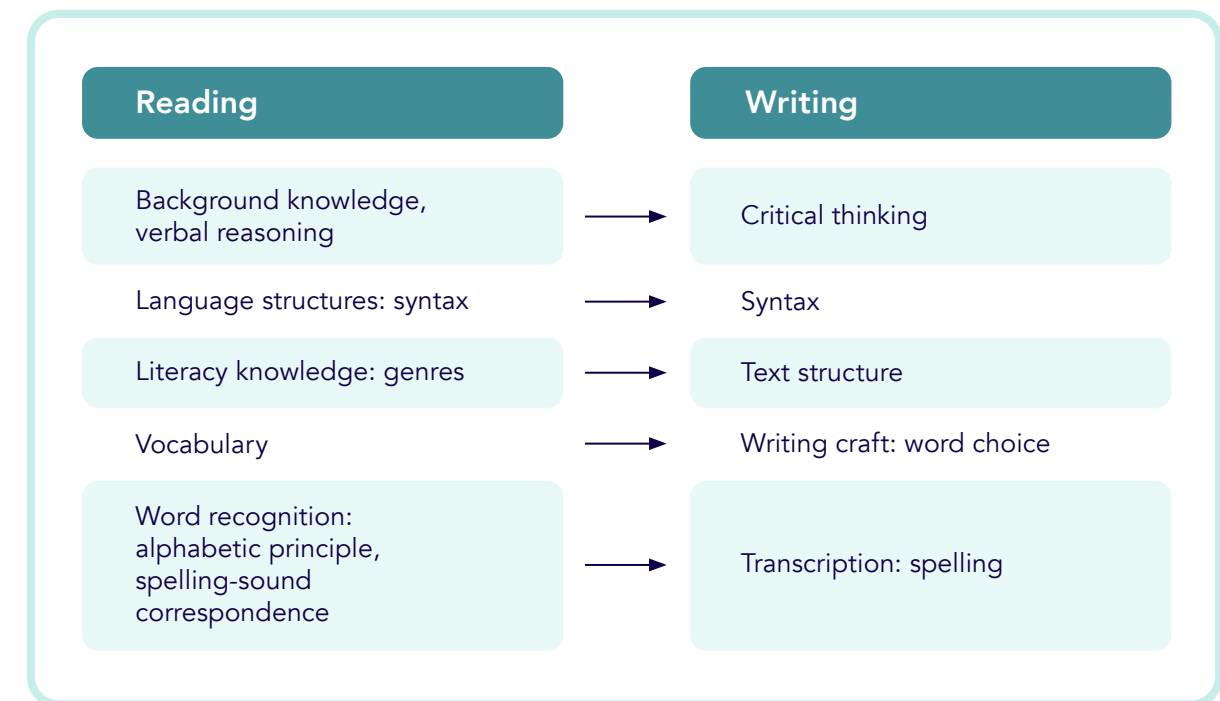
Too often, curricula treat instruction for reading and writing separately, taught in different lessons. However, students benefit from instruction that integrates the two. Given the overlap in the skills and strategies that support both reading comprehension and writing, teaching them together is more efficient and strengthens content learning.

The research guide *Writing to Read* (Graham & Hebert, 2010) highlights how writing supports reading and offers the following recommendations:

- Students' comprehension of content area texts is improved when they write about what they read. Teachers should have students respond to text in writing—including expressing personal reactions, analyzing and interpreting text, writing summaries, taking notes, and answering questions in written form.
- Students' reading skills improve when they learn the skills and processes involved in creating text. Teaching the writing process, text structures, paragraph organization, and sentence construction enhances reading comprehension. Instruction in spelling and sentence construction also supports reading fluency and decoding skills.
- Students' reading comprehension improves when they increase the frequency with which they produce their own writing.

Comparing the Reading and Writing Ropes

Scarborough's Reading Rope (2001) is a seminal model that reflects and is supported by the body of research commonly referred to as the Science of Reading. Similar to *The Writing Rope*, this framework organizes skills and processes required for proficient reading into eight interconnected components, represented as strands in a rope. These strands are grouped into two categories: word recognition and language comprehension. As illustrated below, there are multiple areas in which the skills represented in both ropes overlap.



Learn More:



BLOG POST:

[Connecting the Ropes: Integrating Reading & Writing Instruction](#)
(Sedita, 2024, Keys to Literacy)

Teaching Principles

Informed by research, Sedita (2020, 2023) identified seven teaching principles that should be incorporated when assigning writing tasks and teaching writing skills:

Explicit instruction of writing strategies	Explicit instruction uses structured, sequenced steps to teach a specific skill. It involves clearly explaining the skill, modeling its application through think-alouds, and providing guided practice with feedback. Teaching students strategies for planning, revising, and editing their compositions has been shown to significantly improve the quality of their writing. Strategy instruction may include teaching generic processes, such as brainstorming or collaboration with peers to revise, as well as more targeted strategies for completing specific writing tasks, such as composing an opinion or argument piece (Graham & Perin, 2007).
Gradual release of responsibility	This instructional model (Pearson & Gallagher, 1983), often referred to as the “I do it, We do it, You do it” approach, begins with explicit, direct instruction to introduce and teach a new writing skill, strategy, or technique. During the “I do it” stage, the teacher models and explains the skill. In the “We do it” stage, students practice the skill with guidance, working individually, in small groups, or as a whole class (e.g., collaboratively editing a paragraph). The teacher provides support and corrective feedback during this phase. Students reach the “You do it” stage when they can apply the skill independently.
Differentiated instruction	Differentiated instruction involves designing teaching approaches that meet individual student needs, rather than relying on a standardized approach that assumes all students learn to write in the same way.
Scaffolding	Scaffolding refers to the temporary support provided by a teacher or peer to help a student learn a writing skill they cannot yet perform independently. This support is gradually removed as the student gains proficiency. It is important to note that scaffolding does not mean completing the work for the student; rather, it is a key component of differentiated instruction.
Opportunities for collaboration	Writing is a social activity and is best learned within a community. Collaborative writing has been shown to significantly improve student writing (Graham & Perin, 2007). It involves instructional practices in which students work together to plan, draft, revise, and edit their writing.
Mentor text as models for writing	Mentor texts—also known as writing models—should be used to demonstrate what effective writing looks like. These models help students understand and emulate the style, language, and structure of strong writing.
Increasing the amount students write across subjects	Providing adequate time for writing is essential for developing writing skills, and this time can be integrated into content-area instruction (Graham et al., 2012a). Writing is also a powerful strategy for extending critical thinking about subject-area topics.

More About Mentor Texts

Most people learn new skills by emulating others—for example, learning how to cook a great meal, play basketball, or play the guitar. Writing is no different. Teachers can use writing models, or mentor texts, to show students what strong writing looks like, enabling them to imitate its style, language, and structure in their own work. Mentor texts also demonstrate how authors use techniques associated with writing craft, also described as “writer’s moves”. This is sometimes referred to as teaching students to *read like a writer*. Research has found that using mentor texts is an effective instruction practice (Graham & Perin, 2007; Graham et al., 2012a).

Examples of Focus Areas for Using Mentor Text

- Writing introductions or conclusions
- Incorporating transition words and phrases
- Writing longer, elaborated sentences
- Using quotes
- Stating a claim or providing a reason to support a claim for argument writing



Sedita, J. (2020). *Keys to Content Writing* (4th Ed). Keys to Literacy.

When teachers analyze a writing sample with students, focusing on a specific writing strategy or technique, they point out how the author uses it. The goal is to help the students identify the strategies or techniques the author used to make the writing effective so they can emulate them in their own work. Because many students are unsure of what to look for in mentor texts, they benefit from explicit instruction in how to analyze a text.

Learn More:

SHORT VIDEO:
[Gradual Release of Responsibility – I, We, You](#) (Sedita, 2026, Keys to Literacy)

SHORT VIDEO:
[Why Explicit Instruction?](#)
(Archer, 2019, Center for Dyslexia MTSU)

WEBSITE:
[Differentiated Instruction for Writing](#) (Reading Rockets)

ARTICLE:
[Making the Most of Mentor Texts](#)
(Gallagher, 2014, ASCD)

Stages of the Writing Process

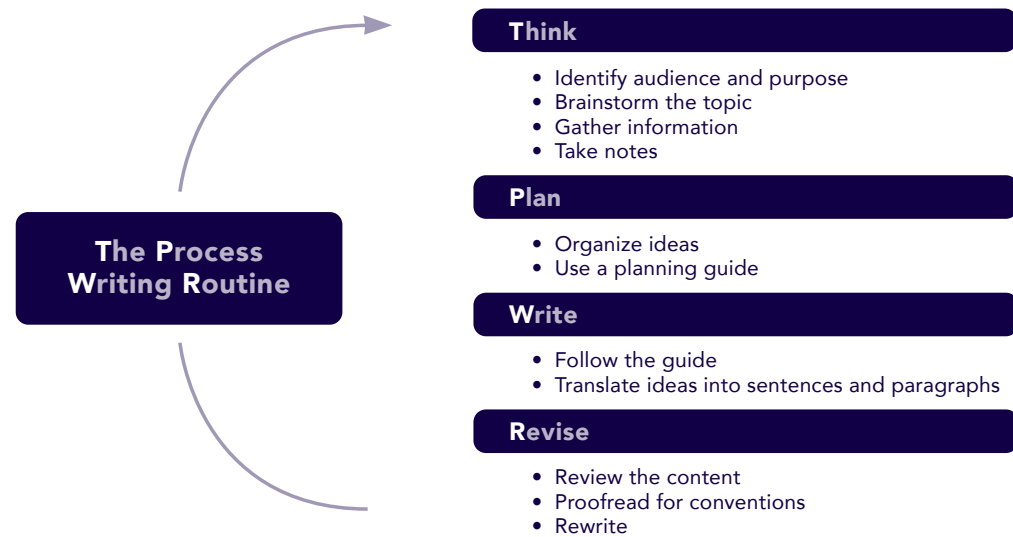


In order to better understand how to teach writing, researchers have examined how skilled writers approach the task. Based on research that began in the 1960's, Hayes and Flower (1980) developed a model of the writing process to identify the steps that proficient writers follow. Drawing on this research, they proposed a model that included four stages (Hayes, 1996, 2004): prewriting, text production, revising, and editing. Subsequent research has shown that explicit instruction in these stages—along with the strategies needed to plan, write, and revise—

is an effective instructional practice (Graham et al., 2012a; Graham, Harris, & Santangelo; 2015; Graham, Collins, & Ciullo, 2024).

Many students are unfamiliar with the writing process, do not use prewriting strategies, and avoid revision. As a result, they benefit from a consistent routine for following the stages of writing, common instructional language, and visual reminders used across subjects. A shared framework such as this helps students internalize the stages of the writing process.

Sedita (2020) developed a four-stage model for teaching the writing process: Think, Plan, Write, Revise. This model separates prewriting into two stages (Think and Plan) and combines



From: Sedita, J. (2020). *Keys to Content Writing* (4th Ed). Keys to Literacy.

revising and editing into a single stage (Revise). The title of this model, *The Process Writing Routine*, is designed to help students recall the stages of the writing process by linking each stage to the first letters of the words in the title. The graphic shown on the previous page outlines the focus of each stage.

Teach the Stages as a Recursive Process

Proficient writers approach writing as a dynamic and recursive process, revisiting and repeating stages as they develop a piece. For example, while drafting during the Write stage, a writer may return to the Think stage to gather additional information from a source. During the Revise stage, the writer may revisit the Plan stage to improve the organization of ideas. The arrow in the graphic on the previous page serves as a reminder of this recursive nature.



Learn More:

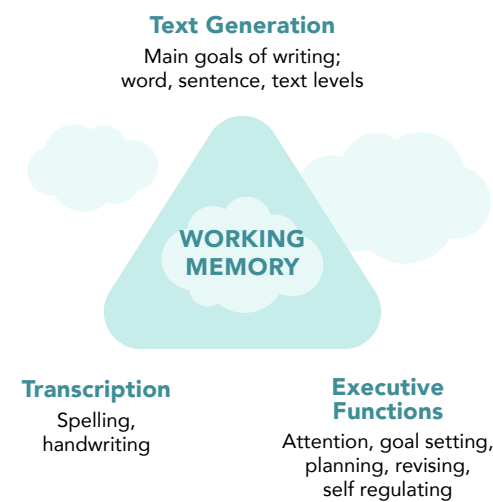
- **RESOURCE DOWNLOAD:**
[The Process Writing Routine Poster](#) (Keys to Literacy)
- **BLOG POST:**
[Stages of The Writing Process](#) (Sedita, 2023, Keys to Literacy)
- **SHORT VIDEO:**
[Stages of The Writing Process](#) (Sedita, Keys to Literacy)

Executive Functions and Writing

Writing is complex and challenging for many students. Proficient writers must integrate a wide range of skills, strategies, and techniques from all five components of *The Writing Rope* as they move through the stages of the writing process. To apply and continuously adjust these skills, students must also draw on executive function abilities, including working memory, attention, goal setting and organization, self-monitoring and regulation, and cognitive flexibility (Cartwright, 2015; Sedita, 2023).

The Not-So-Simple View of Writing

The *Not-So-Simple-View of Writing* (Berninger & Winn, 2006) is a developmental model that highlights the processes and skills that support writing, including executive functions, which are in the bottom right of the graphic shown to the right. The text generation and transcription components of the model align with the components of *The Writing Rope*. Working memory—the ability to hold and manipulate ideas and information—is essential for students to effectively apply writing skills.



Harris, Schmidt, and Graham (n.d.) explain the following related to executive functions:

While negotiating the rules and mechanics for writing, the writer must maintain focus on factors such as organization, form and features, purposes and goals, audience needs and perspectives, and evaluation of the communication between author and reader. Self-regulation of the writing process is critical; the writer must be goal oriented, resourceful, and reflective... For skilled authors, writing is a flexible, goal-directed activity, scaffolded by a rich source of cognitive processes and strategies for planning text production. (p.1)

Executive functions are not discrete skills; rather, they are cognitive processes that cannot be taught directly. However, students who have difficulty with executive functioning benefit from scaffolds such as graphic organizers, word lists, and structured steps for completing writing tasks.



Self-Regulated Strategy Development (SRSD)

Self-Regulated Strategy Development (SRSD) (Harris & Graham, 1992; Harris et al., 2008) is an instructional framework designed to teach both academic strategies and self-management skills.

It is particularly effective for struggling writers who do not automatically use the planning, monitoring, revising, and goal-setting behaviors characteristic of skilled writers. SRSD explicitly teaches these behaviors alongside concrete strategies for completing writing tasks. The framework also includes instruction in self-regulation practices such as goal setting, self-monitoring, positive self-talk, and self-reinforcement. A strong body of research supports the SRSD approach to writing instruction (Graham et al., 2012b; Harris et al., 2013). Many of the instructional strategies recommended in *The Writing Rope* and in Keys to Literacy's writing books and courses (*Keys to Early Writing* and *Keys to Content Writing*) align with SRSD.

Learn More:



BLOG POST:

[The Not-So-Simple View of Writing](#) (Sedita, 2021, Keys to Literacy)



RECORDED WEBINAR:

[The Role of Executive Functions in Reading & Writing](#) (Sedita, 2022, Keys to Literacy)

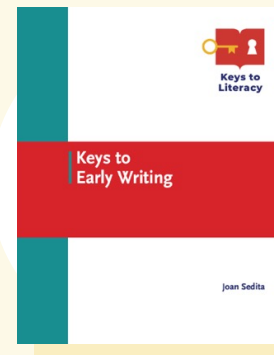
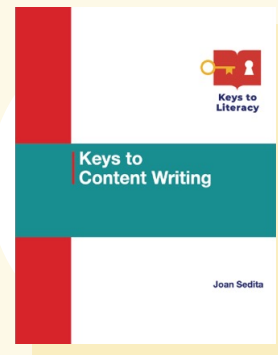
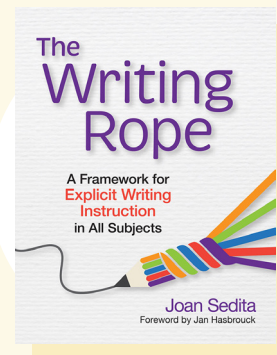


ARTICLE:

[Bringing Powerful Writing Strategies Into Your Classroom](#) (Harris et al., 2013, *The Reading Teacher*)

Teaching Suggestions

The Writing Rope organizes the skills, strategies, and techniques students need to become proficient writers into key components of writing instruction. This section of the guide offers several practical, evidence-based instructional suggestions drawn from *The Writing Rope: A Framework for Explicit Writing Instruction in All Subjects* (Sedita, 2023), along with two related professional learning resources: *Keys to Content Writing* (Sedita, 2020) and *Keys to Early Writing* (Sedita, 2021) available through Keys to Literacy.



Task, Audience, Purpose

Skilled writers recognize the importance of understanding the task, audience, and purpose (TAP) for any piece of writing, as these elements influence the decisions they make. These decisions include the tone of the piece, language and word choice, the type of information presented, the level of detail included, and how information is organized and conveyed. Many students do not automatically consider task, audience, and purpose while writing and therefore benefit from explicit instruction. Effective instruction includes teachers modeling how to consider TAP during writing and sharing guiding questions such as those on the following page.

TAP QUESTIONS

Task	Audience	Purpose
- What is your assignment? - What are you being asked to do? - What form will your writing take?	- Who is the audience for the writing piece? - Is it your teacher or classmates, or is there another, more “authentic” audience? - Who will actually read your piece?	- What is the purpose for this writing piece? - Is it to inform, convince, or tell a story? - How might the audience determine the purpose?

From: Sedita, J. (2020). *Keys to Content Writing* (4th Ed). Keys to Literacy.

It is also helpful for teachers to provide guidance about the task, audience, and purpose when assigning a writing task. The *Writing Assignment Guide* (WAG), a structured planning tool incorporated into the *Keys to Content Writing* professional learning course (Sedita, 2020), helps teachers assign writing tasks with clear, specific expectations. A WAG provides information about TAP, the length of the writing piece, assignment directions and requirements, and the writing supports provided to students.

Learn More:



BLOG POST:
[Planning Effective Writing Assignments Using a WAG](#)
 (Sedita, 2024, Keys to Literacy)

Sentence and Paragraph Instruction

Sentences and paragraphs are the foundational building blocks of writing. When composing sentences, writers combine ideas to create meaning. They then group sentences that share a common main idea into paragraphs and organize those paragraphs into longer, cohesive texts.

SENTENCES AND SYNTAX

Effective instruction in sentences and syntax is essential for developing strong reading and writing skills.

Syntax refers to the system and arrangement of words, phrases, and clauses that form a sentence—in other words, the rules of grammar.

Effective sentence instruction begins in the early grades with teaching basic sentence concepts. This includes understanding the difference between a complete sentence and a sentence fragment, as well as learning the four types of sentences: declarative, interrogative, imperative, and exclamatory.



As students progress from elementary grades into secondary grades, instruction should focus on sentence elaboration—helping students writing longer, more sophisticated, and more detailed sentences.

Sentence combining and deconstruction are research-based activities that help students at all grades develop syntactic awareness, or an understanding of the rules of grammar.

- **Sentence combining:** Students are given two or more sentences and asked to combine them into a single, grammatically correct sentence. They may add or delete words and change the word order, as long as the revised sentence preserves the original meaning and includes all essential information.
- **Sentence deconstruction:** Sentence deconstruction involves breaking a complex sentence into smaller, simpler sentences. Students benefit when teachers identify challenging sentences in classroom texts and model how to deconstruct them in order to uncover meaning.

These types of activities help students practice manipulating and rearranging words while clarifying meaning within sentences, which supports both writing development and reading comprehension.

PARAGRAPHS

Paragraphs are organized around main ideas, and a multi-paragraph piece of writing includes several paragraphs focused on the same topic, with each paragraph centered on a distinct main idea related to that topic. Paragraph instruction begins with the basics in the elementary grades but remains important across all grade levels. As students progress through middle and high school, they are expected to write increasingly sophisticated paragraphs that explain, analyze, compare, argue, and synthesize complex ideas across disciplines. Effective paragraph instruction addresses:

- **Main idea skills:** Understanding what a main idea is
- **Paragraph structure:** Recognizing and writing topic sentences that state the main idea, supporting sentences with details, and concluding sentences
- **Organization and cohesion:** Writing well-organized paragraphs that present information logically, with sentences and ideas flowing smoothly from one to the next through effective transitions and the use of connecting words and phrases

Learn More:



BLOG POST:

Deconstructing and Combining Sentences to Support Comprehension and Writing (Sedita, 2025, Keys to Literacy)



BLOG POST:

The Mighty Paragraph (Sedita, 2022, Keys to Literacy)



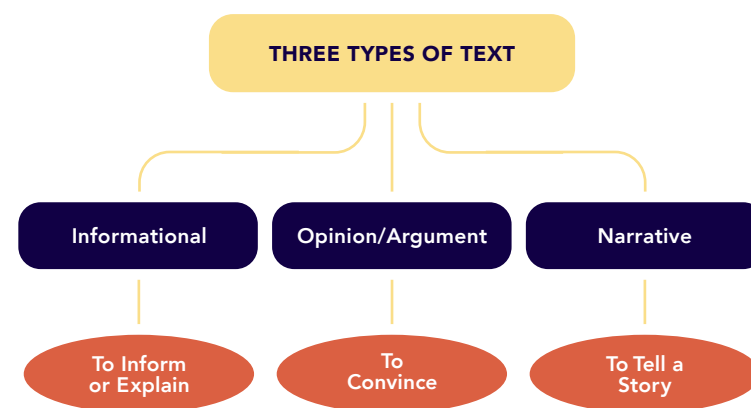
SAMPLE LESSONS:

Writing a Simple Sentence and **Sentence Expansion** (Sedita & Cotte, Reading Universe)

Text Structure

Text structure is a defining feature of written language, and understanding it supports both writing and reading comprehension. The related strand in *The Writing Rope* identifies several levels of text structure, including three types of text (informational, opinion/argument, and narrative), paragraph organization, patterns of information, and the use of linking and transition words.

Three Types of Text
Students benefit from explicit instruction in each type of text.



THREE TYPES OF TEXT

Informational Writing

- ✿ **What it does:** Examines previously learned information or provides new information
- ✿ **Examples:** Textbook, article, letter, speech, instructions, manual, directions, subject area report, explanations, summaries, essays, historical or literary analyses
- ✿ **Text Structure:** Organized into sections and subsections that include a controlling idea, paragraph main ideas, and details; tends to be organized hierarchically

Opinion/Argument Writing

- ✿ **What it does:** Gives an opinion or makes an argument to convince the reader that a point of view is valid or to persuade the reader to take a specific action
- ✿ **Examples:** Persuasive letters, editorials, argument essays, review of books or movies, claims about the worth or meaning of a literary work
- ✿ **Text structure:** Organized around specific text components—claim, reason, evidence, counter-claim, rebuttal

Narrative Writing

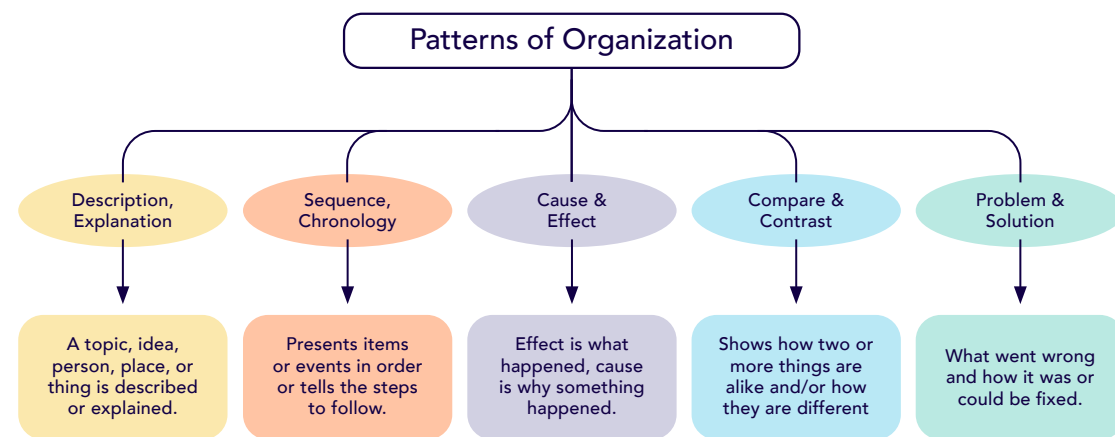
- ✿ **What it does:** Tells a story (real or imagined) of an experience, event, or sequence of events
- ✿ **Examples:** Diary entry, biography, autobiography, personal narrative, memoir, folktale, fairy tale, fable, myth, creative fictional story, science fiction, poem, play, eyewitness account, plot summary, short story
- ✿ **Text structure:** Organized around events and literary elements such as setting, characters, problem/solution

From: Sedita, J. (2023). *The Writing Rope: The Strands That Are Woven Into Skilled Writing*. Paul H. Brookes Publishing.



PATTERNS OF ORGANIZATION AND TRANSITIONS

Patterns of organization are specific structures embedded within a text, either within a single paragraph or across multiple paragraphs, and include: description/explanation, sequence/chronology, cause and effect, compare and contrast, and problem and solution. Explicitly teaching students to recognize these patterns supports both their writing and their reading comprehension. Effective instruction includes analyzing examples of each pattern in mentor texts, modeling how to write using each pattern, and providing scaffolds such as writing templates. The graphic illustrates each pattern.



From: Sedita, J. (2020). *Keys to Content Writing* (4th Ed). Keys to Literacy.

Transition words and phrases link ideas, sentences, paragraphs, and sections of text within a piece of writing. They also signal patterns of organization. Examples of transitions include:

- **To indicate sequence:** first, second, next, last, after, finally, eventually
- **To indicate comparison and contrast:** by comparison, similarly, likewise, in contrast, on the other hand, whereas, however

Effective instruction includes explicitly teaching the purpose of transitions, pointing out how authors use them in texts students are reading, and modeling how to incorporate them into writing.

Learn More:

- **RESOURCE DOWNLOAD:**
Lists of Common Transition Words: [Grades 4-12](#), [Grades K-3](#) (Keys to Literacy)
- **BLOG POST:**
Teaching Text Structure to Support Writing & Comprehension (Sedita, 2023, Keys to Literacy)
- **BLOG POST:**
The Power of Transition Words (Sedita, 2020, Keys to Literacy)
- **SHORT VIDEO:**
Argument Writing Components (Sedita, 2016, Keys to Literacy)
- **RECORDED WEBINAR:**
Text Structure to Support Comprehension & Writing (Sedita, 2020, Keys to Literacy)
- **RESOURCE DOWNLOAD:**
Paragraph Templates for Patterns of Organization (Keys to Literacy)



Writing to Learn

Findings from meta-analyses of writing and reading research indicate that writing about text supports reading comprehension, enhances content learning across subjects, and develops writing skills (Graham & Hebert, 2010; Graham & Perin, 2007). The Critical Thinking strand of *The Writing Rope* encompasses the skills and strategies students need to use writing as a tool for learning. Writing activities that support learning include:



- **Quick writes.** Quick writes are short, informal writing tasks (i.e., ten minutes or less) that help students organize and retain information. They can be used at any point during a lesson to help students communicate their thoughts, deepen their understanding, and reflect on what they are reading and learning. Examples include admit and exit tickets, lists of words or phrases, free writing, definitions or short responses to questions, and completing graphic organizers.
- **Responses to narrative text.** Comprehension improves when students write personal responses to what they have read or connect the text to their own experiences. This may take the form of response journals or written answers to teacher-posed questions about theme, characters, setting, or the author's point of view.
- **Summary writing.** Decades of research have consistently identified summarizing as one of the most important strategies for improving writing and supporting reading comprehension. As students use their own words to summarize text, lectures, or subject-area content, they process the material more deeply, integrate it into their knowledge base, and make it more memorable.
- **Note taking.** The act of taking written notes enhances comprehension, as students analyze text to determine what is most relevant and then synthesize ideas and information in their own words.
- **Teacher-generated writing prompts.** Writing prompts that require students to draw on content-based sources can significantly enhance content learning across subject areas. The length and format of students' written responses vary depending on the task, the number of sources used, and the amount of information required; however, these responses are typically more involved than quick writes.

Learn More:



BLOG POSTS:

[Writing Personal Reactions to Narrative Text](#)
(Sedita, 2023, Keys to Literacy)

[The Power of Quick Writes](#) (Sedita, 2019, Keys to Literacy)



SHORT VIDEOS:

[Generating a Summary](#) (Sedita, 2016, Keys to Literacy)

[Quick Writes: A Strategy to Teach Content Writing](#)
(Sedita, 2016, Keys to Literacy)



ARTICLE:

[Analytical Writing in the Content Areas](#) (AdLit.org)



RECORDED WEBINARS::

[Instructional Suggestions for Writing About Reading](#)
(Sedita, 2022, OregonRTIi)

[Two-Column Notes: A Powerful Tool for Comprehension & Writing](#) (Sedita, 2021, Keys to Literacy)

[Adolescent Literacy: Content Writing to Support Comprehension and Critical Thinking](#) (Sedita, 2024, PaTTAN)

[Teaching Summary Writing to Support Comprehension](#)
(Sedita, 2022, PaTTAN)

Developmentally Appropriate Writing Instruction: Grades K to 2

All components of writing instruction represented in *The Writing Rope* can be introduced and taught in the primary grades. However, instruction should maintain a developmentally appropriate focus that takes into account the needs of young students who are just beginning to learn spelling, handwriting, and basic composing skills. A key element of effective early writing instruction is recognizing that writing is grounded in oral language. Young students use talk to orally rehearse what they want to say before drawing and writing. They use talk to support the transition from thoughts to spoken words to writing. Oral rehearsal gives students the opportunity to shape and revise the phrases and sentences they plan to write.

Additionally, students progress through a series of developmental stages as they move from kindergarten through grade 2, including drawing, labeling drawings, writing lists, composing phrases, and writing sentences.

Drawing → Labels → Lists → Phrases → Sentences



The following instructional suggestions are drawn from the *Keys to Early Writing* book and professional development course (Sedita, 2021).

Drawing: Drawing is a critical stage in early composing. It provides a scaffold that supports oral composition and allows students to rehearse what they want to express in writing. Through drawing and discussion, students move from their thoughts to spoken language and then to written expression. Students benefit from explicit instruction in drawing. Words can be added as labels or through dictation to adults.

Spelling and handwriting: Instruction in these transcription skills begins in the primary grades, often as part of phonics lessons. Students should develop proficiency in spelling and handwriting by the time they enter grade 4 so they can focus more fully on composing. Spelling instruction should include phonemic awareness and an understanding of how letters represent sounds, as well as spelling patterns, generalizations, and rules. Invented spelling is common in the primary grades, as students apply their phonics knowledge to spell unfamiliar words. Another important goal is for students to develop fluent handwriting so they can devote more attention to composing sentences and, eventually, longer texts. Teaching students to form letters also supports learning letter names and sound-letter correspondences.



Sentence basics: Instruction in sentence structure begins by teaching students the essential components of a complete sentence: a subject and a predicate, often described as the “who” and the “did what.” Young children also learn about the four types of sentences referenced on page 22. For kindergarten students who have not yet learned to write words, sentence instruction can be delivered orally.

Writing community: Research on early writing instruction indicates that young students benefit when teachers foster an engaged community of writers (Graham et al., 2012a). This includes establishing a supportive and motivating writing environment, providing access to a variety of writing materials (e.g., different types of paper, markers, pencils, coloring tools, etc.), modeling writing through interactive lessons, and offering opportunities for students to collaborate with their peers.

Writing Lesson Routine

Young students benefit from a consistent instructional routine that incorporates explicit instruction, including teacher modeling and guided practice, ensures frequent student writing, and provides opportunities for collaborative composition (Graham et al., 2015). Whether writing instruction occurs within English language arts, content-area instruction, or high-quality instruction programs, a consistent routine helps students focus on composing and communicating ideas rather than figuring out how to navigate the lesson structure.

The *Keys to Early Writing* lesson routine (Sedita, 2021), shown below, provides a structured framework that incorporates research-based instructional practices. The suggested time allocations are flexible, as is the percentage of time recommended for each stage of the lesson.

LAUNCH 15-20 MINUTES 	- Teacher explicitly teaches or reviews writing skills or techniques - Uses modeling and think aloud - Shares mentor text (published or by teacher/student) - Format: Usually whole group
EXPLORE 15-25 MINUTES 	- Students practice application of writing skills or techniques with a new or continuing writing task - Teacher provides differentiated guided practice - Includes teacher or peer conferencing - Format: Independent, partner, and small group
LAND 5-10 MINUTES 	- Teachers and students reflect on what was learned - Sharing and public celebration of student writing - Giving and receiving feedback - Revision of writing as needed - Format: whole or small group

From: Sedita, J. (2021). *Keys to Early Writing*. Keys to Literacy.

Learn More:

→ **BLOG POST:**
[Spelling Rules and Generalizations](#) (Sedita, 2022, Keys to Literacy)

→ **BLOG POST:**
[Beginning Writing: Transcription vs. Composing Skills](#)
(Sedita, 2023, Keys to Literacy)

→ **BLOG POST:**
[Teaching Handwriting](#) (Sedita, 2022, Keys to Literacy)

→ **ARTICLE:**
[The Importance of Teaching Handwriting](#)
(Spear-Swerling, Reading Rockets)

→ **ARTICLE:**
[Teaching Spelling: An Opportunity to Unveil the Logic of Language](#)
(Moats, 2019, Perspectives on Language and Literacy)

→ **RECORDED WEBINAR:**
[Keys to Early Writing](#) (Sedita, 2020, Keys to Literacy)



Formative Assessment for Writing

Assessing student writing to support learning is an essential component of developing writing ability. Although writing assessment can serve a variety of purposes, its primary goal should be to inform instruction and improve students' skills. Research indicates that formative assessment practices, particularly those that use diagnostic information to guide teaching and learning, have positive effects on students' writing, especially when they incorporate feedback-based approaches (Graham, Harris, & Hebert, 2011; Graham, Hebert, Harris, 2015; Graham et al., 2016). Formative assessment is effective in writing because it helps students understand what they have done well, what needs improvement, and how to improve.



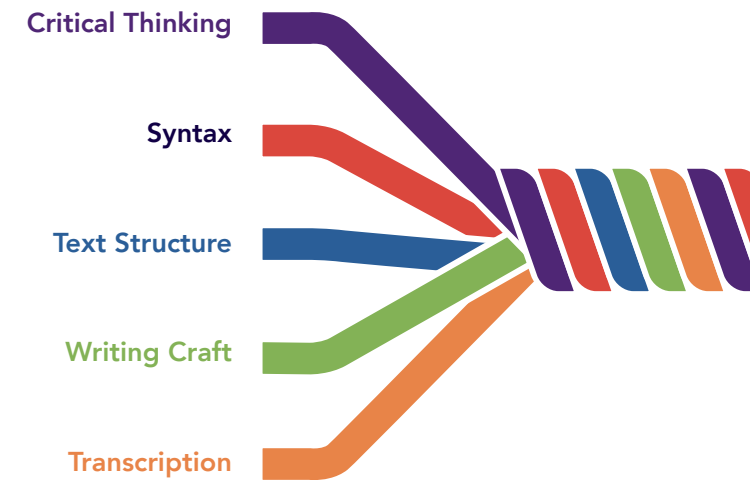
Teachers can review and analyze students' writing to identify strengths and areas for growth across a range of writing skills, strategies, and techniques. It is not necessary to assess every aspect of a student's writing; instead, teachers can focus on one or two specific areas aligned with particular state standards (e.g., sentence construction or introductions to informational writing). Alternatively, they may take a more holistic approach by examining multiple components of writing.

Given that many students now use AI tools to create and organize content during the Think and Plan stages of the writing process, and later to draft and revise their writing, formative assessment of student work completed without AI support is more essential than ever. Such assessment enables teachers to accurately gauge students' writing abilities. Teachers can observe students' thinking and decision-making across all stages of the writing process by analyzing students' note taking, planning documents and graphic organizers, written drafts, and revisions created without the use of AI. This analysis helps teachers better understand students' strengths and instructional needs.

The Writing Rope framework can serve as an organizing tool for analyzing student work. Its strands help teachers categorize observations of students' strengths and needs, as well as the feedback they provide. The framework can also support instruction in the strategic use of AI tools, helping students use AI in ways that enhance critical thinking and writing without replacing their own thinking and creativity.

FORMATIVE ASSESSMENT

What are the students' strengths and areas for growth across the strands?



The feedback process begins with collecting a writing sample, which may come from any subject and include routine classroom assignments, either short or extended, or prompts designed specifically for assessment. The next step is to analyze the sample by evaluating the student's writing across one, some, or all of the strands of *The Writing Rope*. Teachers can then use this information to guide instructional decisions and provide targeted feedback, either to individual students or to the whole class when common areas of need emerge.

Learn More:



BLOG POST:
[The Writing Rope: A Diagnostic Framework for Formative Writing Assessment](#) (Sedita, 2026, Keys to Literacy)



ARTICLE:
[Giving Feedback on Student Writing](#) (Berne, 2009, AdLit)

Writing Instruction: Your Next Steps

Are you interested in professional learning to support student writing achievement?

Improving students' writing abilities requires both educators and school leaders to engage in professional learning and coaching that strengthen instructional practices and support coherent writing instruction across classrooms and grade levels.

Whether your goal is to train teachers to implement evidence-based instructional practices across all subjects, strengthen writing instruction embedded within high-quality instructional materials and programs (HQIM), or develop internal systems for professional learning and coaching, Keys to Literacy offers multiple customized pathways for support, including:



- ✿ Professional learning courses for teaching writing, available in multiple formats (live training, asynchronous online, or facilitated online):
 - **Keys to Content Writing:** For grades 3-12; 12 to 15 hours
 - **Keys to Early Writing:** For grades kindergarten to 2; 12 to 15 hours
- ✿ Job-embedded coaching that strengthens the implementation of research-based instructional practices in classroom settings
- ✿ Support for strengthening writing instruction within HQIM implementation

Contact Keys to Literacy to Learn More:

Email: info@keystoliteracy.com | Phone: 978-948-8511

Do you want to learn more about *The Writing Rope*?

- Order the book from [Brookes Publishing](#).
- Download a set of [book study questions](#)
- View a set of guided [book study webinar recordings](#) available from PaTTAN

Additional Resources:

Use the links throughout this guide, as well as those listed below, to access additional resources on writing instruction:

WHITE PAPER:

Writing Instruction in the Age of AI (Sedita, 2025, Keys to Literacy)

VIDEO:

Steve Graham – Effective Writing Instruction (Graham, 2014, Reading Rockets)

GUIDE:

Instructional Considerations for Text-Based Writing (Dombek et al., 2016, Regional Educational Laboratory Southeast)

ARTICLE:

Supporting Informational Writing in the Elementary Grades (Donovan & Smolkin, 2011) Reading Rockets

WEBSITES:

- **Writing** (Reading Universe)
- **Writing** (Reading Rockets)
- **Teaching Channel**

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