

THE FIVE-STEP WRITING PROCESS

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The Basics of Teaching Writing

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=knt18_80uvc

Webinar: How to Teach Writing

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=kljoTk6XGc4&t=966s>

There's nothing new and exciting in this chapter. The five-step writing process as described by Donald Graves (1983) has been around for a while. This chapter will expand on the brief outline of the five-step writing process found in Chapter 2. Subsequent chapters will describe strategies for each step of the process.

TEACH THE PROCESS TO DEVELOP THE SKILL

But first ... Finding writing topics could be considered a pre-writing step, but it's actually a pre-pre-writing step. This will be explained more fully in the next chapter. Suffice to say for now, students should be able to select their own writing topics to the greatest extent possible. This creates greater motivation to write, which in turn, improves students' writing and communicating skills (Graham & Harris, 2019; Thompkins, 2019). It also results in a more interesting and engaged classroom and makes teaching more enjoyable, efficient, and effective. These are all good things.

The Five Steps

- **Step 1 - Pre-writing.** Pre-writing includes generating ideas, organizing ideas, and sometimes, collecting data. Strategies for generating ideas include things like listing, brainstorming, power writing, and conversations. Strategies for organizing include using graphic organizers, outlining, and inductive analyses (explained in the next chapter). If students are doing expository or inquiry writing, this step includes collecting data. Here students might read and take notes, or conduct interviews, observations, inquiries, experiments, or surveys.

- **Step 2 - Drafting.** Drafting is the writer's first attempt to capture ideas on paper. The goal here is to simply get a bunch of words on the page. However, if students are worried about correct grammar, punctuation, and spelling, this is a hard step for them. I use the analogy of a potter throwing a large blob of clay on the potter's wheel. The goal is to simply get the clay on the wheel so that the potter can begin to shape the pot. Here you are simply trying to get a large blob of ideas on the page so you can begin shaping them. Writers who get stuck here are often trying to shape the pot before they put it on the wheel.

• **Step 3 - Revising.** Revising is at the heart of the writing process. Here the writer revisits, reshapes, and re-views the writing many, many times. Parts are added, moved around, or taken away. As an example, the first draft of this chapter was pretty bad. As a matter of fact, it was horrible. It looked much different than the version you're reading now. This is because during the process of revising, new ideas began to appear. Some ideas were cut, some were reworded, and others were put in different places. Staying with the potter's wheel analogy, revising in writing is like a potter beginning to mold and shape the blob of clay on the wheel to make a pot. And the pot does not appear as a finished product with one spin of the wheel. It begins to appear over time with much shaping.

• **Step 4 - Editing.** This is the step where grammar, spelling, and punctuation errors are corrected. The quickest way to ruin a good writing project or damage a writer is to insist that Step 4 be Step 1, 2, or 3. If writers are editing or worrying about mechanics at the pre-writing, drafting, and revising stages, the flow of ideas and the quality of writing suffers. Precious brain space that could be devoted to generating and connecting ideas will instead be used instead to worry about writing mechanics.

• **Step 5 – Publishing and sharing.** Sharing writing with real people is what makes it become real and come alive (Graham & Harris, 2019). It also helps the writer develop a sense of audience and voice (this will be described in Chapter 10). Here students might read parts of their work in small or large group, exchange their writing with others, or utilize some other form of publication.

Teaching the Five Steps

Some simple tips for teaching the five-step writing process are described here.

• **Use direct and explicit instruction.** Use small bits of direct instruction to teach each step of the writing process (as well as to teach grammar, punctuation, and other writing mechanics). Direct instruction includes the elements of effective skills instruction: input, modeling/demonstration, guided practice, independent practice, and review. (These elements will be expanded upon in Chapter 12)

• **Demonstrate the steps.** Demonstration usually involves cognitive modeling where you think aloud as you are demonstrating steps or related strategies. For example, Ms. Bell was giving a mini-lesson to her third-grade students about a pre-writing strategy. She used her own writing project to demonstrate:

“Boys and girls, I want to write about going to the state fair. I have some ideas in my head, but I'm still a little fuzzy about what I want to say. I need to use one of our pre-writing strategies, listing. This is when you write a list of ideas that pop into your head about your writing topic before you start writing.”

Here Ms. Bell began listing ideas on the board, naming each one as she did. She paused. *“As I'm listing these things, some other ideas are starting to pop in my head. I'm going to add these new ideas to my list.”*

She listed these new ideas on the board and said, *“And these new ideas are giving me more new ideas. That's what can happen when you just start listing. And*

as I'm thinking of these ideas, I'm going to list some of the sounds, smells, and sights."

These were included in the list.

"Now I think I've got enough ideas to start writing my first draft. This is how you use listing as a pre-writing strategy.

Ms. Bell then used guided practice to reinforce this pre-writing strategy. *"Let's try doing one together and then I'll ask you to try it on your own."*

Here Ms. Bell used a topic with which all were familiar, recess. The class brainstormed about things they might see, hear, or do at recess. After which, Ms. Bell said, *"Wow, if I wanted to write about recess, I would have some great ideas for my starting my first draft. Now think about the idea that you've decided to write about today. I've given you some thinking paper. In the next three minutes, I want you to start listing things that pop into your mind about your topic. Put all the ideas down, even the silly ideas, because these will help you think of other ideas. You'll be sharing your list with your writing partner today before you start writing today."*

- **Write.** This is a good place to once again reinforce the importance of you writing along with your students. Writing enables you to better understand each of the five steps. When you write you also remember things about writing to pass along to your students. And as shown above, writing enables you to demonstrate steps and strategies using your own writing products.

I want you to know that I'm practicing what I'm preaching here. As I'm writing this book, I'm also teaching a graduate course in scholarly writing. Here my goal is to help students complete their capstone projects for their Masters degree thesis. While writing this book, I'm remembering little writing tips to pass along to my students. These become the basis of short mini-lessons. (visit my YouTube channel at: <http://www.youtube.com/c/DrAndyJohnson>) It also makes me a more credible writing teacher.

Now you might think that since the students in this class are adult writers taking a graduate course and doing high level graduate level writing that they would need to use super-special, complicated, high-caliber writing strategies that have nothing to do with elementary, middle school, or high school writers. Nope. Writers are writers. The writing processes used are essentially the same no matter what the age or level. For example, I find myself telling graduate students things that I tell writers at all levels, *"You have to write garbage before you can write well. Get that garbage on the paper. It's called a draft. We'll revise and reshape I later."*

- **Put up posters listing the five steps.** Posters can be used as a reference when teaching and when conferencing with writers. They also remind student of the five steps as they're writing. Ideally, the five-step writing process would be taught to students in kindergarten through graduate school and posters would be visible wherever there is writing taking place (hopefully in every classroom).

- **Use scaffolds.** Writing shapes and organizes our thinking (Langer & Applebee, 2007). Our thinking also shapes and organizes our writing. Scaffolds provide a temporary structure for

thinking that gradually becomes internalized (Graham, Harris, & Santangelo, 2015). Scaffolds include things such as graphic organizers or step-by-step guides. A scaffold could also include things like a teacher writing prompt. However, any type of scaffold is meant to be temporary guides for thinking and writing and not permanent recipes to follow.

As an analogy: When a scaffold is used to build something, it's not designed to be a permanent part of that structure. It's used only to support the building process. It's taken down as soon as possible. So it is with scaffolds used for writing. They should be used to support the developing writing process, but they're designed to become obsolete. The mistake often made with scaffolds and structures is that they become permanent formulas for students to follow. An example of this is the five-paragraph essay format. This format can be a useful structure for thinking about essays initially as long as it is flexibly applied. But if it becomes a mandated recipe to follow, the structure becomes cumbersome and constraining and gets in the way of good writing.

- **Make a school-wide commitment to writing and the five-step writing process.** If schools are serious about improving students' ability to write and think, every teacher of writing at every level needs to understand and use the five-step writing process. They must also provide daily writing practice in which students are engaged in authentic writing activities.

TYPES OF WRITING

This chapter will end with a brief description of the types of writing you might include in a writing curriculum. Lucy Calkins (2020) describes three common types of academic writing: persuasive, narrative, and expository writing. These are the types of writing addressed by the Common Core State Standards (CCSS). However, we should not allow academic standards of any kind to narrowly define our writing curriculum. Thus, three other types of writing are included here: inquiry writing, the arts, and communication. Each of these will be addressed in subsequent chapters.

- **Persuasive writing.** The purpose of this type of writing is to make a case for or against an issue or to construct an argument using concise, objective language and sound reasoning.

- **Narrative writing.** The purpose of this type of writing is to describe incidents and events or to tell a story. In other words, the writer becomes a narrator.

- **Expository writing.** The purpose of this type of writing is to explain, describe, provide information, or to communicate knowledge in some form.

- **Scientific writing.** The purpose of this type of writing is to describe all phases of the inquiry process. Inquiry is the process of asking a question, gathering data, and then using that data to answer the question. Inquiry is another name for research. Data can be gathered using primary sources through direct observation, survey, interviews, or other means. Data can also be collected using secondary sources such as books and articles. Inquiry and inquiry writing will be described in Chapter 23.

- **The arts.** The purpose of this type of writing is to create art. As stated in Chapter 3, art is not something beautiful; rather, it's something beautifully expressed. Art seeks to evoke a

variety of responses, including aesthetic, emotional, social, and intellectual responses. Included here is poetry, drama or scripts, song lyrics, comedy monologs, podcasts, and other types of creative writing.

Communication. The purpose of this type of writing is personal communication. This includes email, letters, memos, newsletters, personal letters (remember those?), and things like twitter, blogs, Facebook posts, podcasts, websites, and digital media that we haven't even thought of yet. It also includes oral communication and listening.

SOME BIG IDEAS

- Students should be allowed to select their own writing topics to the greatest extent possible. This creates greater motivation to write. Also, students are writing about topics they know about and care about.

- The steps of the five-step writing process are: pre-writing, drafting, revising, editing, and share/publishing. The five-step writing process has been around for a long time because it works. Writers at all levels benefit from using it.

- Each step of the five-step writing process must be explicitly taught and modeled. The steps should be reviewed throughout a K-12 writing curriculum.

- There are six types of writing that should be included in a K-12 writing curriculum: persuasive writing, narrative writing, expository writing, inquiry writing, the arts, and communication.

- Schools should never let a set of academic standards define or confine a K-12 writing curriculum.

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