

## STEP UP TO WRITING

(adapted from Maureen Auman, 2003)

### **I. What is and who is it for?**

Developed by middle school teacher in Colorado in an attempt to prepare her students for district and state assessments

Can be used in all grade levels, with special needs and gifted students

The writing program is a multi-sensory structured, explicit approach to teaching expository & narrative texts in carefully designed steps moving from easy to more complex structures. The program provides multiple opportunities to practice all components of the writing step and provides immediate feedback to students.

### **II. What is narrative & expository writing?**

#### ***Narrative writing***

writing a story (FICTION OR NON-FICTION) using the basic text structure:

BEGINNING (introduction of characters, time, place, specific situation/problem, does not necessarily tell reader in advance what's coming; uses rise to climax to keep reader's attention)

MIDDLE (sequence of events leading to a climax and then descending into a solution)

END (solution or result of solution, overall message of story/ morale of story)

#### ***Expository writing***

explaining, clarifying, defining or providing factual NON-FICTION information using the basic text structure

INTRODUCTION (tells reader what to expect or what info will be shared)

BODY (details, facts, reasons with examples, explanations, evidence)

CONCLUSION (restates main topic/thesis from introduction and summarizes briefly main findings, NO new information is provided)

used more frequently than narrative writing

found more frequently in school environment (see textbooks, social studies, science, math, Liberal Arts)

### **III. How do we write a good, informative paragraph?**

First, students need to learn how to write a good paragraph as expository texts consist of a sequence of well structured paragraphs.

We use color coding to symbolize the structure elements of a good paragraph:

1. TOPIC SENTENCE (= subject of paragraph, tells reader what will be proved or disproved) = GREEN = GO!
2. REASON, DETAIL, FACT = YELLOW = PAUSE  
SUBTOPICS THAT SUPPORT THE MAIN TOPIC (= provide main ideas of your topic; each one introduces a new key concept; each point must be supported by one or 2 explanations/examples/pieces of evidence, see 3.)
3. EXPLANATION, EXAMPLES, EVIDENCE,  
EXPERIENCES, EXPERT OPINION, EFFECTIVE  
ILLUSTRATIONS, ELABORATION = RED = STOP  
(= makes writing interesting, supports the topic sentence and specifically the detail (YELLOW STATEMENT))
4. CONCLUSION = RESTATE THESIS = GREEN = GO  
(= ties all provided information together by referring back to the initial GREEN topic sentence, restates the topic position and does not include any new information; uses terms that the reader is familiar with (synonyms))

#### **NOTE: FOR MULTI PARAGRAPH TEXTS:**

(A) In a multi-paragraph text, Reason/Detail/Fact statements (YELLOW) turn into topic sentences. YOU INDENT THEM AS



#### Examples of topic sentences with transitions:

When you want to write a good paragraph, you must start with a strong topic sentence.

There are several ways to begin a topic sentence paragraph.

To stay healthy, we need to eat the right foods, so we should make smart decisions about the snacks we choose.

My twin brothers look alike but they have many differences in character.

#### Ways to write the conclusion

restate your position to remind the reader of your position

use synonyms that the reader is familiar with

vary the sentence length

use a quotation that restates your position

use professional language

write your conclusion in a way that the reader is convinced, that challenges the reader to continue to think about your position or to even take action

AVOID PHRASES: "as I have said before" "as stated before" "as I have proved" "as you can see" "as explained previously" "as explained in this text" THEY ARE REDUNDANT!

Good verbs for summaries are:

explain, tell, provide, present, show, describe, compare, illustrate, document, raise awareness for, simplify, suggest, teach, praise, offer, evaluate, explore, express, define, defend, demonstrate, depict, discourage, encourage, entertain, entice, enumerate, confront, confuse, blame, classify, compare, answer, add, acknowledge, advise, assert, assure, address, consider, contrast, critique, endorse, recommend, solve, support, judge, mention, list, offend, name, emphasize

Often it is helpful to use the burrito fold again to get your summary thoughts organized before writing the summary statement.

#### IV. How can we teach paragraph organization skills?

Modeling the pre-structuring strategies by using accordion paragraphs (5-8 sentences; each section = one sentence; sections are numbered, 1-4 on front, 5-8 on back; page is first draft)

2-column sheet (topic appears across top = GREEN; main idea is placed in left column = YELLOWS, details are placed in right column = REDS)

structured sheets with abbreviations & colors (T, RDF, E/EX, C)

using color (GREEN, YELLOW, RED)

number outlines

symbols for each step (color-coded or not; square, triangle, dots)

folding paper (burritos, hamburgers, accordions, 2-column sheets)

trains (engine/green (= topic), wagons/boxcars (sub-topics, with

explanations, coal = red; cars = yellow), caboose/green (= conclusion)

less guided practice with colored or un-colored paper strips

provide time and rewarded opportunities for rewrites/editing

#### V. How do we write expository texts best?

after students have practiced writing good paragraphs, the same techniques are transferred to planning an entire essay.

The different outline formats can be used and the YELLOW sub-topic statements (details, facts) are turned into GREEN topic sentences for each new paragraph.

The overall topic sentence has to be general enough to provide the umbrella for all paragraphs. Burrito fold paper can be used to pre-organize topic sentence content.

#### VI. How do we write narrative text best?

STEP 1: Think of a title & draw a quick sketch or notes

STEP 2: draw your plan : Beginning (where, when, person) + middle (square divided in 4 parts) + ending

STEP 3: write details next to drawing

#### 6 ways to start a story:

Let reader know WHERE your story takes place  
Beyond the city limits, at the beach next to the boat house,

Let reader know WHEN your story takes place  
just as the door bell rang, ...., three years before my brother was born,  
...., every winter night....

Provide an ACTION  
Pat slammed the door and raced down the road to the creek ....,  
My hands trembled as I grabbed the door knob...

Introduce a CHARACTER  
The clown looked sad and tired., grandma walked fast and she expected  
me to keep up with her.

Make a simple but interesting STATEMENT.  
We should have listened to grandpa. The lock on the door must be  
fixed.

Start with a CONVERSATION with interesting, relevant detail for  
continuation of story.  
"The waves look strange today," muttered the fisherman.  
"And the wind is blowing from the northwest," replied Tim.

**TRANSITIONS to move story from action to action:**

while, in between time, when, the following day, after, just as, by ten  
o'clock, as soon as, later, almost as quickly, next, when we arrived,  
suddenly, in no time at all, right away, after that, a day later, before,  
finally, at first I saw..., immediately, quickly, meanwhile, in just...  
minute, that night, afterwards

**CONCLUSION**

Finish with a strong sentence that will help the reader  
feel a feeling  
think about the meaning of the story  
remember a character  
understand the point you are trying to make with your story.

Examples:

The brothers were never seen in town again.  
Jill was the best skateboarder in town!

**VII. How can we encourage appreciation for poetry?**

encourage it through free poetry writing:

students mark interesting words in a text out of a magazine or  
newspaper article (appr. 20 or less if students are younger)  
encourage students to select words they do not know yet to enrich  
their vocabulary and to get use to looking up words in the  
dictionary;  
students cut out these words and arrange them as they please in a  
sequence that means something to them so that they can use these  
words in a poem; they do not have to use all words but at least  
five to start out with;  
students draft their first poem and then rearrange word sequences as  
they fine-tune their poems  
poems do not have to be long or complex  
poems do not have to rhyme; encourage them to use free style  
doe this frequently