

# Introduction

Teaching writing is no longer a new expectation for teachers; however, it can still be a difficult task. One reason is that there are so many kinds of writing. It can be hard to know what to teach, even within a set curriculum. Another reason is that, even with a rubric, teachers may not be sure if they are evaluating writing fairly. Still another reason is that being a good writer, just like being a good mathematician or a good athlete or a good surgeon or a good driver, does not come naturally to everyone. It can be difficult to feel that writing is a subject one has mastered well enough to teach. Teachers are constantly told to write with their students, but not all teachers use their spare time to “just write,” and those who do often prefer to do it in private. Sitting down to write may not seem like a natural act to do in front of students. These are some of the issues addressed in *Make Writing Exciting!* All kinds of writing that teachers do (progress reports, forms, notes, etc.) are recognized in this book. There are many ideas for making writing lessons more interactive and more inviting to students with different learning levels and learning styles. Hopefully, using this book to supplement or build a writing curriculum will also have the effect of making writing time a fun and productive treat that students—and teachers—look forward to experiencing.



**What kinds of writing skills are emphasized in this book?** In addition to stories, reports, and essays, many other types of writing are valued in *Make Writing Exciting!* Lists, letters, directions, journals, forms, and writing across the curriculum are covered as well as other skills that students need to be better writers, such as word choice, writing good sentences, editing and proofreading, and all steps of the writing process. Also included in this book are suggestions for how to assess student writing and how to teach students to evaluate their own and others' writing.

**In what order should I teach writing skills? Do I have to start at the beginning?** You can use the chapters and skills in order to teach writing sequentially. Using the lessons consecutively does have the advantage of helping students construct a scaffold of skills. But, you may want to skip around depending on students' skill levels and the existing writing curriculum. It is fine to choose any form of writing as a starting point. It may also be necessary to revisit easier skills to build student confidence or to jump around as teachable moments come up, using individual activities to reinforce these skills.

**I teach children with special needs. Is this an appropriate book for me?** Absolutely! Students with special needs require more support, more practice, a slower pace, and fresh approaches to help them write to the best of their abilities. Throughout this book are ideas for instructional support that these students need as you build their skills and confidence. See pages 6 and 7 for general tips and suggestions that will help students with special needs get the most out of their writing lessons.



**What supplies do I need for the lessons in this book?** In addition to pencils and paper, consider providing a notebook with pockets for each child to use as a journal, “fun” writing paper (wrapping paper, construction paper, etc.), colored pencils, crayons, markers, other art supplies, at least one tape recorder, headphones, and a computer and word processing program (if possible). A few activities call for special materials.

**But, I DON'T write every day! How do I make writing a habit?** First of all, yes, you do—probably quite a lot. You write e-mails to friends, family, and your students' parents; you write lesson plans; you write notes to students, grocery lists, calendar updates, and maybe even notes to tuck in your own child's lunch box. Writing is not all about essays or stories. Once you make up your mind to value all writing in the classroom, you can help students see writing as a part of everyday life just by doing the writing you already have to do.

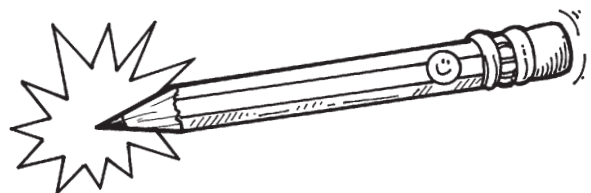
**I dread writing time and my students do, too. How can I fix that?** Again, consider the writing you are already doing—you write more than you think. Next, make writing a treat so that you do not dread it so much, and students will follow your lead. Use these guidelines to make writing something to look forward to.

- Integrate writing activities into show-and-tell, art, math, science, playground time, and so on. Adding writing to other activities gives students extra practice and gives the writing “a point.” Suggestions for this are listed in each chapter.
- Combine writing with any activity you and the class enjoy. Offer special privileges during writing time: share a special snack, show a film and let students respond to it in writing, or let students write with watercolor markers or colored-ink pens.
- Change the atmosphere during writing time. Play music and dim the lighting. Let students write outside or on the floor, trade desks, or even take turns sitting at your

desk as you walk around the room. If they make a big deal about these changes, that's great—tell them to write about how they feel and why they think you have made the changes. They may even have their own suggestions!

- Make the classroom writing atmosphere quiet, but not too quiet. Silent periods often feel too much like testing periods. Plus, many students work better with a little background noise. Of course, you will want to recreate a testing atmosphere during some writing periods so that students take the testing atmosphere in stride when they eventually complete a standardized writing test.
- Do what makes it better for you. Students detect how their teachers feel about things. Analyze exactly what you do not enjoy about the writing period; then, produce changes that will make you happier. For example, if you do not relish keeping a journal but force yourself to journalize during in-class writing time, stop keeping a journal and work on other writing that you need to do.
- Celebrate writing during the publishing stage. Letting students help decide how they want to celebrate will motivate them to do their best. Look at Chapter 12: Proud to Be Published for ideas.

As the title suggests, the activities in this book are designed to make writing a fun time for students. But, the teacher needs to have fun, too. Do not forget to address your own needs. What do you need to enjoy writing? Whatever it is, do it for yourself. If you enjoy writing time and look forward to it, your enthusiasm will carry over to your students.



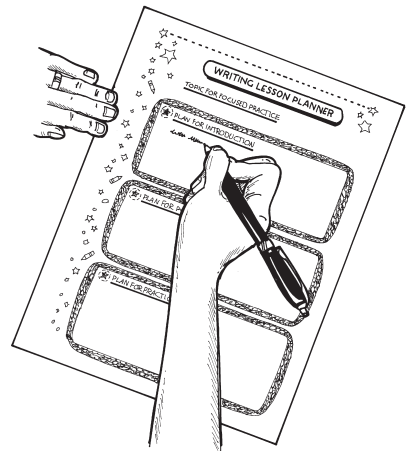
# Structuring Writing Lessons

This book offers lessons on formats (like letters and lists), elements (like prepositional phrases and more colorful language), strategies (like brainstorming and reading paragraphs backwards to evaluate individual sentences), and skills (like combining sentences and finding main ideas). Most of the lessons and reproducibles in this book will fit into any lesson plan or curriculum you already have. Use the **Writing Lesson Planner** reproducible (page 9) to create great student writing experiences.

## Lesson Structure Ideas

This is a practical, easy lesson structure to follow. Most of the lessons and reproducibles in this book fit into this structure. However, you know what your students need to understand new formats, elements, strategies, and skills, so modify these steps accordingly.

1. First, define each new format, element, strategy, or skill. Name it, tell what it is, give examples, and then ask students to do the same. Most importantly, tell why this element or strategy can help make their writing better. For example, when teaching lists, let the class describe the features of a list as you make a list of their descriptions. Students can then brainstorm kinds of lists that people make.
2. Let students practice finding the format, element, strategy, or skill in others' writings. Again, when teaching lists, let them look for lists in their textbooks or assign them to bring in lists from home that their parents have made. Many of the reproducibles and exercises in this book provide opportunities for practice in recognizing different formats, elements, strategies, and skills.
3. Finally, encourage students to practice using the new format, element, strategy, or skill in their own written work. Following the above example, they can make their own lists at this time.
4. Have students record names and descriptions of formats, elements, strategies, and skills you have taught. The listings will prompt them to combine new skills to improve their own writing. In the backs of their journals, have them write the name of the new format, element, or strategy; a brief definition; and a line or two about when to use it.
5. Use copies of the **Writing Lesson Planner** to help you design your writing lessons. Write names of activities and their page numbers in the boxes. You may also wish to include in your notes how much time to allot for each part of the lesson. Exercises from other resources that you have already used can also be referenced here. As you complete successful lessons, punch holes in each page and store it to create your own tried-and-tested writing lesson book.



# WRITING LESSON PLANNER

TOPIC FOR FOCUSED PRACTICE

 PLAN FOR INTRODUCTION

 PLAN FOR FINDING EXAMPLES

 PLAN FOR PRACTICE