Establishing Writing Routines in the Content Classroom

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The instructional procedures were developed to address problems noted in adolescents’ content writing. When students are asked to write they:

- Write a list of reasons or details, or present information in an unorganized manner
- Miss the main or “big” ideas or write to both sides of an argument
- Write very little or nothing

For example, for a short writing prompt:

I think that kids our age should be allowed to pick what TV shows we want to watch. Like Saw or Sponge Bob. Kids should be allowed to pick what TV shows because it is a free world and if it is a free world then you should be allowed to pick. But if it is like naked people then no. Naked people is not right for our age. I like Sponge Bob that is a good TV show. Sponge Bob is really good it is so good I would watch it every day. Haha. But we should be allowed. Thank you people.

Researchers established that writing instruction that begins with short writing tasks and scales to essay writing is effective for the content classroom (e.g., Mason & Benedek-Wood; Mastropieri and colleagues).

To establish writing in content, especially for struggling writers, it is best to start with manageable writing tasks: quick writing.

Quick Writes - A short constructed written response to a teacher given prompt.

- Used primarily in content classrooms (e.g., literature, science, social studies, history)
- An anticipatory or closing activity
- Intended to be a short response
  - Timed
  - Informal
  - Ungraded

Why Start with Quick Writing?

- For teachers
  - incorporates writing across subject areas
  - evaluates students’ prior knowledge and understandings
  - meets initiatives for establishing writing routines in content classes
  - develops skills for teaching writing in content

- For students
  - activates background knowledge
  - links knowledge to personal experience
  - makes reading-writing connections
  - provides writing practice
  - builds confidence in writing about content
Instructional Procedures

Self-Regulated Strategy Development (SRSD)

1) Critical components of SRSD
2) Preparing for instruction – strategy, materials, and prompt selection
3) Lessons for quick writing
4) Tips for school wide implementation and teacher collaboration
5) Tips for scaling from quick writing to essay writing

Critical components of SRSD

Develop Background Knowledge, Discuss it, Model it, Memorize it, Support it, and Independent Performance

PLUS

SRSD - Overview

- Developed by Karen Harris and Steve Graham
- Established as effective in over 50 studies conducted in primary, secondary, and post-secondary settings
- Established as effective for students with and without disabilities and across setting contexts
- Addresses students’ affect, behavior, and cognition
- A flexible model of instruction, instruction is designed to be recursive to meet needs of students, teachers, and content
- Student learning is scaffolded from teacher support instruction to student independence
- When supported as needed, students generalize and maintain skills learned

Stages

- Develop Background Knowledge – develop knowledge for genre specific writing and academic vocabulary in the content area
- Discuss the Strategy – describe each strategy step, noting how the strategy will support writing; establish goal setting; examine a model paper
- Model the Strategy – cognitively model by thinking out loud how to use the strategy with all instructional materials and self-regulation procedures; establish the students’ personal self-instructions

Self-Regulation

- Goal setting – students are taught to establish short and long-term goals that are proximal, specific, and challenging
- Self-monitoring – students are taught to monitor progress in using strategy steps and procedures to obtain long-term and short-term goals

- Memorize the Strategy – the strategy mnemonic and strategy steps are memorized
- Support the Strategy – scaffold students’ writing through collaborative support and peer support to mastery in applying the strategy
- Independent Performance – students demonstrate the ability to write independently; generalization and maintenance is established
• Self-instruction – students establish positive things to say to themselves throughout the writing process; students address negative self-instructions that may have been developed previously

• Self-reinforcement – students self-reinforce themselves for applying the strategy steps and procedures throughout the writing process and for achieving goals

Preparing for Instruction

• First teach a general writing strategy
  
  **POW**
  
  Pick my idea
  
  Organize my notes
  
  Write and say more

• Then select a genre specific strategy for organizing notes, and supporting instructional materials and writing prompts to be used.
Informative

Initial prompts:
- What did you learn about the effect of the Discoveries Era on the Dutch economy?
- What did you learn about the decline of the Eurasian peregrine falcon. Describe the effects of DDT.

Later prompts:
- Describe the "Dutch welfare state;" note resulting programs that are still in effect today.
- Describe the effects of high cholesterol on the body's health.

Persuasive

Initial prompts
- Should students your age encourage their families to use alternative energy sources? Explain why or why not.
- Should students your age present themselves for service in the military if there is a "total war," like World War II? Explain why or why not.

Later prompts
- Is it better to use wind, solar, or hydro energy sources? Explain your answer.
- Is it better for the Netherlands to adopt a policy of isolationism or become involved in world affairs? Explain your answer.
**Initial prompts**
- Write about a time that you or someone you know who has benefited from a new invention. What did you or they do with the new invention?
- Write about a time that you or someone you know faced discrimination. What did you or they do?

**Later prompts**
- Write and tell about the life of Abel Tasmin. Describe what he is best known for.
- Write and tell about the life of Aletta Jacobs. Describe what she is best known for.

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**In addition, prior to instruction**
- Practice lessons…especially modeling!
- Decide a criterion level of performance to be achieved.
- Collect students baseline performance for the genre to be taught.

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**Lessons**

**Lesson 1**
- Develop Background Knowledge
- Tie in strategy steps with other strategies learned
- Discuss it
  - Introduce POW strategy (mnemonic chart)
  - Introduce genre specific strategy (mnemonic chart)
  - Find strategy parts in an anchor paper (paper with all parts +)
  - Establish individual students prior performance by looking at pre-test writing, graph performance (students’ pre-test and graphing chart)
- Begin Memorization
- Begin Generalization
- Obtain Commitment to Learn Strategy
  - Set a Goal to learn the strategy

**Lesson 2**
- Continue Memorization and Generalization
  - Cognitively Model using the strategies by thinking aloud as you complete a quick write
    - Include self-instructions throughout modeling process; be specific to your student’s needs
    - Model goal setting, self-monitoring, and self-reinforcement
- Develop student Self-Instructions
- Establish a Goal to use all parts of the strategy when writing

**Lesson 3**
- Continue Memorization and Generalization
- Ask students to re-examine the pre-test paper graphed in Lesson 1
- Collaboratively practice strategy by revising the paper
  - Use Self-Instructions
  - Set a Goal to use all strategy parts
  - Self-Monitor and graph performance
  - Self-Reinforce
Lesson 4

- Continue Memorization and Generalization

Guided Practice
- Use Self-Instructions
- Set a Goal to use all strategy parts
- Self-Monitor performance
- Self-Reinforce
- Reduce use of support materials

Repeat lesson as needed

Lesson 5 Planned Repetition for Timed Responses

- Continue Memorization and Generalization

Model writing a response in 10-minutes

Guided Practice in writing in 10-minutes

Repeat to Independent Practice

Post-test

I don’t think that students my age should eat junk food and the reason for that is one they can get really fat. Another reason why kids my age should not eat junk food because it is not healthy for you, and you can get really sick from eating junk food. One other reason why kids my age should not be allowed to eat junk food because if you start to eat a lot of junk food you won’t want to stop and you can get addicted to it. The only reason why I would say yes to eating junk food is that it tastes good and a lot of kids like it, but sometimes they don’t realize how much fat and sugar there is in the food and they can get sick from it. So I don’t think it is a good idea for students my age to eat junk food.

Tips for School-Wide Implementation

- Collaborate across teams – support each other!
- Teach the same genre across content currently. Note to the students that the strategies are flexible; however, that when writing for a specific subject area writing should include certain vocabulary etc.
- Consider curriculum objectives for initial instruction and scaffolding.
- In other words, introducing a new strategy may not work well for your most difficult unit!
- Capitalize on resources for struggling students.
- For those students needing repeated practice, consult with each other for opportunities.
- Support generalization of writing – use quick writing before learning, during learning (journaling, homework), and after learning.

Tips for scaling to essay writing

- Use quick writing during a cohesive unit, combine quick writes into an essay format. The quick writes have served as a note-taking journal for future essay development.
- Use the same strategy - expand the graphic organizer so that each detail (informative), reason (persuasive), or action (narrative) becomes a paragraph or more.
- Provide more material to support content knowledge and writing!
- Be sure to tell students that because they learned how to write an effective paragraph response, writing an essay will be much easier.