

# **Differentiated Instructional Strategies for Writing in the Content Areas**

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*questions, portfolios, conferences, and Sixteen Words for the Wise can be helpful prescriptions when writing problems are diagnosed.*

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*Flexible grouping is an essential strategy in the differentiated writing classroom. Students can immerse themselves in the craft of writing descriptive, expository, persuasive, or narrative essays as part of the Total group (T), Alone (A), with a Partner (P), or within a Small group (S). The effective teacher TAPS into student writing talent through each step of the writing process from Prewriting through First Draft, Revision, Editing, Final Copy, and Publication.*

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*Research shows that new and unique experiences improve the brain's ability to store and to retrieve information. Teachers who use differentiated writing strategies strategically and explicitly find that novelty is an effective motivational tool to use with content information because it generates excitement and enjoyment in the learning process. Writing strategies include use of varying styles and genres, personification, brainstorming, "jump start" prompts, journals, research, note taking, outlines, rubrics, essays, rhymes and riddles, poetry, text characters, and forty Writing from A to Z tips that develop learners with focused attention and an eager approach to writing activities.*

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*Teachers make a difference in the writing journey of each life they touch. Effective writing teachers in the differentiated classroom use Choice Boards, Agendas, and Lesson Plans designed to meet each student's individual needs before, during, and after the writing experience. Effective writing teachers develop and support young authors whose writing skills last a lifetime.*

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# Introduction

## *Infusing Writing in the Content Areas*

### **The Author's Flight**

*A young author develops writing wings.  
Each takes a unique learning journey.  
Each one writes the best that he can.  
Why compare one against the other?  
Each writer is unique. Each passage is special.  
Each author's flight is limitless.*

—Adapted from “A Butterfly in the Wind”

Each student is a writer. Each writer has diverse unique needs. To meet these needs the teacher can differentiate the content, the instructional strategies and activities, the assessment tools, and the performance tasks (Gregory and Chapman, 2001). The way each teacher influences the student's use of the writing craft will affect the learner's writing destiny.

Effective writing teachers know how students learn. They pre-assess, so their students' strengths, abilities, and interests are used strategically to plan successful writing experiences. Teachers choose strategies that jog the learner's mind with higher-order thinking skills and creativity. Deeper thinking is stimulated with the use of open-ended questions.

The guidelines, expectations, and evaluation procedures for each activity are explained clearly. Routine feedback with appropriate guidance is provided. Writers are led to see errors as opportunities for improvement. All writing attempts are supported. Each success is genuinely praised with specific feedback.

Effective teachers present writing as a tool for learning and expressing ideas. They share various forms of writing with their students to model and illustrate the purposes and the pleasures that come from content mastery and authorship.

The written word is used more today than ever before. Individuals are no longer passive, but instead are active communicators, using electronic tools including e-mail and faxes. Writing is a key form of communication. Students *must* know how to write. It is essential!

Teachers are required to infuse writing in all content areas. In every classroom, the teacher expects students to have a pencil and paper. Every instructor who gives writing assignments is a writing teacher. For example, in the math classroom, students write out step-by-step procedures for a solution to a problem. In the language arts classroom, the teacher asks students to write an essay. The teacher models the expectations of a writer daily in classrooms in each grade level and content area.

Open-ended questions are given on tests. Often students know the information and can explain it to their peers. They bog down, however, when they try to get their thoughts on paper. The student must be taught, "If I can say it, I can write it." When this approach is one of the established expectations for the "way we do things around here," students perform better and show what they know.

A major goal of education is for students to become self-directed learners as thinkers and productive problem solvers. Differentiated instruction meets this need because each aspect of the individual is considered, including the learner's intelligences, learning styles, and emotional states. "Differentiation is a philosophy that enables teachers to plan strategically in order to reach the needs of diverse learners in classrooms today" (Gregory & Chapman, 2001, p. x).

In the differentiated writing classroom, teachers work with each student's unique needs. Goals for each learner are

- To know how to apply information
- To think and write critically
- To think and write creatively
- To solve problems in the real world

These skills develop self-directed learners and confident authors.

We developed this resource to provide writing strategies and skills for educators to use with textbook information and related sources. We believe each idea, strategy, and activity can be used to assist learners in the diverse ways they process information for long-term memory, test success, and everyday use.

## **TURN ON THE WRITER**

Most toddlers find joy in holding a pencil in their hands. After a few years, however, many students respond to writing activities and assignments as dreaded experiences. Why do these negative feelings exist? We believe

**Figure 0.1** Tools and Strategies for Infusing Writing in the Differentiated Classroom

Creating a Climate for Writing	Knowing the Writer	Diagnosing and Assessing Writers	Differentiating the Writing Process	Instructional Strategies and Activities	Curriculum Approaches
<p><b>Writing Environment</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>❖ Writers are authors</li> <li>❖ Non-threatening</li> <li>❖ Open</li> <li>❖ Accepting</li> </ul> <p><b>Razzmatazz to Thingamajigs</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➤ Cool Tools</li> <li>➤ Material Magic</li> <li>➤ Ready References</li> </ul> <p><b>The Write Spot</b></p> <p><b>Provide Choices</b></p> <p><b>Motivational Strategies</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Internal motivation</li> <li>• Instill self-efficacy</li> <li>• Develop self requested learners</li> <li>• Presexualized Learning</li> </ul>	<p><b>Stages of a Writer</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Scribbler</li> <li>• Picture Maker</li> <li>• Storyteller</li> <li>• Letter Shaker</li> <li>• Copier</li> <li>• Sound Maker</li> <li>• Sentence Maker</li> <li>• Story Maker</li> </ul> <p><b>Writing and the Brain</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Memory</li> <li>• Flow</li> <li>• Metacognition</li> </ul> <p><b>Learning Styles</b></p> <p><b>Multiple Intelligences</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Verbal/Linguistic</li> <li>• Musical/Rhythmic</li> <li>• Logical/Mathematical</li> <li>• Visual/Spatial</li> <li>• Bodily/Kinesthetic</li> <li>• Naturalist</li> <li>• Intrapersonal</li> <li>• Interpersonal</li> </ul> <p><b>Sternberg's Triarchy</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Practical</li> <li>• Analytical</li> <li>• Creative</li> </ul>	<p><b>Knowing the Authors</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➤ Drawing Dana</li> <li>➤ Insecure Inez</li> <li>➤ Lollygagging Lonnie</li> <li>➤ Stumped Stan</li> <li>➤ Wordy Wilma</li> <li>➤ Author Arthur</li> </ul> <p><b>Tools for Diagnosis and Assessment</b></p> <p><b>Questioning</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➤ Open-Ended Questions</li> <li>➤ Choices</li> <li>➤ Sixteen Words for the Wise</li> </ul> <p><b>Portfolios</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>❖ Gathering Information</li> <li>❖ Conferences</li> </ul>	<p><b>Flexible Grouping</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>❖ T Total Group</li> <li>❖ A Alone</li> <li>❖ P Partner</li> <li>❖ S Small Group</li> </ul> <p><b>Types of Writing</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➤ Descriptive</li> <li>➤ Expository</li> <li>➤ Persuasive</li> <li>➤ Narrative</li> </ul> <p><b>The Writing Process</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➤ Getting Started: Prewriting</li> <li>➤ Sloppy Copy: First Draft</li> <li>➤ Hamming It Up: Revision</li> <li>➤ Tuning It Up: Editing</li> <li>➤ Neat Sheet: Final Copy</li> <li>➤ Publishing: Sharing and Celebrating</li> </ul>	<p><b>Formats and Genres</b></p> <p><b>Personification</b></p> <p><b>Writing Strategies</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➤ Brainstorming</li> <li>➤ Journaling</li> <li>➤ Note Taking</li> <li>➤ Model adjustable adjustment curriculum compacting problem-based project development</li> <li>➤ Writing Essays</li> <li>➤ Poetry Adaptations</li> </ul> <p><b>Getting to Know Text Characters</b></p> <p><b>Writing from A to Z</b></p>	<p><b>Approaches</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➤ Choice Boards</li> <li>➤ Agendas</li> <li>➤ Contracts</li> </ul> <p><b>Lesson Planning Effective Authors</b></p>

many students receive negative feedback through grades and informal comments from teachers. They become convinced that they cannot write. These authors build barriers to writing experiences because they fear failure.

Long, boring assignments “turn off” the student’s desire to write. The student hears, “Answer the questions at the end of the chapter,” or “Write the list of words and the definitions.” These writing assignments make a student think this work is the “same old, same old thing.” It is a shame that the student’s natural desire to write is turned off so easily. Teachers need to be aware of students’ emotional barriers and “turn on” their writing enthusiasm. Each experience is planned so the student visualizes himself as a successful, productive writer. Attitude Is Altitude!

Figure 0.1 provides teachers with an overview of ways to select writing tools and strategies that meet the authors’ needs and enrich the content information.

## Use Hooks as Motivational Strategies

The word *hook* refers to one or more motivational strategies designed to focus students’ attention, to intrigue them, and to stimulate their desire to learn more about the topic or skill.

## Adapt Each Writing Strategy or Activity to the Learner’s Needs

Each activity and strategy in this resource may be adapted to an individual learner’s needs. As the learning director, the teacher must consider each student’s diverse needs and levels of understanding to make appropriate adaptations.

- Add one or more steps to the activity to clarify procedures.
- Remove one or more steps to simplify the guidelines or assignment.
- Replace the terminology with words the student understands.
- Extend the activity by providing or assigning creative experiences.
- Challenge the learner’s mind by adding experiences that involve higher-order thinking skills.
- Use the activity for the total group (*T*), for a student working alone (*A*), for partner work (*P*), or for small groups (*S*)—TAPS.

## Focus on Thinking

In many classrooms, educators emphasize writing mechanics and the “look” of the work. Writing involves complex problem-solving techniques, so more emphasis should be placed on getting the information on paper.

The most valuable aspects of each writing experience are the content, the organization, and the author's style as an effective communicator.

## **EVERY TEACHER IS A WRITING TEACHER: THE POWER IS YOURS!**

Every class has writing assignments. It is not realistic for a teacher to say, "This is *not* a writing class! These students should learn writing skills in language arts classes!" or, "If they have not learned the writing skills by now, they are not capable of learning them." All educators must assume these challenges.

Teachers need to take an inventory of their personal feelings related to teaching young writers. According to Marjorie Frank in *If You're Trying to Teach Kids How to Write . . . You've Gotta Have This Book!* (1995, p. 19) teachers need to understand their "attitudes and beliefs, fears and abilities." An individual's self-efficacy, or belief in his success as a teacher, will impact the way writing activities are approached. Teachers have the power to change the quality of students' lives by giving them the writing skills they need for academic and personal success.

Figure 0.2 lists a myriad of writing activities across content areas that can be chosen to challenge learners within all ability levels.

### **A Golden Opportunity**

Each teacher has a golden opportunity to model, teach, and make writing assignments fulfilling experiences for his students. Textbooks and materials provide excellent facts and concepts to involve and challenge the young author. The activities expose students to the different genres, styles, and types of writing in the real world. The students grow in their ability to write with each experience in and out of the classroom. The teacher's passion for the subject is instilled in students through intriguing hooks, modeling, and meaningful writing activities. One teacher's interest can excite a learner and build confidence in his writing ability. One stimulating assignment may motivate a student to become a fluent author.

### **The Authors' Hope**

The strategies and activities in this resource were created by the authors or adapted from effective practices. Many lists, definitions, and activities are designed for the student to use. Words of encouragement, tips, and practical applications are included. Each strategy may be used as a writing tool to enhance thinking and learning in differentiated



**Figure 0.2** Writing Across the Content Areas

Subject	Language Arts	Social Studies	Math	Science	Visual Arts	Vocational Studies	Physical Education and Health
Uses of Writing	Journals Diaries Critiques Summaries Procedures Class notes Brainstorming Manuals Ads Research Note cards Outlines Final reports Interviews Analysis Opinions Songs Jingles Cheers Raps Comparisons	Data gathering Research Notes Interviews Graphs Map labels Statistics Timelines Reports Labels Charts Notes Descriptions Diaries Poems Songs Ads Historical records References	Data interpretation Summaries Conclusions Word problems Procedures Timelines Charts Class notes Labels Graphs Diagrams Directions Definitions Reports Journals Research Conclusions Rules Formulas Guidelines	Data Charts Graphs Interviews Songs Experiments Notes Observations Logs Reports Definitions Statistics Opinions Hypotheses Theories Captions E-mails Summaries Editorials Poems Lists	Journals Critiques Summaries Explanations Directions Playbills Songs Poems Interpretations Research Manuals Diaries Logs Materials Lists Plays Invitations Editorials Conclusions E-mails Designs	Lists Directions Inventions Interpretations Explanations Procedures Instructions Portfolios Opinions Manuals Labels Reports Summaries Conclusions Notes Captions E-mails Charts Recipes Interviews Designs	Rules Notes Posters Brochures Captions Cheers Instructions Diagrams Charts Signs Plays Outlines Tips Definitions Guides Handbooks Biographies Plans Analyses Diagnosis Applications

Subject	Language Arts	Social Studies	Math	Science	Visual Arts	Vocational Studies	Physical Education and Health
Uses of Writing	Charts Graphs Poems Interpretations Statistics Observations Notes Reflections Editorials Letters E-mails News flashes	Lists Logs E-mails Brainstorming History Reflections Graphic organizers	Progress report Self-evaluation Statistics Comparisons Brainstorming Analyses Reflections Notes	Labels Research Inventions Graphic organizers Problem Procedure Diagnosis	Creations Inventions Charts Graphic organizers Signs Notes Articles Portfolio Captions	Brainstorming Rules Charts Lists Reflections Evaluate	Agreements Contracts Game reviews Medical advice Player biographies Newspaper articles First-aid directions Promotions Game statistics

classrooms. We hope the ideas presented are adapted to teach information in all curriculum areas to develop successful, confident, enthusiastic writers.

### Our Mission

Our mission is twofold: (1) To teach students how to use writing as an effective learning tool and (2) to encourage and assist all teachers as they use writing as a valuable component of instruction in the differentiated classrooms. Educators often target skills for writing improvement in daily lessons and test preparations. However, we seldom see a student's self-satisfaction, enjoyment, empowerment, or confidence considered in formal plans to improve writing skills. Writers must know the purpose for each skill, strategy, or experience. They must find the activity to be appealing, so they will have a desire to complete the task.

Refer to each writer as an author. The title will increase the learner's confidence. Throughout this guide, writers are referred to as authors. Each learner must believe in his writing ability and know that he is an author. He needs assurance that each writing attempt is respected and appreciated.



# Creating a Climate for Writing

# 1

*When a butterfly egg is hatched in a proper environment,  
It has everything needed to thrive.  
When a child enters the writing world,  
He has everything he needs to become an effective author.*

In a differentiated classroom, the climate is conducive to writing. It is a comfortable, exciting place for any student author. All aspects of the physical and psychological environment have been established with the students' individual needs in mind. Lessons include activities that motivate and challenge the young authors. Novel writing strategies, materials, and tools are used to intrigue the writers.

The young authors feel secure in taking risks with their ideas and skills during writing exercises. They view their mistakes as opportunities to improve. They know errors are corrected with specific, positive feedback and encouragement. The teacher schedules ample time for the writers to complete assignments at their own pace.

The students understand the value of writing to learn and communicate ideas. The teacher guides young authors to see the value of expressing emotions and thoughts in their unique styles. Writing experiences provide opportunities for the students to see themselves as authors. The students develop a deep appreciation for published authors through exposure to a variety of genres. The teacher shares the joy of writing daily.