

**From: *Keys to Content Writing*
The Writing Rope: An Instructional Framework**

The Writing Rope (Sedita, 2019) is an instructional framework for teaching writing across all grades that identifies five components, or categories, of writing skills that students must learn in order to become skilled writers: *Critical Thinking*, *Syntax*, *Text Structure*, *Writing Craft*, and *Transcription*.

Figure 1-1 is a graphic representation of *The Writing Rope* that lists the five components. The components (i.e., strands) in the rope are explained in Figure 1-2.

Figure 1-1

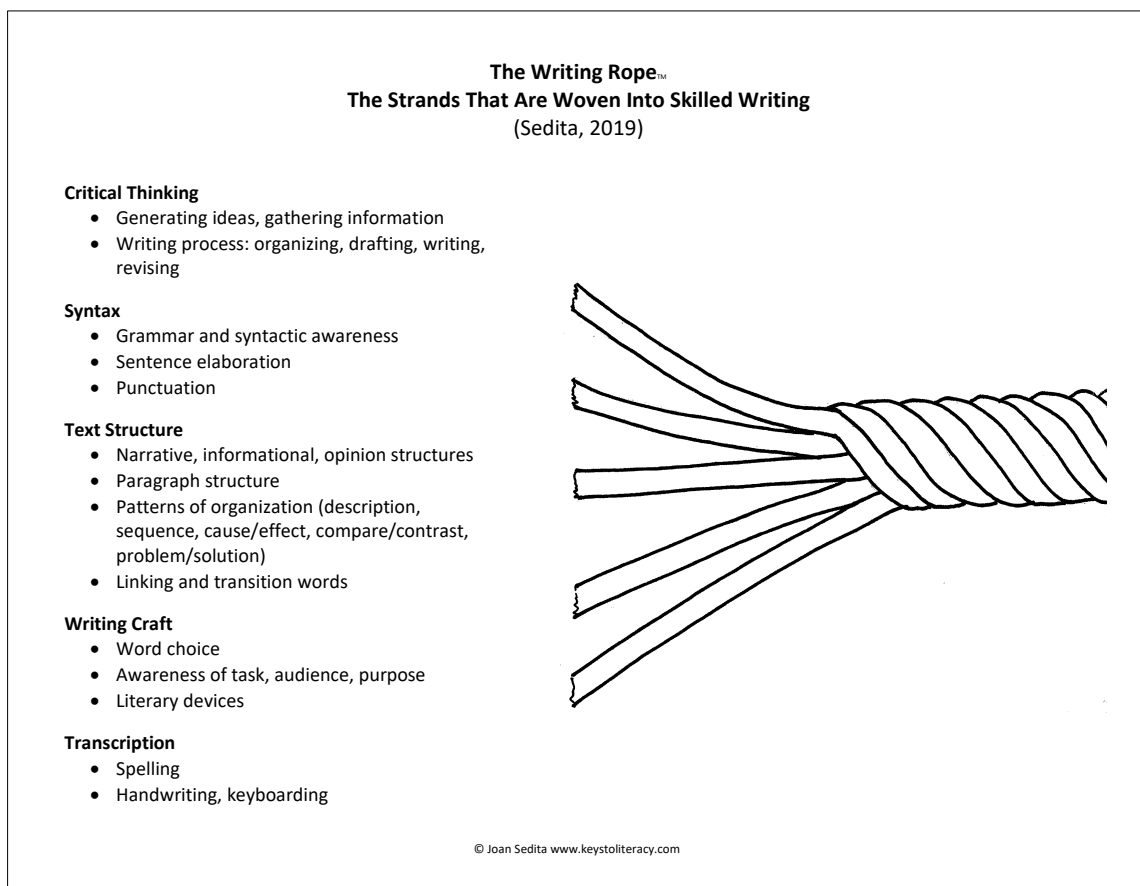


Figure 1-2

The Writing Rope™

The Critical Thinking Strand

This strand draws significantly on critical thinking and executive function skills, as well as the ability to develop background knowledge about a writing topic. Students engage in critical thinking as they think about what they want to communicate through their writing. If they are composing an informational or opinion/argument piece, they will need to incorporate comprehension skills to gather information from sources.

This strand also includes awareness of the *writing process* (i.e., thinking, planning, writing, revising). For the thinking stage, students benefit from explicit instruction for brainstorming strategies and skills for gathering information from written and multi-media sources, such as note taking. They also need to learn planning strategies for organizing their thoughts, including the use of prewriting graphic organizers. Students need to be metacognitive and purposeful about working recursively through the stages of the writing process, and they benefit from explicit instruction in revising and editing strategies.

This component of *The Writing Rope* is addressed in Chapter 2 *Quick Writes*, Chapter 4 *The Writing Process*, Chapter 5 *Summary Writing*, Chapter 6 *Three Types of Writing*, and Chapter 7 *Writing from Sources*.

The Syntax Strand

Individual sentences communicate ideas that add up to make meaning. Efficient processing of sentence structure is necessary for listening and reading comprehension, as well as for communicating information and ideas in writing. *Syntax* is the study and understanding of grammar – the system and arrangement of words, phrases and clauses that make up a sentence. Students develop syntactic awareness as they learn the correct use and relationship of words in sentences. This begins with exposure to standard English by listening to people talk, and reading or listening to written text. Students benefit from explicit instruction focused on building sentence skills, including activities such as sentence elaboration and sentence combining.

This component of *The Writing Rope* is addressed in Chapter 3 *Sentences and Paragraphs*.

The Text Structure Strand

Text structure is unique to written language, and awareness of text structure supports both writing and reading comprehension. Students benefit from explicit instruction for several levels of text structure.

- Narrative, informational, and opinion text structure: knowledge of the different organization structures for these three types of writing, including the use of introductions, body development, and conclusions
- Paragraph structure: understanding that written paragraphs are used to group text into manageable units that are organized around a main idea and supporting details
- Patterns of organization: understanding that sentences and paragraphs can be organized to convey a specific purpose including *description, sequence, cause and effect, compare and contrast, problem and solution*
- Transition words or phrases: the use of words or phrases to link sentences, paragraphs or sections of text – including knowledge of transitions associated with specific patterns of organization

This component of *The Writing Rope* is addressed in Chapter 3 *Sentences and Paragraphs*, and Chapter 6 *Three Types of Writing*.

The Writing Craft Strand

This strand addresses skills and strategies often referred to as *writers' craft* or *writers' moves*. This includes a number of techniques that writers employ that affect writing style, text structure, and choice of words. Students benefit from explicit instruction in the following:

- Word choice: purposeful use of specific vocabulary, word placement and dialogue to convey meaning and create an effect on the reader
- Writer's voice: the techniques and style of writing an author uses to show emotion, personality or point of view
- Literary devices: understanding and use of common literary elements (e.g., plot, setting, narrative, characters, theme) and literary techniques (e.g., imagery, personification, figurative language, alliteration, allegory, irony)

When teachers share examples of mentor text that include clear examples of how authors use techniques, students are able to imitate them in their own writing.

This strand also addresses the importance of being mindful of the task, audience, and purpose when writing. Awareness of these elements influences decisions about word choice, tone, length and style of a writing piece.

Instructional practices for teaching literary devices are not the purview of *Keys to Content Writing*. However, the writing craft strand of *The Writing Rope* is partially addressed in this chapter (using model mentor text as models of writing craft) and Chapter 4 *The Writing Process* (task, audience, purpose).

The Transcription Strand

This strand addresses spelling and handwriting/keyboarding skills. They are basic skills that are needed to transcribe the words a writer wants to put into writing. Once students become automatic and fluent with spelling and handwriting/keyboarding, they can focus their attention on the other strands of the writing rope. If students do not develop fluency with these skills by grade 3, this will put a constraint on writing development as they move into the later grades.

Instructional practices for teaching spelling and handwriting/keyboarding are not the purview of *Keys to Content Writing*.