

The Writing Rope: A Framework for Explicit Instruction in All Subjects

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Book Study Questions

These questions are designed to help individuals or groups of educators reflect on the content of the book and integrate the instructional suggestions into their teaching. Use some or all parts of this guide based on your individual needs and goals!

Chapter 1: Introduction to the Writing Rope

1. Are you familiar with any other frameworks for writing instruction? If so, how is *The Writing Rope* framework similar and different?
2. Reflect on this wording from page 7: “Teaching students to write is often considered the job of English language arts and writing teachers. Although some writing skills, strategies, and techniques are typically taught by the English language arts teacher during time dedicated to writing instruction, students need to practice writing on a frequent basis throughout the school day, in all subjects.”
3. What are some examples of “discipline-specific” writing tasks related to the subject(s) you teach?

Did you complete these “Connect to Your Classroom” activities? If you are in a book study with peers, share some of your responses.

Page 6

1. Does the writing curriculum used in your school include instruction for all five components of The Writing Rope?
2. Which writing components do you feel most confident about teaching, and which areas do you want to learn more about?

Page 8

1. How often do you assign Quick Writes, Content Learning Tasks, and Formal Writing Tasks?
2. For each of the three types of content writing tasks, identify at least one example of a writing task that you have assigned to your students.
3. Next, for each type of task, generate at least one new example of a writing task you might assign to your students.

Chapter 2: What do we know about effective writing instruction?

1. The Science of Writing: Why is it important for teachers to know the research findings related to effective writing practices?
2. How do your students’ strengths or challenges related to executive functions affect their writing ability?
3. What kinds of writing scaffolds do you provide some or all of your students?

4. What has been your experience with providing opportunities for students to collaborate with peers for writing and providing peer feedback?
5. Do you share samples of mentor text with students? If so, what are some examples of strategies or techniques that are the focus of these samples?

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Page 15

1. Reflect on each teaching principle.
2. Which principles do you already use on a regular basis related to writing instruction?
3. Identify at least two principles that you would like to use more often.

Page 21

1. Identify a writing skill, strategy, or technique that you would like to teach your students.
2. Identify at least two samples of mentor text that employ the skill, strategy, or technique.
3. Generate a lesson plan that analyzes the text samples with students and includes an opportunity for them to practice application of the skill, strategy, or technique with peers.

Chapter 3: Transcription Skills

1. Reflect on this wording from page 24: “Once students become automatic and fluent with spelling and handwriting/keyboarding, they can focus their attention on higher-level composing skills. If students do not develop fluency with these skills by Grade 4, this will put a constraint on writing development as they move into later grades.”
2. Do you agree with the suggestion that spelling and handwriting are best taught during phonics instruction in the early grades?
3. How does the generic phonics scope and sequence align with phonics instruction in your school’s curriculum or reading program?

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Page 24

1. Identify students who have difficulty with writing.
2. Do you think part of what contributes to their writing difficulty is a lack of fluent spelling or handwriting/keyboarding skills?
3. How might you provide support or scaffolds related to transcription skills to these students?

Page 32

1. How are spelling and handwriting/keyboarding taught in your school?
2. Is there something you have learned in this chapter that you can use to modify the way you teach spelling and handwriting/keyboarding?

Chapter 4: Writing Craft

1. Think of an example of how you considered the task, audience, and purpose for a writing task you have completed. The example can be a personal or professional writing task.
2. Why do you think students are more motivated to write when they can keep in mind an authentic audience?
3. Do you think elements of writing craft (including literary devices) should be taught primarily in English or English language arts classes, or can writing craft instruction be integrated into other content areas?

Did you complete these “Connect to Your Classroom” activities? If you are in a book study with peers, share some of your responses.

Page 35

1. Do you explicitly teach students about TAP? If yes, explain how you do this. If no, develop a lesson that introduces students to TAP.
2. How often do you assign writing tasks that have authentic audiences?
3. Generate a writing task related to your content that includes an authentic audience.

Page 36

1. Identify two examples of mentor text that reveal and clearly convey the author’s feelings or Do ypersonality that you can share with students.
2. Identify one example of mentor text that is written in first person and one example of mentor text that is written in third person to share with students.

Page 38

1. Identify several examples of sentences in mentor text where the author has used descriptive, colorful language that you can share with students.
2. Ask students to imitate these sentences by using similar language in their own sentences.

Page 38

1. Select one of the literary devices in Figure 4.5, and identify two mentor texts that provide clear examples of the device.
2. Ask students to use the literacy device in a writing piece.

Chapter 5: Stages of the Writing Process

1. How aware are your students of the stages in the writing process?
2. Do you think students would benefit from seeing a classroom anchor chart that lists the stages of the writing process?
3. Do you think your students spend enough time at the Think and Plan stages? How about the Revise stage? Is the answer to this question different for your successful writers versus your students who struggle with writing?
4. What strategies or scaffolds do you teach students to use at the Think and Plan stages before they write?
5. Are you familiar with two-column notes? Do you think this is a scaffold that will benefit your students?
6. Do the elements at the start of the topic web (introduction, body, conclusion; beginning, middle, end) reflect requirements of your state’s writing standards? Do you think this is a scaffold that will benefit your students?
7. Reflect on these quotes from the book on pages 54-55: “During revision, students analyze and evaluate a piece of writing that is their own or their peer’s... they also need to proofread for conventions such as spelling, capitalization, punctuation, and grammar.... Students can learn to complete two rounds of revising.”
8. Do you think you can use some or all of the Peer- or Self-Feedback Checklist (Figure 5.12, also on page 201) as a tool for providing opportunities for peer feedback and revision?

Did you complete these “Connect to Your Classroom” activities? If you are in a book study with peers, share some of your responses.

<p>Page 47</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Develop a lesson plan for introducing students to The Process Writing Routine. 2. Create a visual reminder of the writing stages that can be shared with your students.
<p>Page 50</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Develop a lesson plan for introducing the two-column note format to students. 2. Include directions for setting up a note-taking page. 3. Identify a simple informational topic for a writing task. Work collaboratively with students to generate big ideas and supporting details related to the topic, and then model how this information can be written in two-column notes.
<p>Page 51</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Develop a lesson plan for introducing the topic web graphic organizer to students. Introduce both the expository and narrative versions, and explain the difference between them. 2. Use the same informational topic you used to model two-column notes. First, use the expository topic web template, and add the topic of the writing piece at the top. Work collaboratively with students to generate words or phrases that will be part of the introduction and conclusion. 3. Then, collaborate with students to organize the big ideas from the two-column notes under the body section of the topic web.
<p>Page 54</p>

1. Continue with the same topic you used to model two-column notes and a topic web. Work collaboratively with students to model how to use the topic web to organize the overall structure of the writing piece, and the two-column notes as a source for main ideas and details that you develop into sentences and paragraphs.
2. Begin by using the introduction section of the topic web to write an introductory sentence. Then, use each item under the body section of the topic web to write the body paragraphs. Finally, use the conclusion section of the topic web to write a concluding sentence. Be sure to include some transition words and phrases.
3. Option: Model the use of a writing template as part of Step 2.

Page 57

1. Use the draft piece you used to model two-column notes and a topic web.
2. Model how to elaborate the wording in the introduction and conclusion.
3. Select a few sentences, and work collaboratively with students to model how to elaborate or combine sentences.
4. Model how to add more transition words and phrases to link sentences.
5. Ask the students if they have any suggestions to improve the content or organization of the writing piece.
6. End by modeling how to proofread to be sure there are no spelling, punctuation, or grammatical errors.

Chapter 6: Syntax and Sentence Skills

1. Reflect on how well-developed syntactic awareness supports reading comprehension as well as writing. How does reading (or listening to read aloud) of text that includes complex sentences contribute to stronger writing ability?
2. Respond to this quote from the book on page 60: “Sentences and paragraphs are the building blocks of writing... Good writers build their text from strong sentences.”
3. Reflect on this quote from the book on page 61: “Teachers can use grammar terminology in writing instruction, but the focus should be on applying syntactic awareness to students’ writing in context, rather than on having students memorize and label parts of speech, sentence elements, or sentence types (Graham, Bollinger, et al., 2012).”
4. What are some possible advantages of having students complete a short, sentence combining activity in every subject at least once a week, using sentences that are related to content being taught?
5. Which of the suggestions for sentence elaboration might be best for your students – W questions, expanded kernel sentences, or both?

Did you complete these “Connect to Your Classroom” activities? If you are in a book study with peers, share some of your responses.

Page 61

1. In text you are using to teach your content, identify two examples of each of these types of sentences to share as mentor models:
 - a. Simple sentence with one subject and one predicate

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> b. Simple sentence with two subjects or two predicates c. Compound sentence d. Complex sentence e. Compound-complex sentence <p>2. Ask students to emulate these models to write an example of each type of sentence.</p>
<p>Page 62</p> <p>Develop a lesson plan that incorporates one of the activities in Figure 6.2 or Figure 6.4.</p>
<p>Page 64</p> <p>Use sentences related to your content area to generate two sentence scrambles.</p>
<p>Page 72</p> <p>Use sentences related to your content area to generate two sentence combining activities.</p>
<p>Page 73</p> <p>Use sentences related to your content area to generate two sentence combining activities.</p>
<p>Page 74</p> <p>Generate an expanded kernel sentence example related to your content instruction.</p>

Chapter 7: Paragraph Skills

1. When first introduced to the concept of a paragraph, young students are often taught that a paragraph should start with a topic sentence and end with a concluding sentence. In the book (page 78) it is noted that topic sentences do not always appear as the first sentence and sometimes are not stated at all (i.e., the main idea is implied). The book also suggests that a concluding sentence is not needed for every paragraph in multiparagraph pieces. What can teachers do to help students make the leap from formulaic paragraph writing to more sophisticated paragraphs as they move beyond grade four?
2. Reflect on this quote from the book (page 79): “Some students have difficulty constructing paragraphs because they have not developed sufficient main idea skills. This may include not recognizing the difference between a main idea and a supporting detail...” What is the main idea skill levels of your students? Do you think some explicit instruction around main ideas would be beneficial to your students?
3. How might you use the list of transition words and phrases to support your students’ writing?
4. Do you think your students can benefit from paragraph templates such as the examples provided in the book?

Did you complete these “Connect to Your Classroom” activities? If you are in a book study with peers, share some of your responses.

<p>Page 79</p> <p>Identify sample paragraphs from your content reading, and generate practice activities using the previous suggestions.</p>
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Page 81

1. Identify sample paragraphs from your content reading that provide clear examples of patterns of organization.
2. Ask students to identify transition words and phrases.
3. Ask them to identify the pattern of organization.

Chapter 8: Three Types of Writing

1. How might you use the text you use to teach content to help students learn about the different structures for informational, opinion/argument, and narrative types of text?
2. What are some sources of mentor text that you can use to teach students how to write introductions and conclusions?
3. Why do you think the topic web for planning a narrative writing piece is organized by “beginning, middle, end” instead of “introduction, body, conclusion”?
4. Do you think your students can benefit from writing templates such as the examples provided in the book on pages 102-105?
5. Do you think you can use some or all of the Teacher Checklists (pages 106-109) as tools for providing feedback to students about their writing?

Did you complete these “Connect to Your Classroom” activities? If you are in a book study with peers, share some of your responses.

Page 91

1. What percent of the writing tasks you give students are opinion/argument, informational, and narrative?
2. How much of your students’ assignments are for English language arts, and how much for other subjects?

Page 92

1. Identify a topic for an informational writing piece you might assign to your students.
2. Generate a sample introduction for that topic that states the topic, includes a lead, includes some background knowledge about the topic, and previews subtopics or central ideas.
3. Use the same topic. Generate at least three different leads, drawing from the types of leads in Figure 8.4.

Page 93

1. Use the same topic you used to write a sample introduction.
2. Generate a sample conclusion that incorporates the previous suggestions.

Page 95

1. Identify a writing topic for an informational or opinion/argument writing topic you might assign your students.

2. Generate a topic web that includes suggested subtopics that are organized under the body section of the topic web.

Page 98

1. Identify an example of informational or opinion/argument mentor text that can be analyzed with your students.
2. Generate a topic web that reflects the organization of this sample text.

Chapter 9: Summary Writing

1. Are most teachers and students in your school clear about how a summary is different from a retell, a paraphrase, and other types of writing tasks?
2. Briefly summarize what you learned about the benefits of writing summaries (see page 114).
3. Which of the seven scaffolds might be most beneficial to help your students write summaries?
4. What are some possible advantages of having students write at least one summary in every subject at least once a week?

Did you complete these “Connect to Your Classroom” activities? If you are in a book study with peers, share some of your responses.

Page 119

1. Develop a lesson plan that models how to write a summary.
2. Include the following information:
 - a. What is the text source?
 - b. What are the expectations for length of the summary?
 - c. What scaffolds will you use?

Chapter 10: Writing From Text Sources

1. How much emphasis is placed on writing from sources in your state’s reading and writing standards?
2. Do state literacy assessments include tasks where students use one or more sources to write a response to a prompt?
3. How might you incorporate more opportunities for students to write responses to narrative text? Do you think you can incorporate some or all of the guiding questions (page 129 and 189) or the Personal Response Feedback Checklist (pages 129 and 187)?
4. Reflect on this quote from the book (page 129): “Comprehension skills and strategies figure prominently at the Think stage of the writing process, and they are used to identify the relevant source information required to respond to a writing prompt.”
5. What are some possible advantages of having students write responses to a prompt related to the content and text in every subject at least once a week?

6. What are some of the challenges students have with annotating text?
7. Do you think the two-column note format and the topic web will help students write better responses when writing from sources?
8. Do you think using the WAG template can help you plan and assign writing tasks to your students? How do you think a WAG can benefit students?

Did you complete these “Connect to Your Classroom” activities? If you are in a book study with peers, share some of your responses.

<p>Page 125</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Develop a writing assignment for a personal writing task in response to narrative text. 2. Include the following information: <ol style="list-style-type: none"> a. What is the text source? b. What is the task? c. Which guiding questions will you provide? d. Will you use a feedback checklist such as the example provided? If so, what will be the focus of the feedback?
<p>Page 126</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Review the sample writing prompts in Figure 10.6. How do the prompts become more challenging as students move from Grade 4 to Grade 8? How do demands on comprehension and/or writing skills increase? 2. Generate at least one sample writing prompt related to text used in your classroom.
<p>Page 129</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Develop a lesson plan for introducing text annotation to your students. 2. Include a text sample that you will use to model text annotation. 3. Generate and use a writing prompt to provide a focus for the annotation. 4. Model one or two annotating techniques (underlining, highlighting, margin notes). 5. Share a list of annotating tips with students.
<p>Page 135</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Develop a lesson plan for introducing and practicing paraphrasing. 2. Identify several sentences from a sample text passage that can be used to model paraphrasing.
<p>Page 143</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Over the course of several lessons, model the application of the writing process to a sample expository writing task. Model these strategies: annotating text to identify relevant information, gathering information from sources into two-column notes, and using a topic web to organize before writing. Consider providing a writing template as a scaffold. 2. Begin by generating a prompt for a writing task related to one source.

3. Read the source out loud as students read along silently. Stop at the end of a few sentences or a paragraph, and model how to use text annotation to focus on the parts of the text that are relevant to the prompt.
4. Model how to gather the relevant source information into two-column notes.
5. Model how to complete a topic web to plan the organization of the writing piece.
6. Model how to use a writing template to develop a first draft of the written response.
7. Model how to review and revise the draft for content and organization, and then how to proofread for conventions.
8. Repeat Steps 1–7, but this time select more than one source (text, audio, or video) and generate a prompt for a writing task that requires the integration of information from all the sources.

Chapter 11: Putting It All Together

Reflection:

What is your reaction to this quote from the book (page 174):

“Every teacher plays an important role in developing students’ writing skills and abilities. When students are exposed to a consistent set of instructional practices and terminology related to writing as they move from grade to grade and subject to subject, they are more likely to learn to independently apply writing skills, strategies, and techniques.”

Activity 1: The Strands of The Writing Rope (pages 164-173)

If you are participating in a book study with peers, share your responses from the third column in the chart.

Activity 2: Seven Principles for Teaching Writing (pages 175-178)

If you are participating in a book study with peers, share your responses from the third column in the chart.