

Writing Frames

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Rationale:

How can we integrate reading and writing across the content areas? Data from 2002 National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) showed that only 28% of fourth graders, 31% of eighth graders, and 24% of twelfth graders performed at or above a proficient (i.e., competent) level of writing achievement for their respective grade level (Persky, Daane, & Jin, 2003).

Composing text is not an easy task; it requires cognitive, physical, linguistic, and content skills as well as considering the audience needs and the author's communicative purposes. On the other hand, many of our students speak English as a second language and have specific reading needs. More demands for higher levels of writing performance and for demonstration of content mastery through writing are being made of students and their teachers, while teachers are simultaneously facing a higher proportion of students who struggle not only with composing, but also with basic reading and writing skills.

One method for integrating content area reading with writing is the use of **writing frames** (Fowler 1982; Nichols, 1980). A writing frame consists of a skeleton outline to scaffold children's non-fiction (or fiction) writing. Some students find non-fiction writing problematic compared to writing narrative. Writing frames help struggling writers in particular use appropriate text organization for summarizing content area information that adheres to a basic structure (e.g., compare-contrast). Many struggling readers have difficulty getting started and staying focused on an issue when asked to respond in writing to a selection they have read. The writing frames contain key language information to help students organize their thoughts and writing about the major ideas of a narrative or expository text.

The connectives in writing frames (i.e., first, then, finally) help students transition from one idea to the next, thus giving them a structure for developing a logical and coherent piece of writing. Writing frames can be helpful for students who struggle with writing because they activate prior knowledge about the topic of study, help students with text summarization, and/or encourage discussion through which students are exposed to multiple perspectives.

Teaching writing with writing frames helps students of all ages and all abilities. The strategy has been used with students from kindergarten through high school.

How to Use the Strategy:

Use of the writing frame should always begin with discussion and teacher modeling before moving on to joint construction between the teacher and student and then followed with the student using the writing frame independently.

Teachers should (a) challenge the students by involving them in a close examination of the features of text, both fiction and non-fiction; (b) model a wide range of techniques for responding to text by focusing on each text's particular writing form; and, (c) require students to review and revise their responses after a guided reading of the text.

Writing frames are appropriate for guided writing which involves the teacher working with a small group of students writing a range of text types. In guided writing the teacher models through mini-lessons and students apply the understanding they gained from modeled and shared writing sessions with varying degrees of support from the teacher. Writing frames provide scaffold for writing.

Steps:

1. When teaching writing using a frame, first introduce the type of writing with the critical elements highlighted.
2. Present the writing frame and model how to complete it.
3. Discuss the writing frame responses with the class and invite students to ask questions.
4. Provide guided practice using the writing frame.
5. After students have used the writing frame over time and with the teacher using informal assessment, students then use the frame to write individually.
6. As students learn the structure of the particular type of writing (i.e., narrative, expository) the use of frames is discontinued.
7. Have students present their paragraphs, explaining why they used the ideas they wrote.
8. Once students are comfortable with writing one paragraph, expand their writing to multiple paragraphs.
9. After practice, post examples of completed paragraphs in the classroom for students to refer to when they write without the use of frames.

Examples:

Opinion Writing Frame

Click on each of the examples below for a printable PDF version.

Opinion Writing Frame

I like apple fries. Here is why I like them. First, they are crisp. Next, they are juicy. Finally, they are very healthy for me. Those are the reasons I like apple fries.

Example Elementary Opinion Writing Frame

Opinion Writing Frame

I like _____. Here is why I like them. First, _____. Next, _____. Finally, _____. Those are the reasons I like _____.

Blank Elementary Opinion Writing Frame

Opinion Writing Frame

I am in favor of hybrid cars. Here are my reasons for having this opinion. First, they are fuel efficient. Next, they are environmentally friendly. Finally, there are tax incentives available for hybrid cars. Those are the reasons I am in favor of hybrid cars.

Example Secondary Opinion Writing Frame

Opinion Writing Frame

I am in favor of _____. Here are my reasons for having this opinion. First, _____. Next, _____. Finally, _____. Those are the reasons I am in favor of _____.

Blank Secondary Opinion Writing Frame

Give students a different frame on the same organizational pattern as the first. For instance, after giving students the "Opinion Writing Frame", try one like the "Comparison-Contrast Writing Frame" to give them more practice with this pattern.

Comparison-Contrast Writing Frame

Click on each of the examples below for a printable PDF version.

Comparison- Contrast Writing Frame

Apple fries and French fries have some similarities but are also different. They are both snack foods. They are similar in that they look like fries. You can buy them both at some fast food restaurants. Although they are both snack foods, they are different in some ways. For example, French fries are greasy. In addition, French fries have lots of calories but, apple fries are healthy for you. Another difference is that apple fries cost a bit more than French fries.

Example Elementary Comparison-Contrast Writing Frame

Comparison- Contrast Writing Frame

_____ have some similarities but are also different. They are both _____. They are similar in that _____. Although they are both _____, they are different in some ways. For example, _____. In addition, _____ but _____, Another difference is that _____.

Blank Elementary Comparison-Contrast Writing Frame

Comparison- Contrast Writing Frame

Hybrid and electric cars have many things in common but are also different. They are both fuel efficient. They are similar in that they both use technology that is designed to decrease the use of gasoline fuel for powering gas engines. Although they are both similar in that they are fuel-efficient, they are different in some ways. For example, electric cars are totally electric, meaning that they have to be plugged in and charged; the range of the car is as far as the charge, Hybrid car batteries charge while you are driving. On the other hand, electric cars need a recharge every 50-100 miles. In addition, electric cars go up to 50-60 miles/hr whereas hybrid cars go much faster than that. Another difference is that hybrid cars are a mixture of gas and electric power to create a gas efficient partially electric car with a limited range.

Comparison- Contrast Writing Frame

_____ have many things in common but are also different. They are both _____. They are similar in that _____. Although they are both similar in that they are _____, they are different in some ways. For example, _____. On the other hand, _____. In addition, _____ whereas, _____. Another difference is that _____.

Assessment:

The writing frames can be also used for assisting assessment of the students' developing reading and writing skills, and can be filed in students' individual portfolios.

Resources:

KidAuthors. (<http://www.kidauthors.com/default.asp>). Stories and poems submitted by children and adolescents ages 6–18.

Kids on the Net. (<http://www.kidsonthenet.com>). Advice and guidelines for writing, teaching resources, writing games, book reviews, and papers submitted by students.

National Council of Teachers of English. (<http://www.ncte.org>). Standards for literacy instruction, summaries of research on writing and reading, resources for teaching writing, and professional development.

Six Traits for Elementary Grades. (<http://www.edina.k12.mn.us/concord/teacherlinks/sixtraits/sixtraits.html>). Explanations, rubrics, posters, and scored samples for the six traits.

Writing Frames for the Literacy Strategy. (<http://www.mcgraw-hill.co.uk/kingscourt/downloads/writingframeslevels9-12.pdf>) Writing activities and several examples on writing frames for ages 7-8.5.

An Approach to Factual Writing. (http://www.readingonline.org/articles/art_index.asp?HREF=writing/index.html). Explanation of writing frames, how to use them, and examples.

Using Writing Frames in the Classroom. (<http://www.halton.gov.uk/schools/english/frontwritingframes.htm>) Several examples on writing frames for elementary through middle school grades.

References:

Fowler, G. L. (1982). Developing comprehension skills in primary students through the use of story frames. *The Reading Teacher*, 36, 176-179.

Nichols, J. N. (1980). Using paragraph frames to help remedial high school students with writing assignments. *Journal of Reading*, 24, 228-231.

Persky, H. R., Daane, M. C., & Jin, Y. (2003). *The nation's report card: Writing 2002*. (NCES 2003-529). U.S. Department of Education. Institute of Education Sciences. National Center for Education Statistics. Washington, DC: Government Printing Office.

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