Powerful Writing Structures
Brain Pocket Strategies for Supporting a Year-Long Writing Program.
Powerful Writing Structures

Brain Pocket Strategies for Supporting a Year-Long Writing Program

Adrienne Gear

Pembroke Publishers Limited
To Richard, Spencer, and Oliver — always and with love

© 2020 Pembroke Publishers
538 Hood Road
Markham, Ontario, Canada L3R 3K9
www.pembrokepublishers.com

All rights reserved.
No part of this publication may be reproduced in any form or by any means electronic or mechanical, including photocopy, scanning, recording, or any information, storage or retrieval system, without permission in writing from the publisher. Excerpts from this publication may be reproduced under licence from Access Copyright, or with the express written permission of Pembroke Publishers Limited, or as permitted by law.

Every effort has been made to contact copyright holders for permission to reproduce borrowed material. The publishers apologize for any such omissions and will be pleased to rectify them in subsequent reprints of the book.

Library and Archives Canada Cataloguing in Publication
Title: Powerful writing structures : brain pocket strategies for supporting a year-long writing program / Adrienne Gear.
Names: Gear, Adrienne, author.
Identifiers: Canadiana (print) 20190153458 | Canadiana (ebook) 20190153504 | ISBN 9781551383446 (softcover) | ISBN 9781551389431 (PDF)
Subjects: LCSH: Language arts (Elementary) | LCSH: English language—Rhetoric—Study and teaching (Elementary)

Editor: Kat Mototsune
Cover Design: John Zehethofer
Typesetting: Jay Tee Graphics Ltd.

Printed and bound in Canada
9 8 7 6 5 4 3 2 1
Contents

Preface 6

Introduction 7

1: A Balanced Writing Program 9
   Writing Structures and Brain Pockets 9
   Introducing Brain Pocket Writing 11
   Elements of a Balanced Writing Program 13
   Formative Writing Assessment and Responsive Teaching 14
   Writing Joy 14
   Writing Goals 15
   Writing Routine 16
   Mini Lessons 17
   Word Work 17
   Independent Writing 18
   Anchor Books and Mentor Texts 19
   Writing Conferences 19
   Implementing Weekly Practice Writes 21
   Introductory Lesson 22
   The Importance of Planning 22
   Draft Day 23
   Revising and Editing 24

2: Memory Pocket Writing: Personal Narrative 37
   Walking Stories 37
      Walking Story Topics and Anchor Books 38
   Mini Lessons for Walking Stories 39
      Word Choice: Triple-Scoop Words 40
      Interesting Details 41
      Organization Drawers 45
      Sensory Details 46
      Similes 48
      Personification 50

   Event Stories 57
      Introductory Lessons 58
         Deconstructing Event Stories 58
         Planning Event Stories 58
      Mini Lessons for Event Stories 60
Transition Words 60
Stretching the Moment 62
Effective Event Story Endings 63

3: Fact Pocket Writing: Nonfiction 67
Introducing Nonfiction Writing 69
Text Structures 69
Text Features 71

Descriptive Writing 76
Introductory Lesson 77
Mini Lessons for Description 78
Dash Facts Research 78
Putting the Facts Together 80
Hook Your Reader with a Great Beginning 81
Find Your Voice 82
Too Much Icing 83
Effective Endings for Description 83
Descriptive Writing in the Content Areas 85

Instructional Writing 95
Mini Lessons for Instruction 97
The SAD Formula 97
Text Features for Instruction 98
How-To Tips 99
Expert Writing 99
Instructional Writing in the Content Areas 101
How to Be an Animal 101
How to Be People 103
Indigenous Ways of Knowing 104

Persuasive Writing 114
Mini Lessons for Persuasion 116
The Language of Persuasion 116
Planning 117
Effective Introductions: The Top of the Diamond 119
Focusing on the Why 121
Effective Endings: The Bottom of the Diamond 122
Persuasion in the Content Areas 124
Catalogues 124
Bubblegum Letters 124
Famous People Persuasion 124
Everyday Inventions 125

Comparison Writing 134
Introductory Lesson 134
Mini Lessons for Comparison 136
The Language of Comparison 136
Independent Practice 137
Comparison in the Content Areas 138
Comparing Animals in Science 139
Comparing Early Humans/Civilizations in Social Studies 139

**Explanatory Writing** 145
Introductory Lesson 145
Mini Lessons for Explanation Writing 147
   - Modeling Explanatory Writing 147
   - Flow Charts and Diagrams 147
Explanation Writing in the Content Areas 148

**Biography Writing** 154
Mini Lessons for Biography Writing 156
   - Time Lines 156
   - Past Mini Lessons 156
   - Biography of a Classmate 156
Biography in the Content Areas 157
   - Change Agents 159
   - Author Biographies 161

4: **Imagination Pocket Writing: Story Writing** 168
Introductory Lesson 169
Mini Lessons for Story Writing 170
   - What's the Problem? 170
   - Character Development 172
   - Planning the Plot 173
The Story-Writing Process 174

**Final Thoughts** 189

Acknowledgments 189

**Professional Resources** 191

Index 193
A Balanced Writing Program

Writing Structures and Brain Pockets

It’s hard to bake cookies without a recipe. You can guess how much flour and baking soda to add, how hot the oven should be, and how long to bake them, but without knowing the exact formula, it is unlikely your cookies will turn out. They might resemble cookies, and you may have included high-quality chocolate chips and expensive butter, but they likely won’t look very appealing or taste very good. It’s the same with writing: if you don’t have the recipe and know the formula, it is likely your writing won’t turn out. You may have included some great words, some impressive literary techniques, and your capitals and periods, but the writing falls flat. You get where I’m going. Without knowing the recipe, it’s hard to bake; without knowing the text structure, it’s hard to write.

Text structure is the key to successful writing. It’s the keys to the car, the frame to the house, the combination to the safe, the recipe for the cookies. Every piece of writing, whether a persuasive letter, a story, or a comparative essay, has its own unique structure. Without knowing what that structure is, writing a successful piece is as about as likely as baking delicious and beautiful cookies without a recipe. (Okay, enough with the cookie analogy!)

Often, I hear friends with children in middle and high school saying their kids are “stuck” in their English homework because they don’t know how to write their essay, story, or report. And the most likely reason they are stuck is not that they have nothing to say, but is instead that they don’t know how to organize their thoughts. In a school year, students are expected to be able to write a wide range of different writing forms—from persuasive to narrative, from report to comparative. But how many of us are actually teaching our students explicitly about the importance of knowing the text structure for each of these forms? When you know the structure, frame, or skeleton of a piece of writing, it helps you organize your ideas and then the “filling in” becomes much easier.

We write differently for different purposes. In a balanced writing program, students are exposed to a variety of different writing forms throughout the year. Explicit instruction in the structure, language, and traits of that particular writing structure is provided and students are given many opportunities to practice. Among the different structures children need to be comfortable writing in elementary school are personal narrative or personal recount (there are two substructures within this category), nonfiction writing (there are several substructures within this category, including description, instruction, and persuasion), and story writing (one main structure). Each is unique, with its own form, language, and writing techniques. These different forms of writing are not intended to be taught in a single one-off writing lesson, but rather are taught, modeled, and practiced with many different topics over several months.
Brain Pocket Writing has become my way of helping students understand different types of writing, and I thought it would be a useful way of organizing my year-long writing program. Based on the three Brain Pockets—Memory, Fact, and Imagination—I developed a plan to focus on one form of writing per term. The order you teach them is entirely up to you, however, there are reasons behind my choices. I like to start my year focusing on Memory Pocket Writing (personal narrative) because it allows me to get to know my students through their writing. Also, because it is a relatively easy structure, it allows me to introduce a variety of literary devices (word choice, similes, sensory details) through mini lessons. As well, the anchor books I use for Memory Pocket Writing also work well for teaching students the Power of Making Connections, with which I like to start my year. Fact Pocket (Nonfiction) Writing has several different structures, including description, instruction, persuasion, comparison, explanation, and biography, and each one can be easily linked to your content areas. I recommend that teachers choose only two nonfiction structures per school year so that students can get lots of opportunities to practice and to link this form of writing to a content area you are working on. I like to introduce Story Writing, the most challenging type of writing to teach and master, towards the end of the school year, after students have developed sound writing skills and techniques, and when they are ready for the challenge of new literary elements, including character development and plot development.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Brain Pocket</th>
<th>Personal Narrative</th>
<th>Nonfiction</th>
<th>Story Writing</th>
<th>Poetry</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Memory Pocket</td>
<td>Walking Stories:</td>
<td>Descriptive</td>
<td>Climbing Stories:</td>
<td>Free verse</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>topic/detail/detail</td>
<td>Instruction</td>
<td>setting/character/</td>
<td>Acrostic</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>/detail</td>
<td>Persuasion</td>
<td>problem/solution/</td>
<td>List</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Event Stories:</td>
<td>Explanation</td>
<td>ending</td>
<td>Cinquain</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>beginning/middle/</td>
<td>Biography</td>
<td></td>
<td>Limerick</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>end</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Concrete</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Sonnet</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Suggested Writing Techniques</th>
<th>Personal Narrative</th>
<th>Nonfiction</th>
<th>Story Writing</th>
<th>Poetry</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>• interesting details</td>
<td>• organization</td>
<td>• character development</td>
<td>• simile/mimetaphor</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• word choice</td>
<td>• text features</td>
<td>• dialogue</td>
<td>• personification</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• hook sentence</td>
<td>• transitions</td>
<td>• transitions</td>
<td>• word choice</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• endings</td>
<td>• effective openings</td>
<td>• plot development</td>
<td>• using the senses</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• using the senses</td>
<td>• effective endings</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• voice</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Language Features</th>
<th>Personal Narrative</th>
<th>Nonfiction</th>
<th>Story Writing</th>
<th>Poetry</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>• transition words</td>
<td>• transition words</td>
<td>• transition words</td>
<td>• rhyme</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• word choice</td>
<td>• interesting fact phrases</td>
<td>• sensory description</td>
<td>• repetition</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• comparative words</td>
<td>• voice</td>
<td>• rhythm</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• persuasive words</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• instruction words</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• tips</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Poetry

Teachers either love teaching poetry or they don’t; they either avoid it and “run out of time” or make it a staple throughout their school year. For me, poetry is reading, writing, speaking, and celebrating language. There is no better way to teach structure, language, and writer’s craft than through poetry. I encourage you to find ways to weave poetry throughout your yearly writing program and to share the joy of poetic language with your students. I will often use an anchor text to teach a specific poetic structure or literary technique. Whenever you share an anchor poem, I recommend writing it out on chart paper so that students can see the form of the poem and, as well, visibly identify features, such as rhyming words or repeating words or phrases. It is important to introduce poetry to your students and discuss the key features of this type of writing. After reading aloud several poems, brainstorm some of the key features of poetry and create an anchor chart.

Poetry...

- Can be about anything
- Is usually written in shorter lines
- Has a unique form and shape
- Includes at least one of the 3 R’s: rhyme, repetition, rhythm
- Often ends with a surprise
- Has a title
- May be serious or humorous
- Can express important personal feelings

Introducing Brain Pocket Writing

Brain Pockets originated from a student in my class many years ago. I admit that when this student raised his hand, I avoided eye contact. His ideas were filled with imagination and creativity, but often not connected to what we were learning about. I wanted to find a way to gently guide his thinking, while not squashing his creativity, and so I developed Brain Pockets as a way of redirecting his thinking.

I explained to him that our brains hold our thoughts and ideas in three different “pockets”: one pocket stores our experiences and memories; another holds facts and information; and the third holds our imagination. Depending on what
we are reading or learning, we can find thoughts in our brain pockets to help us understand and make connections. If reading a story about friendship, we might visit our memory pocket; if reading about volcanoes, we would go into our fact pocket. I told him that I noticed that he seemed to be spending a lot of time focusing on his imagination pocket, which was obviously very full of amazing imaginary thoughts. I pointed out to him that sometimes he needed to visit his other pockets! A few days later, he told me, “Ms Gear, you know that imagination pocket place? I think I live there.”

Since then, I have used Brain Pockets not only for teaching reading and making connections, but also when I teach writing as Independent Writing. At the beginning of the school year, I provide students with a blank Brain Pockets page (see page 31) and invite them to record different ideas from their three brain pockets that they could possibly use as a writing topic.

Anchor Books for Introducing Brain Pocket Writing

Hanlon, Abby. Ralph Tells a Story (memory pocket)  
Bram, Elizabeth. Rufus the Writer (memory pocket)  
Lehrhaupt, Adam. Idea Jar (imagination pocket)

McNaughton, Colin. Once Upon an Ordinary School Day (imagination pocket)  
Stead, Phillip C. Ideas are All Around (all pockets)

INTRODUCTORY LESSON

• Ask students, “Where do writers get their ideas for writing?”
• Tell them that our brains are powerful places in our body that store all our thinking. Explain that our brain stores our thoughts in three big pockets: Memory Pocket, Fact Pocket, and Imagination Pocket.
• Draw and label the brain pockets; see page 11.
• Explain that writers use their brain pockets to help them find ideas for writing. Depending on what they are going to write about, they might visit different pockets.
• Give examples of what you might have stored in your different pockets:

I have lots of camping stories in my memory pocket, so I’m going to add camping to my memory pocket. I know a lot of facts about gorillas, so I will put gorillas in my Fact pocket. I was imagining one day about a penguin who plays hockey so I will put Penguin Goalie in my imagination pocket.

SAMPLE OF MODELING BRAIN POCKETS

Jessica Suurallik, teacher from Rutland Elementary School in Kelowna (SD 23) developed an amazing lesson when she introduced brain pockets to her class. She created actual pockets with folded chart paper, placed small cards with topics into each of the pockets, and provided excellent prompts: I remember when… (Memory), I can tell you about… (Fact), Once there was… (Imagination).
• Explain that not every thought in our brain pockets will get turned into writing, but that it’s helpful to think about different ideas that you could write about.

• Pass out the blank Brain Pocket handout (page 31). Invite students to use them to make their own personal Brain Pockets and draw and label ideas in each pocket.

Once complete, the brain pocket ideas can be glued into a lined or half-lined notebook. Instead of weekly journal writing, your students can do brain pocket writing in their Brain Pocket Notebook. Encourage them to look over ideas from their Brain Pocket plan and choose one pocket they would like to write from that day. Making the shift from journal writing to brain pocket writing has made a huge difference to my students’ free writing. It is far more focused, interesting, and enjoyable to read.

Elements of a Balanced Writing Program

*Reflect* and *refine* are two of my favorite “teacher words.” I often invite teachers at workshops to take time to reflect on their current practice, to think about what is working well and what may need a little tweaking or refinement. It’s not about changing everything, but recognizing that there is always room for a little tune-up. A balanced writing program consists of a variety of elements, from explicit instruction to independent free-choice writing; from word work to writers workshop. While there is no one perfect writing program, there are some components I believe support an effective one. I encourage you to reflect on your own practice and think about one or two elements you could refine or add to your current writing program:

• Formative Assessment to inform teaching practice
• Writing Joy: a positive attitude towards writing
• Writing Goals
• Writing Routine: weekly practice writes with a focus on process
• Mini Lessons: explicit instruction with regular teacher modeling in writing structure, language, and writer’s craft
Ongoing assessment of your students’ writing is important for helping them focus on specific writing skills they need to work on. While I believe the most value we can provide happens during individual conferences (see page 19), using a basic rubric for different writing structures can also help track your students’ progress. See rubrics for different forms of writing on pages 38, 69, and 169.

“I don’t know how you can teach kids until you know what they know.” — “The Sisters” Gail Boushey and Joan Moser

“Teaching writing is a matter of faith. We demonstrate that faith when we listen well, when we refer to our students as writers, when we expect them to love writing and pour their heart and soul into it.” — Lucy Calkins

Formative Writing Assessment and Responsive Teaching

Teaching writing looks easy on Pinterest. So many shiny objects to choose from, some with glitter, others with fancy borders and sparkles. But the problem with Pinterest is that it promotes isolated writing lessons that might look fantastic when complete but that aren’t helping students, over time, develop their writing skills by doing them. So how do you know what lessons to teach? Be responsive. Look up! Look up to see where your students are as writers and discover their strengths and stretches. Find the gaps! Fill the gaps! The most effective writing teachers teach lessons their students need, not ones they find on Pinterest.

I believe the most important first step in developing an effective writing program is formative assessment: assessment to inform our practice; assessment that leads to responsive teaching. This is usually done in the form of a writing sample from each student at the beginning and end of each school year. The purpose of the fall assessment is to see how well the students are doing; I like to think that the purpose of the spring assessment is to see how well I did! I am not a fan of “cold writes,” but like to have a writing sample done in the context of a regular writing lesson, beginning with a read-aloud and allowing time for students a chance to brainstorm, plan, and discuss their ideas prior to writing. The only difference from a regular lesson is that there is no modeling of the writing by the teacher, and that students are given a limited time to write and only a few minutes at the end to read over their writing and make any changes they wish to make.

Once the writing samples have been assessed (by using a criteria-referenced performance standard rubric provided by your school district, region, province, or state), the information you have gathered can be analyzed and next steps can be planned. Look for trends in your class and ask yourself: Collectively, what are they doing well? What do they need to learn through whole-class instruction? Your students will show you what they need through their writing. Look for small groups of students who might need support with certain skills. You can use the Assessment Summary Sheet on page 26 to help you track your students’ assessment results as well as to help you analyze, look for trends and needs in your current class, and help you plan your next steps. Through this process, your students’ writing will tell you what they need support with.

Writing Joy

One of my very first writing lessons at the beginning of the year is meant to establish why it is important to learn to write well and to promote writing joy!

• Ask students “Who likes writing?” Survey a quick show of hands.
• Extend the conversation by asking anyone who said no to explain why. Invite them to discuss with a partner. Most often you will get answers like these: it’s boring; I don’t have anything to write about; not good at it.

• Word Work
• Independent Writing
• Anchor Books/Mentor Texts to use as models for language, structure, and techniques
• Writing Conferences: regular one-on-one meetings with students to discuss their writing and to develop personalized writing goals

“I don’t know how you can teach kids until you know what they know.” — “The Sisters” Gail Boushey and Joan Moser
“Don’t write for the market, write for your readers. It’s not about writing a best seller, it’s about sharing something that can touch hearts and shift minds.”
— Bryana Beecham

- Now ask students what the difference is between having to do something and getting to do something: “have to” is something you don’t want to do; “get to” is something you do want to do.
- Invite students to discuss in partners and try to give examples: e.g., “I have to clean my room”; “I get to play with my friends.”
- While they are discussing, write on the whiteboard or chart stand: This year, you don’t have to write... Invite students to read the sentence and ask, “What do you think?” (Be prepared for cheering and fist pumps!)
- Tell them that the sentence isn’t quite finished and add You get to write. Invite students to discuss what they think that means.
- Explain that one of your goals this year is that everyone in the class not only learns to become better writers, but also grows to love writing. You don’t want to hear anyone in the class saying, “Ahh... do we have to write?” You want everyone to say, “Yeah! We GET to write!!!”
- Tell students that you love to write and you want all your students to love writing too.

Writing Goals

- Show a picture of a party invitation or ask students if they have ever been invited to a birthday or a special event where they had to bring a gift.
- Describe going to a store to pick out the perfect gift for your friend, then taking it home and wrapping it up in special paper. Invite students to think about the excited feeling they have when they give that gift to their friend, and the anticipation of watching their friend opening the gift, knowing what it is and that they picked it out especially.
- Explain:

  When you write this year, I want you to feel the same way as when you give a special gift to your friend. When we write, we are actually “gifting” our reader with a gift of words and ideas. And just like we make sure that the gift we give our friends is special and wrapped up in nice paper with a bow, writers always want to make sure that their writing is special and wrapped up with a bow. Nobody gives their friend a broken, used toy wrapped in an old paper bag. So as writers, we don’t want to be giving our readers “broken toys” to read. We want to always make sure that our writing is the very best gift we can give our reader!

- Explain that, in order to make sure we are gifting our readers with our very best writing, we need to focus on two writing goals: 1) Making the writing interesting for my reader; 2) Making the writing clear for my reader.
- Discuss the common idea in both goals: the reader.

The reader is the most important part of your writing.

- Create a class anchor chart of the two goals written at the top.
- Begin with goal #1: Make Writing Interesting for My Reader. Tell students that the bottom line is if your writing is boring, your reader will be bored. Explain that there are many things a writer can do to make their writing interesting. Begin listing: interesting details, triple-scoop words, similes, good hooks, etc.
- Move to goal #2: Make Writing Clear for My Reader. Explain that if the present you give your friend is too complicated or hard to figure out, they likely
won’t want to play with it. Similarly, if writing is too confusing or hard to read, a reader likely won’t want to or be able to read it. Explain that to make writing clear you need to focus on spacing, spelling, punctuation, etc. Create a list under that goal.

- Depending on the grade, students can create their own Goal Chart to include or glue inside in their writing folders to keep track of the lessons as they learn them.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>MY WRITING GOALS</th>
<th>To make sure my writing is CLEAR for my reader</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>INTERESTING for my reader</td>
<td>• Spacing</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Interesting details (page 41)</td>
<td>• Spelling No-Excuse Words (page 17)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Triple-Scoop words (page 40)</td>
<td>• GUM It strategy (page 18)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Similes (page 48)</td>
<td>• Punctuation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• A great beginning (pages 81, 119)</td>
<td>• Organization (page 45)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• A great ending (pages 63, 83, 122)</td>
<td>• Stay on target</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Using the senses (page 46)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Voice (page 82)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Nonfiction text features (page 71)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Writing Routine

One of the most important aspects of an effective writing program is establishing a writing routine. Students work better when they know what is expected of them; I teach better when I know what I’m doing! My weekly writing routine is based on three stages of the writing process: Plan, Draft, Revise. Each week, over the course of three writing blocks in my timetable, the students spend time working on a short practice write, focusing on one stage of the writing process per day. This way, when students see Writing Power or Writing Workshop on their agenda, they know exactly what is expected of them each day. New writing skills are introduced or reinforced through weekly mini lessons and students are encouraged to apply the new skill or technique to their weekly practice writes. By the end of the week, my students will have completed a revised practice write.

Practice writes are just that—practice. Classrooms that provide children with regular opportunities to express themselves on paper without feeling too constrained by correct spelling and proper handwriting help children understand that writing has real purpose (Graves 1983; Sulzby 1985; Dyson 1988). I encourage students to try their best, but not to worry or focus too much on conventions or spelling during this stage of the writing process. They will have time to edit later; the important part about drafting is getting their ideas down. While I encourage students to finish their practice writes, not all will finish every piece, and that’s okay. There will be another practice write next week. I never send the practice writing home as homework. Students publish only one practice write per term and the rest are kept as practice writes in their writing folders.

Here is an example of a weekly writing routine schedule. Part-time teachers or those who may not be able to fit this schedule into a single week can spread it over two weeks.

See page 21 for Implementing Weekly Practice Writes.
Memory Pocket Writing: Personal Narrative

Walking Stories

Personal narratives or personal recounts are writing based on the writer’s own personal experiences, memories, and feelings, the contents of what I refer to as our memory pocket. Because writers use ideas from their own lives, as opposed to researching facts or developing characters and plots, I find personal narrative the simplest structure to teach. It also allows maximum time to front-load key writing routines and techniques that will carry students throughout the year. This is why I like to begin the school year with this type of writing. I spend the first term of school teaching a focus on personal narrative practices and the mini lessons connected to this style of writing. I find that the topics and anchor books I use to teach personal narrative are often the same ones I would be using to get to know students at the beginning of the year, such as stories about family, friendships, school, and feelings. If you are using Reading Power, these anchor books also work well for teaching the power of making connections.

Under the broad umbrella of personal narrative, I have discovered two sub-structures: walking stories describe a personal topic (me, my friend, my pet, my culture, my school, etc.) and event stories are about a personal event with a beginning, middle, and end (my field trip to the pumpkin patch, going skating, my birthday party, etc.).

Walking Story Anchor Books

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Walking Story Anchor Books</th>
<th>Walking Story Anchor Books</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Browne, Anthony. My Dad</td>
<td>Parr, Todd. It’s Okay to Make Mistakes (or any Todd Parr book) (P)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Carlson, Nancy. I Like Me! (P)</td>
<td>Reid, Barbara. The Party</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Clark, Emma Chichester. I Love You, Blue Kangaroo! (P)</td>
<td>Rylant, Cynthia. Birthday Presents</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Curtis, Jamie Lee. My Brave Year of Firsts</td>
<td>Rylant, Cynthia. When I Was Young in the Mountains</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Heide, Florence Parry. Some Things Are Scary</td>
<td>Shannon, David. No, David!</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Henkes, Kevin. My Garden</td>
<td>Shannon, David. Too Many Toys!</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Walking Stories at a Glance

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>A Walking Story...</th>
<th>A Walking Story does NOT...</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>• stars you!</td>
<td>• contain a problem</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• comes from your memory pocket</td>
<td>• show time passing with a beginning, middle, and end</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• is all about a person, place, or thing that you know a lot about</td>
<td>• use move-along or transition words</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• uses lots of interesting and visual words</td>
<td>• include imaginary characters</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• sometimes has anchor lines (repeating words or phrases)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
ASSESSMENT

This rubric can be used for both walking and event stories. It is not based on a specific grade, but focuses on the overall skills I look at when assessing personal narratives. You will need to make adjustments to the expectations for your students’ particular grade level.

Personal Narrative Assessment Rubric

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Description</th>
<th>Approaching</th>
<th>Developing</th>
<th>Applying</th>
<th>Extending</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Meaning</strong></td>
<td>Writing makes sense: easy to follow; centred around a main idea; based on personal experiences; stays on topic</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Style</strong></td>
<td>Writing is engaging: evidence of writing techniques, including word choice, details, voice, imagery</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Form</strong></td>
<td>Writing is organized: sentences are grouped (paragraphing); evidence of transition words; clear beginning-middle-end (where applicable)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Conventions</strong></td>
<td>Writing is clear: accurate spelling of high-frequency words; evidence of appropriate punctuation and spacing</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Walking Story Topics and Anchor Books

The topics children can write about when it comes to walking stories are endless—their memory pockets are jam-packed with stories about themselves, their family, friends, their favorite toy, a special place, a special grown-up. We never run out of memory-pocket topics! When students focus on walking stories, they are writing about a topic from their memory pocket, sharing interesting details with their readers about that topic. When choosing topics for weekly practice walking-story writes, I like to choose topics around anchor books that I share with the students. These books anchor my lessons; they provide me with topics and themes for discussing and connecting, and inspire great writing. The suggested anchor books are organized by Walking Story topic. You can use them for your weekly practice writes to share with students as a way of introducing the topic and stimulating brainstorming and discussions prior to writing.

Anchor Books: Walking Stories

CELEBRATE ME!
Carlson, Nancy. *I Like Me!* (P)
Ewald, Wendy. *The Best Part of Me*
Miller, Pat Zietlow. *Remarkably You* (P)
Nyong’o, Lupita. *Sulwe*

Muhammad, Ibtihaj. *The Proudest Blue: A Story of Hijab and Family*
Myers, Walter Dean. *Looking Like Me*
Mini Lessons for Walking Stories

Because of the simple, linear structure of walking stories, teaching them first leaves space for me to focus on mini lessons on several key writing techniques that enhance the quality of personal narrative stories, as well as that of other structures. Depending on what class trends I notice early in the school year and what gaps I see in my students’ writing, I choose a lesson to focus on. I don’t teach all these mini lessons in a row. Using the Plan–Draft–Revise weekly practice writes, students quickly get into the flow of our writing routine. Usually I teach one technique or craft on Draft Day (see page 17 for weekly schedule), and then students practice applying it to their practice writes for several weeks. As often as I can, I use anchor books to introduce and model a specific technique.
Word Choice: Triple-Scoop Words

The simple fact is that interesting words make interesting writing. Many of us could quickly rattle off the most cringe-worthy, overused, and boring words we encounter in children's writing: good, nice, fun, bad, mad, sad, stuff, for a start. I use a lot of analogies when I teach, and triple-scoop words is my reference to word choice. Some other terms I have heard teachers use are “million-dollar words” or “juicy words.” What you call word choice is not important; what is important is that you are encouraging students to expand their vocabulary and take risks in their word choice so that their writing is more interesting to read.

Anchor Books: Word Choice

Banks, Kate. Max's Words
Bryant, Jen. The Right Word: Roget and His Thesaurus
Hutchings, Jessica Lee. Delores Thesaurus
O'Connor, Jane. Fancy Nancy (P)
Reynolds, Peter H. The Word Collector
Rowe, Chelsea H. Ebenezer Has a Word for Everything
Schotter, Roni. The Boy Who Loved Words
Van Slyke, Rebecca. Lexie the Word Wrangler
Wimmer, Sonja. The Word Collector

• Begin the lesson:

  Writers, today we are going to focus on an important thing a writer can do to make sure their writing is interesting—choosing interesting words to include in their writing. If a writer uses boring words, their story will probably be boring, and their reader might just fall asleep!

  (Feel free to add snoring sound effects here)

• Invite students to visualize going to an ice-cream shop and lining up to buy an ice-cream cone. While they wait, they look through the glass case at the buckets to choose what flavors of ice cream to order. Tell them that they really want to order the triple-scoop in a waffle cone, but when they go to order their cone, their mom or dad orders them a kiddie cone. So instead of bubblegum, cotton candy, and sticky chewy chocolate, they get a half a lump of ice cream in a yellow Styrofoam cone. They say thank you but, inside, they were secretly wishing for that triple-scooper!

• Tell students that you have been talking about ice cream, but really you were talking about their writing. Explain that sometimes when you read their writing, you are wishing for some triple-scoop words, but all you get is “little lumps” of words that are not very interesting!

• Brainstorm some single-scoop words: good, nice, fun, bad, sad, mad, stuff, big, small. List them on one side of a T-chart.

• Invite students to think of some triple-scoop words that can be used instead of the words listed. Divide the class into small groups and give each group one of the single-scoop words. Invite them to try to come up with triple-scoop words for that word.

• Results can be made into a class anchor chart or a Triple-Scoop Word Challenge, or students can work on their own Triple-Scoop list. See page 52 for the Triple-Scoop Word Chart template; see page 53 for a template for early primary students.

Principal Sue Stevenson gives each class in her school a single-scoop word written on a paper cut into the shape of a cone. She challenges each class in her school to come up with as many triple-scoop words as they can for their word and displays these in the hall of the school. This challenge could also be done in a class, with cones being given out to small groups of students.
- Read a few of the anchor books on page 40 over the next few weeks.
- Set a goal:

  Writers, for the next few weeks, I would really like to see you trying to include at least three triple-scoop words in your practice write.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>TRIPLE-SCOOP WORDS</th>
<th>SAMPLE</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>big</td>
<td>humungous, gigantic, enormous</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>good</td>
<td>amazing, fantastic, outstanding</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>sad</td>
<td>upset, depressed, devastated</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Interesting Details

“You need to add more details to your sentence.” How many times have we said that to our students? Too many to count! And what I have found is that, if we don’t explicitly show writers what an interesting detail looks like, they make their sentences longer, but the sentences are still boring! I have found that this lesson, which gives students specific words to use when adding details, is foolproof.

- Begin the lesson:

  Writers, today we are going to focus on a way we can work on our Writing Goal #1: making our writing interesting for our readers.

- Explain that you would like to share some of your writing with them and discuss whether they think it is interesting. Have these sentences already written on the whiteboard or chart stand. Read them out loud:

  *I like snow.*
  *I like books.*
  *I like red licorice.*

- Ask students what they think of the writing. (*boring!* Why? (*repetitive, no details, no triple-scoop words*)
- Tell them that you are going to show them how to turn these boring sentences into interesting ones.
- Invite students to write three boring sentences about things they like. (*food, people, sports, activities, animals, etc.*)
I like ___________________
I like ___________________
I like ___________________

• Invite students to read their sentences to a partner in a really boring voice.
• Model how, while they were writing, you added some interesting details to your sentences:

  I like snow because it's fun.
  I like books because they're awesome.
  I like red licorice because it's good.

• Ask students if they think your details make your sentences more interesting. (No) Why not? (Because the writing does not give the reader anything to think about.)
• Explain that when you add details, you need to use a linking word to join the fact with the detail. Ask them what linking word you used. (because) Explain that the word because is a good word to use for answering questions or explaining something, but not a good choice for adding details.
• Model again, asking the students if these are more interesting sentences:

  I like snow. When it snows, I always do a snow dance in the kitchen.
  I like books. Sometimes, I sniff new books in the bookstore.
  I like red licorice. Once, I ate a whole bag in the movie theatre.

• Discuss what happens in our brains when we read these sentences. (we visualize, connect, wonder) Explain that good writing activates the reader’s thinking and gives their brains something to do, and that is what makes the writing more interesting.
• Show students “magic” words that help make sentences more interesting:

  Once (one time)
  If
  When
  Sometimes

• Remind students that the detail you add must connect to the fact. Show examples and discuss:

  I like my friend Jessica. Once upon a time, a dragon broke the castle. (detail doesn't match the fact)
  I like my friend Jessica. Sometimes my brother pinches me. (detail doesn't match)
  I like my friend Jessica. Sometimes Jessica tells funny jokes to make me laugh. (Great!)

• Invite the students to practice making their boring sentences more interesting by using the magic words once, if, when, and sometimes.
• Have students share their interesting sentences with a partner: e.g., I like hockey. One time, I scored the winning goal and got the MVP award.
• Set a goal:

With younger students, I refer to this as “robot writing” and read it aloud in my “robot voice”—flat tone with no expression or intonation.
Writers, for the next few weeks, I would like you to really try to use at least three different magical detail words in your weekly practice write.

**FIVE-FINGER MINI LESSON FOR EARLY AND EMERGENT WRITERS**

The magical detail words may be challenging for beginning writers, so I have adapted a lesson from Lori Jamison Rog that has been successful in many classrooms.

- Write this “story” on the whiteboard or chart stand:

  *I have a cat. The end.*

  - Tell students, “Writers, I wrote a story and I’d like to share it with you.” Read the “story.”
  - Ask students what they think about your story. (*it’s too short, boring, no details*)
  - Ask them what is missing. (*Interesting details!; e.g., name of the cat, color, what the cat likes to do*)
  - Tell students you would like to show them a way to add interesting details to your story.
  - Hold up your hand, one finger at a time, beginning with pointer finger and ending with your thumb. Say: “Topic, Detail, Detail, One time, Feeling.” Repeat this, holding up a finger with each word.
  - Explain that this can help you add to your cat story. Model:

    - **Topic:** I have a cat named Sumo.
    - **Detail:** Sumo is black with white paws and a pink nose.
    - **Detail:** Sumo likes to drink coffee.
    - **One time:** One time, Sumo fell in the bathtub!
    - **Feeling:** I love my cat Sumo.

  - Read the story again and ask students if it is more interesting.
  - Practice the Five Finger Planner orally. Invite students to hold up their hand and think about Topic/Detail/Detail/One time/Feeling they can write about. Invite them to share their story with a partner before beginning their writing.

**STICKY DOT/STOP SIGN MINI LESSON FOR EARLY AND EMERGENT WRITERS**

Another lesson adapted from Lori Jamieson Rog is designed to help beginning writers add details as well as to introduce the concept of punctuation, specifically periods between sentences.

- Begin the lesson:

  Writers, I’ve been thinking I’d like to write a story about something that happened to me. I’m going to write a memory story.

- Model this “story” on the whiteboard or chart stand:

  *Yesterday I went to the park. The end.*

  - Prompt students to read the story and ask them what they think of it. (*short, not interesting, no details*) Ask, “What else would you like to know?” Invite students to ask you questions. (*who did you go with?; what did you do there?*, etc.)
• Introduce the strategy:

Oh, so I need to add more details to my story to make it more interesting. Today we are going to write “sticky dot” details. I’m going to put three sticky dots on my hand. These are going to show me where to add details to my story.

• Model the strategy:

Yesterday I went to the park with my dad.

• Say, “Now I need to add a detail.”

(Place sticky dot on writing)

I went on the swings.

(Place sticky dot on writing)

My dad pushed me really high, up to the sky.

(Place sticky dot on writing)

I was a little scared.

• Talk about the feeling word you added:

When writers add a feeling, it helps their reader make a connection. If your reader makes connections to your writing, it makes it more interesting for them.

• Invite students to write about something from their memory pocket that they did recently at home, at school, at a community centre, at a restaurant, etc. Ask them to think of three sticky-dot details they would like to add. Encourage them to include one feeling detail.

• Before students begin writing, invite them to share their sticky-dot details with a partner.

• Pass out sticky dots (three per student) and ask students to place them onto the top of their hand. Remind them to stick their sticky dots onto their paper after every detail.

• The next week, you can repeat the sticky-dot lesson without actually using the sticky dots. Explain that writers don’t always carry around sticky dots, so they make a little dot with their pencil instead. It’s called a period. If you are able to use your model writing from the previous lesson, remove sticky dots and draw in periods.

• Explain that this dot is like a mini Stop sign and it helps readers know where one idea (sentence) stops and another starts. Remind them that sticky dots are round, so we need to make sure we are leaving a round space after the period before we start our next idea.

• Set a goal:

Writers, this week, try to add a little Stop sign period to show your reader that one idea has stopped and another one is going to start.

This lesson also works well when teaching Event Stories to help with transitions (see page 60); sticky dots can be placed after each transition.
Organization Drawers

Focusing on writing techniques to help make writing interesting can help to improve the quality of your students’ writing; however, it is important to balance your lessons to include ways to support Writing Goal #2: making writing more clear for your reader. Otherwise it's a little like a polishing a beautiful car that has no engine.

- Begin the lesson:

  Writers, today we are going to focus on a way we can work on our Writing Goal #2: making sure writing is clear for your reader. Remember, if your writing is mixed up, then your reader will get mixed up!

- Explain that you will be showing them a way to group their ideas together to help their writing be more organized.
- Draw a chest of drawers on the board, whiteboard, or chart stand. Ask students to visualize their drawers in their bedroom.
- Ask “What is this piece of furniture meant for?” (to keep clothes organized) “How does it help keep the clothes organized?” (the drawers help to group all the same types of clothes together)

  Imagine if there were no drawers to separate your clothes. Everything would be mixed up in one big box. Confusing to find what you need!

- Invite students to visualize their chest of drawers in their bedroom. Describe yours as an example:

  I have socks in my top drawer. They are different colors and different sizes, but the important thing is that they are all socks in the same place.

- Tell students to visualize closing their top drawer and opening the next one.

  What’s inside that one? Maybe it’s your underwear drawer.

    (prepare for giggles)

  They might be different colors but they are all underwear grouped in the same drawer.

- Continue “looking in your drawers” with the class.
- Explain that, just like real drawers help us organize our clothes, as writers, invisible drawers help us organize our writing.
- Model by drawing a large chest of drawers on the whiteboard or chart stand.

  Let’s say I want to write a walking story about my dog.

    (write My Dog on the top of the chest of drawers)

  After deciding my topic, I am going to think about what I want to put in each of my drawers. I have four drawers, so I need four big ideas, one for each of my drawers. What big ideas do I think my readers would like to know about my dog?
The world of nonfiction writing is huge. It is compiled of a wide variety of different text structures to share different kinds of information for various purposes. Whether you are writing a persuasive letter, instructions, or a descriptive report, each form has a specific purpose, unique form or text structure, and particular language features associated with it. Most elementary teachers are familiar with descriptive report writing and, while this type of writing is important, children need exposure to and practice in other forms during their elementary years. In Tony Stead’s book, *Is That A Fact?* (2001), he outlines the different forms of nonfiction children should be learning and practicing in school, including Description, Instruction, Persuasion, Explanation, Biography. In my book *Nonfiction Writing Power* (Pembroke 2014), I added Comparison writing, as students are often asked to compare and contrast subjects in upper grades.

**Nonfiction Writing Forms and Purposes**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Structure</th>
<th>Type of Writing</th>
<th>Purpose</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Description</td>
<td>All-About writing</td>
<td>To give the reader the facts and information about a single topic</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Instruction</td>
<td>How-To writing</td>
<td>To give the reader the step-by-step instructions on how to achieve a specific task or goal</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Persuasion</td>
<td>Make-Me writing</td>
<td>To influence or change the reader’s thoughts or actions</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Comparison</td>
<td>Same–Different writing</td>
<td>To describe to the reader similarities (compare) and differences (contrast) between two or more things</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Explanation</td>
<td>How? Why? writing</td>
<td>To explain to the reader how or why something happens, usually in nature</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Biography</td>
<td>Who’s That? writing</td>
<td>To summarize, in sequence, the main events in a person’s life</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

As I outlined in *Nonfiction Writing Power*, the intention is not for one teacher to teach all six forms of nonfiction writing in a single school year, but ideally to teach two forms per grade. I suggest that a school plan is developed whereby each grade would focus on two different structures and link the structure to a content area you are focusing on. This way, by the time students are moving on to middle or high school, they would have at least some exposure and practice.
in a variety of different structures. In teaching nonfiction writing, I spend time supporting students through several practice writes with non-research topics so that they become familiar with the language and structure. Once students have had practice, I look for ways to link the writing form to a content area that we are focusing on in social studies or science. This usually requires additional lessons and practice in research and note-taking, but the application of writing after the research is complete is much easier because students are already familiar with the writing form. I recommend spending four to six weeks on a specific nonfiction form as each requires its own mini lessons and because, depending on the topic, students might need to spend time researching and gathering information for their writing.

**SAMPLE SCHOOL PLAN FOR TEACHING NONFICTION FORMS**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Grade</th>
<th>Nonfiction Form</th>
<th>Possible Links to Content</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>K</td>
<td>Instruction</td>
<td>Social Studies: How to dress in _______ (Season)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Description</td>
<td>Science: Describe an insect</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Instruction</td>
<td>Social Studies: How to help in your community</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Comparison</td>
<td>Science: Compare living and nonliving things</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Persuasion</td>
<td>Social Studies: Persuasive letter to support a school event</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Explanation</td>
<td>Science: Explain the water cycle</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Instruction</td>
<td>Social Studies: How to have a Smudging Ceremony (Potlatch, Sharing Circle)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Biography</td>
<td>Science: The life of a famous scientist or inventor</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>Explanation</td>
<td>Social Studies: Explain the impact of colonization</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Comparison</td>
<td>Science: Comparing two biomes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>Comparison</td>
<td>Social Studies: Compare two different regions in Canada</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Persuasion</td>
<td>Science: Which extreme weather is the most dangerous? (persuasion in first person)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>Biography</td>
<td>Social Studies: Biography of a change agent</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Explanation</td>
<td>Science: Explain basic function of one body system</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>Comparison</td>
<td>Social Studies: Compare early humans, ancient civilizations, or ancient inventions</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Persuasion</td>
<td>Science: Persuasive letter about a social issue; e.g., climate change, poverty, homelessness</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

You will find more detailed lessons in all six nonfiction forms in my book *Nonfiction Writing Power* (Pembroke, 2014).

**NONFICTION WRITING ASSESSMENT**

The rubric on page 69 can be used to assess any of the nonfiction forms. While it is not text-structure specific, it does assess whether a student has communicated the information clearly and demonstrates a basic understanding of nonfiction text structure and language.
Introducing Nonfiction Writing

You will find specific rubrics for each nonfiction text structure in my book *Nonfiction Writing Power* (Pembroke, 2018).

Depending on the grade you teach and how many books you have for the lesson, try mixing up the different types of texts and divide the books among groups of students to sort. Groups should be able to name and explain their categories.

### Nonfiction Assessment Rubric

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Description</th>
<th>Approaching</th>
<th>Developing</th>
<th>Applying</th>
<th>Extending</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Meaning</strong></td>
<td>Writing communicates information clearly: topic is clear; easy to follow; centred around a main idea or purpose; provides accurate information with supporting details and examples.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Style</strong></td>
<td>Writing is engaging: evidence of writing techniques, including clear beginning and ending; interesting details; effective word choice; variety of sentence length.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Form</strong></td>
<td>Writing is organized: effective use of structure; information is organized and grouped clearly; effective use of transition words; includes relevant text features where applicable.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Language</strong></td>
<td>Writing is effective: effective use of language features specific to text structure.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Conventions</strong></td>
<td>Writing is clear: accurate spelling of high-frequency words; evidence of appropriate punctuation and spacing.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### Introducing Nonfiction Writing

Before launching into one of the nonfiction forms, I like to do a lesson introducing students to nonfiction text structure and a lesson on text features. Both lessons help students learn important key elements of all nonfiction texts and what makes information writing different from narrative and story writing.

#### Text Structures

Prior to this lesson, visit your school or local library and gather several examples of each of the different nonfiction writing forms, along with picture book, a chapter book, and a novel.

- **Description**: “all-about” books describing animals, insects, countries, seasons, etc.
- **Instruction**: “how-to” books about cooking, drawing, crafts, sports, etc.
- **Persuasion**: persuasive books, brochures, catalogues. Some fiction titles will work for this as well; e.g., *I Wanna Iguana* by Karen Orloff or *Earrings!* by Judith Viorst
- **Comparison**: nonfiction books comparing subjects. The *Who Would Win?* series by Jerry Pallotta is a popular example.
- **Explanation**: books explaining scientific phenomenon, usually with “How” or “Why” in the title; e.g., the *I Wonder Why?* series by Kingfisher
- **Biography**: book about a famous person (explorer, scientist, athlete, entertainer, etc.)
• Begin the lesson:

Writers, today I would like to explore some different types of writing with you. I have gathered books from our library that I would like to share with you.

• Hold up the fiction books. Ask students what is different about the three books. (different stories; different sizes; hardcover vs. soft cover; picture book, chapter book, novel; some have pictures, some don’t; etc.)

• Explain that even though the books are different in many ways, they have something in common. Ask students what they think is the same about these books. (all fiction; all have characters, setting, problem, solution, ending) Depending on the grade, you may need to prompt a little for these answers.

• Tell students that fiction books, while they tell different stories, share a similar inner structure or skeleton. Writers know that, if they are going to write a story, they need to use the story structure, in which a character in a setting has a problem and the problem gets solved.

• I like to explain text structure by using the analogy of building a house. When you build a house, you don’t start by buying the furniture or putting up the artwork. You begin with the frame, the structure that holds the entire house together. Once the frame is secure, then the walls, furniture, and paintings have a place to go. Writers are like builders—they need to start with a solid frame or else their writing will fall apart.

• Hold up the description books. Ask students what is similar (all information books, nonfiction) and different about them. (different information; e.g., one is about bears, one is about trains, and one is about Japan)

• Explain that these books tell the reader all about a topic. They are called description books and they have their own special structure or frame. Start an anchor chart to list the different structures.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Fiction</th>
<th>Nonfiction</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Characters</td>
<td>Description</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Setting</td>
<td>Instruction</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Problem</td>
<td>Persuasion</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Solution</td>
<td>Comparison</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Beginning–Middle–End</td>
<td>Explanation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Biography</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Magazines like the Owl group—Chirp, Chickadee, and OWL—are great resources for teaching text structure. They often include a wide variety of text structures, including cartoons, recipes, crafts, nonfiction descriptions, poems, and scientific explanations. Invite children to use sticky notes to identify the different structures they find.

• Hold up the instruction books. Ask students what is different about them. (different information; e.g., one is about making cookies, one is about making crafts, one is about playing hockey). Ask students what is the same about them. (all how-to books)

• Explain that these books tell the reader how to do something or make something. They are called instruction books and they have a different structure or skeleton. Add this word to the anchor chart.

• Continue holding up different groups of books and discussing their structure and purpose.

Persuasion: information books stating an opinion or point of view that try to convince the reader.
Comparison: information books comparing two or more topics, how they are the same and how they are different

Explanation: information books explaining how or why something happens, usually something in science and nature: e.g., How do clouds form? Why are some eggs brown and some blue?

Biography: information books that tell about the lives of important or famous persons

- End the lesson by reflecting on the fact that fiction writing has one main structure for telling stories, but that nonfiction writing has many different structures, depending on what information is being shared. Knowing the structure before you start to write helps writers to organize their ideas and makes the writing clearer.
- Use the Nonfiction Text Structures template on page 74 and invite students to use visuals of book covers with titles showing each of the different text structures.

Grade 5: Nonfiction text structures

Text Features

One of the most significant differences between fiction and nonfiction texts can be seen when you open up the books and compare them visually. Fiction books have text with or without illustrations; nonfiction texts represent and present information in different ways through a variety of text features. Nonfiction features are an essential part of information texts and are included to help readers better locate, navigate, access, and ultimately understand the information. As writers of nonfiction, students need to understand the purpose of text features and know how to create them as a way of representing information more clearly to their readers.

Prior to the lesson, pair up several sets of fiction and nonfiction books from the library: e.g., *The Very Busy Spider* by Eric Carle and a nonfiction book about spiders; *Owl Babies* by Martin Waddell and a nonfiction book about owls; * Bringing in the New Year* by Grace Lin and nonfiction book about Chinese New Year.
• Begin the lesson:

Writers, today we are going to continue exploring fiction and nonfiction books together. Yesterday we talked about different nonfiction text structures.

(you may wish to review them)

Today we are going to talk about text features.

• Hold up two books on the same topic, one fiction and one nonfiction. (I like Make Way for Ducklings by Robert McCloskey and Watch Me Grow: Ducklings from DK Publishing.) Ask students how the two books are the same. (both about ducks; both have titles, pictures) Ask students how the two books are different. (photographs vs. illustrations; fiction vs. nonfiction; story vs. information; titles are different)

• Open the books to the middle and show the inside of the books. Ask the same two questions: How are they the same? How are they different? Ask students what they notice about the way the books look on the inside. (fiction: same size text and illustrations on every page; nonfiction: many different visuals on the page, different size fonts, words are in different places, etc.) Depending on the books you have and the grade you teach, you may have students start to identify some of the different features; e.g., map, chart, fact box, Venn diagram, etc.

• Continue the lesson:

Now we understand that fiction and nonfiction books are about different things, and we are noticing that they also look very different. We’ve noticed that pages of fiction books have words or words and pictures, but pages of nonfiction books have many different things on the pages—maps, charts, headings, fact boxes. These are called nonfiction text features and they are a very important part of nonfiction writing.

• Pass out paired picture books (one fiction and one nonfiction on the same topic) to pairs of students and invite them to look through the books side-by-side, noticing similarities and differences, and paying special attention to different text features

• Come together as a class to create an anchor chart listing the nonfiction features that students have identified, along with their purpose.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Feature</th>
<th>Purpose</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Map</td>
<td>To show location: e.g., animal habitat, bodies of water</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Web</td>
<td>To list connected items: e.g., list of food an animal eats</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Diagrams and labels</td>
<td>To describe features of something: e.g., parts of a shark</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Venn diagram</td>
<td>To compare two things: e.g., wasps and bees</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Seymour Simon is the author of more than 200 science books for children and, while his books include amazing facts and photographs, he does not use any text features. If you want to find something in one of his books, you basically need to read every page! I like to use his books when I am teaching text features to highlight how difficult it is to read information without any features to help readers locate and navigate. Depending on what grade you teach, you can have your students “help Seymour Simon” by creating text features for his early reader books. More detailed lessons on using text features can be found in Nonfiction Writing Power (Gear, 2014).
• Once you have created the anchor chart, ask students the all-important question: Why? Why do nonfiction texts have all these text features and fiction texts don't?
• Show students the two samples in Which Is Easier to Read? on page 75; if possible, project them one at a time onto an interactive whiteboard or screen. Ask students which one is easier to read. (Venn) Why? (fewer words; facts are sorted; information is clearer)
• Explain that nonfiction writers use text features to make information easier for their readers to access. Explain that students will be learning to use text features in their fact-pocket writing to help their readers access facts more quickly and easily.

LESSON EXTENSION
• Create Nonfiction Feature Dictionaries with your class. Fold three pieces of white legal paper in half and staple in the centre. Students can choose six different nonfiction text features to draw, color and label in these blank mini books.
Nonfiction Text Structures

Name: ________________________________

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Description</th>
<th>Instruction</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Persuasion</th>
<th>Comparison</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Explanation</th>
<th>Biography</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Which is Easier to Read?

Cats and Bunnies

Cats and bunnies have many similarities and differences. Both are mammals that are covered in fur. Both also have whiskers and a tail, and are similar in size. People enjoy having both cats and bunnies as pets. They are relatively clean animals and come in a variety of colors.

When comparing differences in appearance, you would notice the different ears and tail. Cats have long thin tails, while bunnies have short fluffy tails. Cats also have short triangle ears, while bunnies have long floppy ears. Cats make sounds like purring, meowing or howling sounds, while bunnies don't make any sound at all. Cats also like to eat mice, but bunnies eat vegetables, such as carrots and lettuce. Cats have sharp claws and sharp teeth, but bunnies have long, square teeth. Cats are a symbol of Halloween and bunnies are a symbol of Easter.
Index

3-2-1 Check It, 24–25
ABC books, 87
All About, 90
Alphabet Book Planning, 94
anchor books
  balanced writing program, 19
  biography writing, 154, 160
  comparison writing, 134
  descriptive writing, 77
  event stories, 57, 60, 62
  explanatory writing, 145
  instructional writing, 95, 100–101, 102, 103–104, 105
  persuasive writing, 114, 125, 126
  story writing, 168–169
  walking stories, 37, 38–39, 40, 47, 49, 50
Animal Comparison, 144
animals
  comparison writing, 139
  descriptive writing, 86
  instructional writing, 101–102
Assessment Summary Sheet, 26
authors, 161
balanced writing program
  anchor books, 19
  elements, 13–14
  formative writing assessment, 14
  independent writing, 18–19
  mentor texts, 19
  mini lessons, 17
  responsive teaching, 14
  word work, 17–18
  writing conferences, 19–20
  writing goals, 15–16
  writing joy, 14–15
  writing routine, 16–17
Biography of a Famous Person
  Primary, 166
  template, 165
Biography of Classmate, 164
biography writing
  anchor books, 154, 160
  author biographies, 161
  change agents, 159–160
  classmates, 156–158
  described, 154
  introductory lesson, 155
  mini lessons, 156–158
  past lessons, 156
  science, 158–159
  social studies, 158–159
  timelines, 156
Brain Pockets / Brain Pocket Writing
  anchor books, 12
  described, 8
  introducing, 11–13
  introductory lesson, 12–13
  template, 31
  writing structure, 9–13
bubblegum letters, 124
catalogues, 124
Champion for Change, 167
change agents, 159–160
character development
  described, 172–173, 176–177
  template, 184
“cherry-picking” teaching, 7
closing phrases, 85
coaching, 20
Comparison Planning Page
  Primary, 143
  template, 142
comparison writing
  anchor books, 134
  animals, 139
  described, 134
  early humans/civilizations, 139–140
  independent practice, 137–138

Index 193
introductory lesson, 134–136
language, 136–137
mini lessons, 136–138
science, 139
social studies, 139–140
structure, 135–136
topics, 138
crediting sources, 85
Cycle Flow Chart, 152
dash facts
  described, 78–80
  template, 88
descriptive writing
  ABC books, 87
  anchor books, 77
  Canadian animal posters, 86
  crediting sources, 85
dash facts research, 78–80
described, 76
effective endings, 83–85
great beginning, 81–83
introductory lesson, 77–78
mini lessons, 78–85
putting facts together, 80–81
science, 85–86
social studies, 86
“too much icing”, 83
diamond plan, 119
Draft Day
  In the Zone, 23–24
  mini lesson, 23
  partner share, 23
editing, 24–25
endings
  descriptive writing, 83–85
  persuasive writing, 122–124
  story writing, 178–179
event stories
  anchor books, 57, 60, 62
  assessment rubric, 38, 58
deconstructing, 58
  described, 37, 57
effective event story endings, 63–64
introductory lessons, 58–60
mini lessons, 60–64
planning, 58–60
stretching the moment, 62–63
transition words, 60–62
Event Story Planner
  Primary, 66
  template, 65
expert writing, 99–101
Explanation Flow Chart, 150–151
Explanation Structure, 153
explanatory writing
  anchor books, 145
described, 145
flow charts and diagrams, 147–148
introductory lesson, 145–147
mini lessons, 147–148
modeling, 147
sample, 149
structure, 146, 147
topics, 148
Fact or Detail: Cut and Sort, 89
Fact Pockets
  biography writing, 154–167
described, 10, 67
descriptive writing, 76–94
explanatory writing, 145–153
instructional writing, 95–113
nonfiction writing, 67–75
persuasive writing, 114–133
facts
  dash facts, 78–80
  fancy fact starters, 83
Finding Your Voice, 92
flow charts and diagrams, 147–148
formative writing assessment, 14
great beginnings, 81–83
The Greatest Invention Planning Page, 133
The Greatest Planning Page, 132
GUM It strategy, 18
handle sentence, 46
Hook Your Reader, 91
hooking readers, 81–83, 174–175
How To
  Early Primary, 109
template, 106
How to Be an Animal
  Planning Page, 110
  Primary, 111
How to Dress, 112–113
Imagination Pockets
described, 10
story writing, 168–181
In the Zone, 23–24
independent practice, 137–138
independent writing, 18–19
Indigenous culture
story writing, 171–172, 179–181
ways of knowing, 104–105
instructional writing
anchor books, 95, 100–101, 102, 103–104, 105
animals, 101–102
described, 95
expert writing, 99–101
Indigenous ways of knowing, 104–105
introductory lesson, 96–97
mini lessons, 97–101
people, 103
SAD formula, 97–98
text features, 98–99
tips, 99
interesting details
described, 41–43
five-finger mini lesson, 43
sticky dot/stop sign mini lesson, 43–44
introductions
descriptive writing, 81–83
persuasive writing, 119–121
inventions, 125–126
Let's Get Organized, 55
List Plan, 35

Memory Pockets
assessment rubric, 38
described, 10
event stories, 57–66
walking stories, 37–56
mentor texts, 19
micro-teaching, 17
mini lessons
balanced writing program, 17
biography writing, 156–158
comparison writing, 136–138
descriptive writing, 78–85
event stories, 60–64
explanatory writing, 147–148
instructional writing, 97–101
story writing, 170–181
walking stories, 39–51
No-Excuse lists, 17–18
No-Excuse Words
Grade 1, 27
Grade 2, 27
Grade 3, 28
Grade 4, 29
Grades 5–7, 30
Nonfiction Text Structures, 74
nonfiction writing
anchor chart, 70, 72
assessment rubric, 68–69
biography writing, 154–167
comparison writing, 134–144
described, 67–68
descriptive writing, 76–94
explanatory writing, 145–153
forms and purposes, 67
instructional writing, 95–113
introducing, 69–73
nonfiction writing, 67–75
persuasive writing, 114–133
sample school plan, 68
text features, 71–73
text structures, 69–71
organization drawer, 45–46
partner share, 23
Pass the Senses, 47
people
famous, 124–125
how to be, 103–104
personal narrative
assessment rubric, 38
described, 37
event stories, 57–66
walking stories, 37–56
personification, 50–51
The Persuasive Diamond Plan, 130
The Persuasive Sandwich Plan, 129
persuasive writing
anchor books, 114, 125, 126
bubblegum letters, 124
catalogues, 124
described, 114
diamond plan, 119
effective endings, 122–124
effective introductions, 119–121
everyday inventions, 125–126
famous people, 124–125
features, 117
focusing on why, 121–122
introductory lesson, 115
language, 116–117
mini lessons, 116–124
positive versus negative, 116–117
sandwich plan, 117–119
secrets of success, 116
TSN technique, 122–123
wrap-up formula, 123–124
Persuasive Writing Planning Sheet, 128
Picture Plan, 33
Picture Plan Plus, 36
plot, 173
poetry, 10, 11
Primary Persuasive Planning Page, 131
Primary Story Planning, 187
responsive teaching, 14
revising, 24–25
SAD formula, 97–98
sandwich plan, 117–119
science
biography writing, 158–159
comparison writing, 139
descriptive writing, 85–86
instructional writing, 104
sensory detail, 46–48
Simile and You Will See!, 54
similes, 48–50
single-scoop words, 40
Six Senses Planning, 56
Smokin’ Pencils, 19
social studies
biography writing, 158–159
comparison writing, 139–140
descriptive writing, 86
instructional writing, 103–104
Somebody/Wanted/But/So/Then, 183
Source Your Resource, 93
Story Booklet Spread, 188
story structure, 170–172
Story Structure
Primary, 183
template, 182
story writing
anchor books, 169, 170
assessment rubric, 169
classroom development, 172–173
described, 168
introductory lesson, 169–170
mini lessons, 170–181
plot planning, 173
process, 174–181
“what’s the problem?”, 170–171
story-writing process
character development, 176–177
early primary adaption, 181
ending, 178–179
hook, 174–175
Indigenous focus, 179–181
pacing, 175–176
problem introduction, 177–178
problem solving, 178
stretching the moment, 62–63
Student Writing Goals, 32
superhero writing, 125
text features
fiction versus nonfiction, 71–73
instructional writing, 98–99
text structures, 69–71
Timeline template, 163
Timeline Planning Sheet, 162
timelines, 156
tip words, 99
“too much icing”, 83
transition words, 60–62, 117, 177
Triple-Scoop Word Chart
Primary, 53
template, 52
triple-scoop words, 40–41
TSN technique, 122–123
Venn Diagram for Comparing, 141
walking stories
anchor books, 37, 38–39, 40, 47, 49, 50
assessment rubric, 38
described, 37
interesting details, 41–44
mini lessons, 39–51
organization drawers, 45–46
personification, 50–51
sensory detail, 46–48
similes, 48–50
word choice: triple-scoop words, 40–41
Web Plan, 34
Weekly Practice Writes
described, 21
Draft Day, 23–24
Index

editing, 24–25
implementing, 21–25
introductory lesson, 22
planning, 22–23
revising, 24–25
What’s the Hook?, 127
What’s the Problem?
Primary, 185
template, 184
Which Is Easier to Read?, 75
word choice, 40–41
word work, 17–18
wrap-up formula, 123–124
writer’s voice, 82–83
writing conferences, 19–20
writing goals, 15–16
writing joy, 14–15
writing routine, 16–17
writing structures
Brain Pockets, 9–13
described, 9–10
writing workshop, 21
This timely book uses thinking structures to deepen student writing. Powerful Writing Structures revolves around “brain pockets” to help students become familiar with the qualities of different writing forms. They learn to access memory pockets for personal narrative writing, fact pockets for writing nonfiction, and imagination pockets for story writing.

The thinking strategies in this practical resource focus on using structural aspects of writing forms to inspire and inform students learning to write. Detailed lesson plans revolve around anchor books and include sample student work from real classrooms, book lists, and assessment rubrics. Based on extensive classroom testing, this comprehensive approach to developing a balanced year-long writing program includes tips for implementing weekly writing practice and for using different forms of writing in the content areas.

This valuable resource shows teachers how to set up an effective writing program that focuses on process rather than product. The book includes:

- Lessons to introduce different forms of writing, including six types of nonfiction, personal narrative, and story
- Mini lessons on writing structure, language, and writer’s craft so that students can carry skills forward into writing practice
- Book lists of the best children’s books to anchor, support, and extend lessons
- Student examples that illustrate how strategies work in real classrooms

From writing goals to writing joy, Powerful Writing Structures helps teachers guide students through the skills, the structures, the language, and the beauty of effective writing.

Adrienne Gear has been teaching in Vancouver for more than twenty-five years. She remains grounded in classrooms and provides workshops, demonstration lessons, and leadership training to teachers throughout North America. Her international experience includes speaking in the U.S., U.K., Australia, and Sweden. Passionate about literacy and learning, Adrienne is the author of the popular ‘POWER’ series on reading and writing instruction. Adrienne lives in Vancouver with her husband and two sons.