



Elements for Better Writing from the *Writing Next Report*: A Closer Look at Collaborative Writing and Specific Product Goals

Part 3 of a 7 part series

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At the beginning of 2007, the Alliance for Excellent Education released a publication called *Writing Next: Effective Strategies to Improve Writing of Adolescents in Middle and High Schools*. This report examined research studies to find out what strategies were most effective for improving students' writing. Part One of this series <http://literacy.kent.edu/Oasis/Pubs/0200-27.pdf> contains a brief summary of the *Writing Next* report and a list of the recommended elements for improving students' writing. Part Two of this series takes a closer look at the first two of the recommended elements, Writing Strategies and Summarization, and offers suggestions for instruction <http://literacy.kent.edu/Oasis/Pubs/0200-28.pdf>. Part Three of this series examines two more elements for effective writing, Collaborative Writing and Specific Product Goals.



Collaborative Writing

Collaborative writing happens when students plan, draft, revise, and edit their compositions together, which is the way writing often happens in the "real world." The research examined for the *Writing Next* report shows that collaborative writing improved students' writing more effectively than when students wrote alone. As students become more comfortable and proficient writing with their peers, it may be easier for them to move toward writing independently.

A common collaborative writing activity is a class GED essay. Students brainstorm topics and choose one. Students are given the GED essay rubric to guide their writing. The teacher writes on the board or a flip chart as the students work together and dictate the sentences for the essay. The resulting essay can then be typed and copied for each student. Students could also work collaboratively to use the rubric to discuss the quality of sample GED essays. These sample essays are often found in GED practice books.

Poetry is another type of writing that students enjoy writing collaboratively. Teachers can give students a short phrase, for example "I feel great when...." After each student finishes the phrase with his or her own words the teacher and students work together to construct a poem from all the sentences. The Copy/Change strategy http://literacy.kent.edu/eureka/strategies/copy_change.pdf also works well for poetry. In this strategy students use another author's pattern as a framework for their own writing. Exam-

ples of poems that work well with the Copy/Change strategy are Judith Viorst's (1981) "If I Were in Charge of the World," Kaye Starbird's (1960) "Speaking of Cows," William Carlos Williams' "The Red Wheelbarrow," or Joyce Carol Thomas (1998) *I Have Heard of a Land*. For more suggestions on using poetry, read the OLRC publication "Poetry in the Adult Literacy Classroom" at <http://literacy.kent.edu/Oasis/Pubs/0300-26.pdf>.

During any type of collaborative writing, the teacher acts as a writing "advisor" to each group by answering their questions or making suggestions. Strategies for collaboration can be found in Eureka! at http://literacy.kent.edu/eureka/strategies/strategies_collab.pdf.

Specific Product Goals

When students are given, or develop, specific goals to achieve with their compositions, the quality of those compositions improves.

Goals and subgoals guide the writer as he or she plans the composition and writes. The goals and subgoals help the writer make decisions about how to approach the topic, what kind of information to include, and how to organize that information. For example, the student's goal may be to write about Christmas at her grandmother's house. The subgoals for this student could include writing about one specific person at her grandmother's house, writing the piece in a humorous way, and using descriptive language to talk about this person.

The benchmarks that make up the Ohio ABE writing standard and components of performance <http://www.ode.state.oh.us/GD/Templates/Pages/ODE/ODEDetail.aspx?Page=3&TopicRelationID=966&Content=36143> could be used to help students set subgoals. Examples of benchmarks that could be used in this way include: the type of organizational pattern to use, the audience the composition is intended for, the choice of a topic, the purpose of the composition, focusing on one topic, and providing support for the topic.

References

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