



## Elements for better writing from the *Writing Next* report: A closer look at Strategies and Summarizing

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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> contained a brief summary of the *Writing Next* report and a list of the recommended elements for improving students' writing. This article will take a closer look at the first two of the recommended elements, Writing Strategies and Summarizing, and make suggestions for instruction.



### Writing Strategies

When skilled writers write they use a variety of strategies to help them plan, draft, revise and edit their compositions. Explicitly and systematically teaching these strategies to struggling writers in the context of their writing has a positive effect on the quality of their writing. These can be general strategies like brainstorming, using invented spellings, or using a graphic organizer. They can also be more specific like the steps for writing a 5-paragraph essay or writing a descriptive paragraph.

Examples and descriptions of several helpful strategies for writers can be found on-line in Eureka! at <http://literacy.kent.edu/eureka/strategies/strategies.html>.

Skilled writers also use a type of strategy called "self-regulation" to help themselves stay on task, eliminate distractions, and produce more writing. By introducing these strategies to our students and helping them learn to use these strategies independently, we are helping them become better writers. The self regulation strategies can be grouped into three categories: environmental, behavioral, and personal (Zimmerman & Risemberg, 1997).

The environmental strategies are used to control the writer's physical or social setting in which he or she is writing. These strategies could include things like using a certain kind of pen or paper, having a certain kind of music playing in the background, bouncing ideas off a friend as the writer writes, using models of good writing to guide his or her own writing, or asking for help from a teacher or tutor.

The behavioral strategies are used to regulate the actual act of writing (motor activities associated with writing). These strategies could include the writer saying aloud what he or she will do next, reading text aloud to hear how it sounds, rewarding him or herself for producing a certain amount of text, or keeping track of how many words or pages are written at each session to see if progress is being made.

The personal strategies are used to help a writer increase his or her effectiveness. These strategies could include setting a goal to write for a certain length of time or to produce a certain amount of text, setting his or her own standards to judge the quality of the writing, setting aside a certain time of day to write and making sure nothing interrupts this writing time. If the writer is doing creative writing, he or she could imagine the setting, characters, and plot for the story before beginning to write.

Teachers could talk about how they use these strategies for their own writing, help each student decide which strategy he or she would like to try, and then support the students as they practice the strategy when they write.

### Summarizing

In order for struggling writers to improve the summaries they write, they need to be explicitly and systematically taught how to summarize texts. One way to do this is through models. Students can read a selection and then be

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shown a well written summary of the information. The teacher can engage students in a discussion about what was included or left out of the summary and why. This can be done several times with various types of text, both fiction and non-fiction.

As a next step, the students could read a selection, then construct a summary as a group with the teacher recording student contributions on the board, chart paper, or an overhead. As students become more comfortable with summarization, they could work in pairs and then on their own.

One example of a strategy to help students think about what to include in a summary is Magnet Summaries. The description of this strategy can be found on-line in Eureka! at [http://literacy.kent.edu/eureka/strategies/magnet\\_summaries.pdf](http://literacy.kent.edu/eureka/strategies/magnet_summaries.pdf)

## **References**

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