Handbook of Practical Reading & Writing Strategies

Model Lessons Submitted by Participants of “Thinking Strategies for Writing Across the Content Areas”
Dr. James L. Collins, Instructor
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Word Patterns Used for Descriptive Writing: Strategies for Teaching Students How to Write Descriptive Sentences and Paragraphs

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Introduction

This strategy is used as part of a fifth grade classroom in Akron Elementary School. The students' abilities range from special education needs to regular education students. The special education students in the classroom receive support from a resource room teacher who pushes into and pulls out of the classroom. Through using this strategy, all students are given the chance to succeed in adding adjectives to their writing and form word patterns such as adjective, adjective noun.

This strategy should be used after the students have an understanding of what a noun and an adjective are. During the month of September, these concepts may be reviewed and ten the patterns may be started, after the concepts are fully understood.

Step 1: Identifying the Strategy

The objective of this lesson is for the students to be able to write a paragraph using descriptive sentences by combining adjectives and nouns into word patterns.

To introduce this strategy, you will need to supply a picture for the students to look at. The picture should be interesting and have plenty of details. Possible pictures would be of seasonal pictures, setting pictures,
subject specific pictures, or even a snapshot picture blown up on the overhead. Be sure the picture is large enough and colorful enough for the students to see and pick the details out of.

A picture is used in the first few lessons, as a visual stimulus to get the students thinking and focus their writing. To complete the lesson, the students must understand a noun is a person, place, thing, or idea and that an adjective describes a noun. This lesson then takes the students to the application level of learning. They are no longer required to simply identify the nouns and adjectives in a sentence; rather, they are required to supply the nouns and adjectives to develop sentences and eventually paragraphs.

Using this strategy, the students are given the opportunity to see how their work is progressing and, how others will describe the same picture differently.

**Step 2: Model the Strategy**

Hang a picture in the front of the room for all the students to see. Have them fold a piece of lined paper in half the long way. The right hand side of the paper should be labeled nouns and the left side should be labeled adjectives. Another option is to use the included think sheet for this step.

After the students have been given time to look at the picture, have them fold the paper in half so they are only looking at the nouns side. Ask them to write 10 nouns they saw in the picture on this side of the paper. When each of the students has had time to write the 10 nouns down, ask them for examples of nouns they saw. As the students tell you the nouns, it is a good idea to write them in a class list on the overhead, on chart paper, or on the chalkboard.

Upon completion of the list of nouns, instruct students to open their papers flat. Along the fold of the paper, they should see a list of nouns. For each noun the students have written down, on the left side of the fold, they should write one adjective, from the picture to describe each noun.

After the students have had time to complete this task individually, ask for examples. Complete a class list of adjectives used to describe the class list of nouns. As the students hear various adjectives, they may add them to their own lists. They should have one or two adjectives in front of each noun they had on their list.
Now that the students have this list, they are ready to write their sentences. Some example sentences after looking at a scene of life on the desert may read:

The large, gray elephant cared for her young.
A spotted, lean cheetah darted through the dry, yellow grass.

Step 3: Scaffolding the Strategy
After the students have written a few sentences using the adjective, adjective noun pattern, they should then be ready to begin piecing the sentences to form a descriptive paragraph.

When the paragraphing is completed, the students should underline the nouns in one color and the adjectives in another. This will allow them to see the patterns they used to add description to their writing. Eventually, the students should reach the level of self-regulation. When this point is reached, they will no longer need the picture as a prompt, nor will they need to underline the nouns in adjectives in their writing, the descriptions will just become a habit. However, the type of adjectives used may need to be monitored. Students will tend to use "simple" words. I call these words $10.00 words. The students are encouraged to use more expensive words as time goes on.

Step 4: Providing Additional Practice
This strategy is not only developed for a "writing lesson." This can be used in science, for instance with a picture of the Solar System. The students can write a descriptive paragraph describing the planets, using the adjective, adjective noun pattern. In social studies, the students could write a descriptive paragraph about a battle scene. These make for nice displays around the classroom. Particularly if one color is used to underline the nouns, and one color is used to underline the adjectives.

Along with the descriptive writing aspect, this lesson can also be extended into comma usage. This is another difficult concept for students and this is an opportunity to reinforce it.
THINKSHEET
Using Word Patterns for Descriptive Writing

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Adjectives</th>
<th>Nouns</th>
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Boxcar Building:
A Strategy for Teaching Students How to Improve Their Detail Finding Skills for Comprehension Analysis

Amy R. Traynor
Queen of Martyrs School

Introduction
My Fifth grade textbook is set up with a collection of short stories, poems, and book excerpts in a numbered series. This lesson involves teaching students to recognize all the important details within a short story to increase their essay writing and comprehension skills. Many times, after reading a piece of literature, students can orally give important details from this piece but can not incorporate these into an essay or fail to include all important details in their written word. This lesson helps them organize and recognize these details first before completing their written work. This strategy is designed for a fifth grade classroom, but may be incorporated into numerous grade levels.

Step 1: Identifying the Strategy
The goal of this lesson is to develop within the student the ability to recognize the important facts and details within a written story to better increase their comprehension ability and essay writing skills. Students often read a story, whether independently or orally, and are able to recall details and facts through a follow-up discussion, but cannot transfer or find these same details on their own. This thus has a negative effect on a written response and the ability to judge the amount of individual learning and understanding that has occurred. This strategy aims to teach students how to
find, organize, and put to use all those details into their own written work. It also incorporates the use of transition words and adjectives to make their written work flow and remain creative. The strategy is called, “Boxcar Building,” so children will be able to see the “connection” among all their details when writing. This strategy is implemented with students by giving them a visual picture and form to follow for their organization, as on the think sheet at the end of this chapter.

**Step 2: Modeling the Strategy**

I modeled the “Boxcar Build” strategy by first having the children complete the reading of their short story in the Reading series we use in our classroom, both orally as a group and independently. Upon its completion, I assigned the students one of the “Think About It” questions that follow at the completion of each story and pertain to a specific thinking level and question type. For the example I have attached to this strategy packet, the question asked the children to compare and contrast our way of life today with that of their grandparents in the 1920’s and 1930’s. This question related to the story we had just completed entitled, “When Your Grandparents Were Growing Up.” The question asked the children to focus on the categories of sports, transportation, medicine, and appliances. When I assigned the question, I gave students the instructions to answer with complete sentences and to use their text to pull any forgotten information when forming their answers. When the children turned in their responses the next day, I received a wide range of work. Some of the children handed in answers with four sentences written (see Example 1 attached to this packet), others a whole page. Some children used some facts from the story, others used their own facts, with no supplement from our reading. Their answers reflected a difference in effort, as well as recall and ability, to use the facts we had discussed in their writing.

After the children had answered the question on their own, I handed out four “Boxcar Building” think sheets to each student, one for each of the topics the question had asked the students to cover (transportation, sports, medicine, appliances). I modeled for the children how the boxcars were to be used, one boxcar for each fact on the topic, written on the left hand side of their think sheet. These facts were to come directly from the short story we had completed. I also stressed that not all the topics would use all the boxcars available. Together as a group, we wrote the topic on top and proceeded to look up the facts that related to it from our short story, writing each in an
individual boxcar on the left as we went along. In between the boxcar, I had drawn a connecting arrow. I showed the children that this was for reminding them that they would be writing these new found facts the author supplied, in their own words, on the right hand side of their think sheet. I also show them that the lines in between the boxcars on the right were for any transition words that would or could lead us from one of their worded facts to the other when writing our final essays. I also showed he students a blank box in the top right hand corner of their think sheet. This will be used for any additional transition words we uncovered together or independently, as well as any adjectives they will independently use to set their final essay apart from the other students in the class. We completed all four topics using the same procedure as above and using a separate think sheet for each topic. When this is through, we orally discuss how their "new" essay would be set up and written, by orally combining all boxcars and transition words on the right hand side into one.

Step 3: Scaffolding the Strategy

After the group work is complete on recognizing and writing all the facts and details needed to answer the question given, I give the students time to go back and rewrite their first answer a second time using the think sheets and transition words we have used (see Example 2 attached in this packet). I circulate around the room and make it a point to stress to the students, for this essay in particular, that even though we have uncovered the information as a class, the order of their essay topics, the adjectives used and the length, will set their essay apart from their classmates when re-read the second time. I also remind them to think of the train and its purpose, thus triggering the strategy and allowing them to make the logical connections.

Step 4: Providing Additional Practice

Throughout the year, and with future Reading stories and comprehension questions, I provide the children with the Boxcar think sheet to use independently on their own when writing for organization and details, until the children have a strong enough foundation on their own. This think sheet can easily be adapted for other content area subjects as the year proceeds.
Boxcar Build

Written Example #1

Martha

1. My life is different from Eda LeShan's because there are better cars, more sports, televisions, VCRs, better radios, Cd's, Cd players, DVDs, and dishwashers.
Boxcar Build

Written Example #2

Martha

Everyone listened to the radio, but there were no computers or televisions. There was no electricity and no telephone until they were invented. They also washed their clothes on a washboard. There was no vaccines for polio, but they had aspirin and cough medicine. The doctors had to visit your house and people died from measles, etc. They did not have many cars in the early 1900's, but they rode cable cars, bikes, and walked. There were no modern spaceships and they rode boats to get around. People rode double-decker buses and could not stand. Finally, they had no modern airplanes and transportation was less expensive. Sports were not popular and they did not make as much money. Women could not play sports and there were not many teams.
"Boxcar Build"

**Author's Facts and Words**

1. In my own words
2. In my own words
3. Question

**Topic:**

**Directions:** In each box on the LEFT HAND side, place one fact for the topic you are writing about from your source of information (textbook, story, etc...). Rewrite this fact in your OWN words on the boxes on the RIGHT. Use the spaces between the boxes on the RIGHT hand side for "connecting" words used in sentences. Some examples of these words are: but, and, finally, though, etc.... Use the "Adjective and Adverb" box in the top corner for words you will add to your final writing piece to make it descriptive and creative.

**Remember:** When you are taking a quote directly from a selection, use quotation marks to indicate it is the author's own words, and not your own words or thoughts.
Follow the Footsteps: A Step-by-Step Process for Successful Descriptive Paragraph Formation

Julia M. Harford
Silver Creek Central School District

Introduction:
This lesson was developed to help students formulate a step-by-step process for descriptive paragraph writing. A descriptive paragraph is one which creates an image in the reader’s mind. Many of my students have a difficult time getting started with their paragraph writing or do not know how to continue after they have written their topic sentence. Additionally, when writing descriptive paragraphs, they often rely upon repetitive descriptors instead of expanding their use of adjectives and adverbs. This lesson provides students with a pattern to follow in writing their paragraphs as well as aids them in creating better descriptive paragraphs.

Step 1: Identifying the Strategy:
I created this lesson to help my students develop and internalize a step-by-step thinking strategy for writing descriptive paragraphs. Because we do a lot of descriptive writing, my students are often called upon to use a variety words and phrases to depict, in detail, the subject about which they are writing. I was finding that many of my students had trouble creating paragraphs that were descriptive and detailed, without being repetitive. Many of them were struggling over how to start their paragraphs. They had trouble continuing on after they had developed a topic sentence. They were unable to elaborate upon their point.

This strategy allows them to reach each stage in the paragraph
writing process step-by-step by showing them how and when each decision in the process is made. Using the thinksheets as a guide, my students are able to successfully complete the process. They then have all the information they need to write an informative, well-organized, descriptive paragraph.

**Step 2: Modeling the Strategy:**
Using an overhead projector, I introduce the students to a copy of the thinksheet they will be using for this lesson. I explain to them that I will be sharing with them a strategy for descriptive paragraph writing which, if used correctly, will enable them to write descriptive paragraphs smoothly and easily.

I introduce a topic for discussion to use as an example. We are currently studying mammals so I choose, as my example, the "lynx." I tell my students that I have decided to write a descriptive paragraph about what a lynx looks like. Their job is to help me complete each step in the process. See attached thinksheet for example.

**Footstep #1:** This is where we write the topic of my paragraph.

**Footstep #2:** I ask myself "What am I going to discuss in my paragraph?" As a group, we come up with 2-3 sentences that may or may not work as topic sentences in my final paragraph. I write those choices down in the space provided. I tell my students that they may or may not use these choices.

**Footstep #3:** This step asks me to create a list of adjectives or phrases I may want to use in describing the lynx. We think about the animal for a minute. At this point, the class can brainstorm ideas. I then write down suggestions of words or phrases which could be used in describing this animal. I may or may not use them in my final paragraph. (This is perhaps the most helpful section of the "footsteps" process because it allows the creation of a list of words instead of demanding full sentences. The student can think more precisely.)

**Footstep #4:** Here I am asked to write 3-4 sentences using the words and phrases I listed above. Now that I have those words and phrases down
on paper, creating sentences with them becomes a much easier task. The class helps me write my sentences.

**Footstep #5:** I am now asked to organize those sentences in the order they would most make sense in my paragraph. I allow the class to offer suggestions. If there are more than one possible arrangement, we vote on the best one.

**Footstep #6:** I am now required to choose the topic sentence I believe will best suit the paragraph. I can refer to my list of possibilities in “Footstep #2” to determine the best topic sentence for my paragraph. If I need to, I can create a new topic sentence now that I have the rest of the paragraph written.

**Footstep #7:** I finish my paragraph with a concluding sentence. This sentence should sum up what I have written about the lynx. As a class, we brainstorm possibilities. The concluding sentence should be kept simple but pull together the information I have stated in my paragraph.

**Footstep #8:** This is the last step in the process. I rewrite the paragraph in its full form. I then ask the class, “Does this paragraph describe a lynx?” If it does, we have successfully completed the task. If it does not, we will need to read back through the steps to determine where we got off course.

**Step 3 - Scaffolding the Strategy:**

After I go through the process on the overhead, (leaving my example on the overhead for them to see) I pass out a copy of the thinksheet to each student. Their task is to follow the same process we followed together to write their own paragraph about a mammal of their choice. I circulate as they write to make sure they are following the steps of the process. We then share our paragraphs with each other.

**Step 4 - Providing Additional Practice:**

The descriptive paragraph thinksheets are available for use in my room at all times. Some of my students still rely upon the thinksheets to
take them through the step-by-step process while others are able to follow the steps without outside help. As time goes on, I’m confident that most of my students will cease to require the help of the sheets. Additionally, I have the steps listed on a poster which hangs in the “Write Right” section of my room with other helpful suggestions for writing. If I see a student struggling while he/she is writing, I often refer to the “footsteps” to help them back on track.
Follow the Footsteps

1. Choose your topic. What do you want your paragraph to be about?

2. Write 2-3 topic sentences about your choice. DO NOT choose one to use yet.

3. Brainstorm a list of words or phrases you could use to describe and discuss the topic you chose for your paragraph.

4. Create 3-4 sentences using some of the words/phrases you came up with.
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<table>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>Put those sentences in <strong>order</strong> to form a paragraph that makes sense to you.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1.</td>
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<tr>
<td>2.</td>
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<td>3.</td>
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<tr>
<td>4.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td><strong>Choose</strong> the best topic sentence from the choices in Footstep #2 for the sentences you have written.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td><strong>Write</strong> a closing sentence to your paragraph.</td>
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<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td><strong>Rewrite</strong> the final product. Does your paragraph state what you wanted to say?</td>
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Richard Was and Jill Marshall
Hamburg Middle School

Introduction
This lesson involves teaching students to identify important information in a document based question (DBQ). With the standards changing, the expectations for students have increased to an almost overwhelming extent. Students are faced with questions and tasks that are based on historical documents, quotes, and charts and maps. Students need to learn a strategy that will help them identify what a question is asking. They should be able to identify key words and phrases that will enable them to answer the question. This strategy is designed for use in sixth grade social studies classrooms, but can easily be adapted for any social studies classroom.

Step 1, Read the Question and Identify Key Words or Phrases
The goal of this lesson is to help students develop a strategy for making sense of document based questions. Often students struggle to identify key words and phrases necessary to answer a question successfully. Identifying the objective of a question presents a problem for some students. Our goal as teachers is to prevent student frustration before they shut down and decide they “CAN’T” answer the question. Having a strategy to identify the objective of a question and the key words and phrases that meet that objective will help to ease or eliminate the frustration that some students experience.
Step 2, Modeling the Strategy

The first What? Say What! thinksheets which we give the students will include prompts for identifying key words, important phrases, and ideas (see attached). There will also be a place where students can identify what the test question is asking. Through discussion and modeling, students will first identify the intent of the question. They will then use the prompts on the thinksheet to identify the information from the selection that corresponds to them. On the right side of the sheet the student will state the importance or meaning of each item listed after the prompt. This step will help the student understand the relationship of the key words to the intent of the question. Our example is based on a map of the routes used by the Crusaders to travel to the Holy Land. The question requires the student to determine the dangers faced by the Crusaders along the route.

As we move past the first few thinksheets, the prompts will become fewer and fewer and the students will begin to generate their own prompts. Different DBQ questions will be handed out to pairs of students. Together they will identify the intent of the question and key words and phrases for the prompts. They will then explain the importance of each word or phrase. Each pair will share their responses with the class. Suggestions and comments will be made by other students or the teacher.

Step 3, Scaffolding the Strategy

As the year progresses, the prompts on the What! Say What! sheets will be removed. Students will be expected to identify key words and terms and explain their significance with little help. The teacher will monitor and be available to assist those students who may have difficulty. When students are finished with each assignment, the class will discuss the significance of the words they selected.

Step 4, Providing Additional Practice

For each chapter test students will be given a DBQ question and will be required to fill out a What? Say What! sheet for it. This will help to build confidence and instill this strategy for answering DBQ questions.
List words or phrases that fit the prompt words. Write the importance of those answers. You do not need to use complete sentences.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>WHAT?</th>
<th>SAY WHAT?</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>FACTS, KEY WORDS OR IDEAS</td>
<td>IMPORTANCE OR MEANING</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cities on route</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Destination city</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Routes taken and ownership of lands traveled through</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Distances traveled</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Name: ________________  Social Studies Topic
What is the question asking?

In the left column, list key words or phrases that prompt your thinking about the question. Write the importance of those prompts in the other column. You do not need to use complete sentences.

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>WHAT?</th>
<th>SAY WHAT?</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>FACTS, KEY WORDS OR IDEAS</td>
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SQ3R-Narrative Plus: Teaching Students How to Promote Strategic Reading And Writing

Marlene McFeely, Reading Specialist Grades 6-8
Richard Brewer, Reading Specialist Grades 6-8
Sweet Home Middle School

Introduction/Background

This strategy is part of a comprehensive remedial reading approach we use at Sweet Home Middle School. Each remedial reading group is comprised of eight students coming from the 6th, 7th, and 8th grades. The groups include both regular education students and special education students. Generally, the average instructional reading level for the students is at the 4th grade. Many of the students possess inadequate print processing abilities. Also, in the area of meaning processing, few are able to acquire information from the text. All have limitations in their ability to construct meaning at the inferential and applied levels of comprehension. Few are successful articulating thoughts and ideas relating to the text through writing. Therefore, students have difficulty extending the meaning of text through the written word.
Step 1  Identifying the Strategy

The goal of this unit is to develop students' ability to identify the important ideas and details in a reading passage and to communicate the ideas and details is writing. Frequently, students will read a passage and upon completion of the reading task they are unable to differentiate between important and unimportant text information. For example, students come up "empty" after reading a chapter in a book or after reading a paragraph in English or social studies. This unit provides an effective strategy for "reading for meaning" and expressing that meaning clearly and concisely through writing. This strategy is called SQ3R-Narrative Plus. The strategy is explained on the SQ3R-Narrative Plus think sheet.

Step 2  Modeling the Strategy

After a brief introduction including strategy identification, steps, and rationale, each step in the SQ3R-Narrative Plus process is explained and demonstrated. We do this over time, and we emphasize practical, meaningful reasons why these are useful steps. Students are provided with a SQ3R-Narrative Plus strategy card as a resource to be used during the reading process. Survey and Question steps are prereading/prewriting strategies preparing the students for upcoming reading and writing tasks. The Read step provides assistance during reading where students focus on meaning, thus facilitating comprehension, and on words and phrases enhancing a written summarization process. Post reading steps Recite and Review support understanding by elaborating meaning through writing.
Step 3  Scaffolding the Strategy

After SQ3R-Narrative Plus is explained and demonstrated, an initial lesson is modeled with teacher think alouds expressing metacognition verbally for students to hear. With each succeeding lesson support is gradually withdrawn as students begin to internalize the strategy process and apply the strategy independently.

Step 4  Additional Practice

Students continue implementing this strategy routinely with each new chapter of the class narrative text. Sq3R-Narrative Plus strategy card and KWL chart are used regularly to guide the strategic process and to facilitate the internalization and application of SQ3R-Narrative Plus strategy.

Conclusion

SQ3R-Narrative Plus is a flexible strategy that can be used with a variety of texts especially in ELA and social studies, and provides a structured framework necessary for successful strategic reading and writing with at-risk students. With proper scaffolding the students internalize the strategy and automatically implement it during learning tasks.
SQ3R - NARRATIVE

SURVEY

• Read the introductory (first) paragraph.
• Read the first sentence of every paragraph on each page. If there are more than four paragraphs, choose only four paragraphs – top/middle/bottom.
• Read the summary (last) paragraph.

QUESTION

• Ask one or two purpose setting questions based on the survey just completed that may be answered in the material to be read. ("W" on KWL Chart).

READ

• Read the material to be able to answer the purpose setting questions asked in the Question Step. "X" any difficult words you encounter.

RECITE

• Answer the purpose setting questions. Work with the difficult words ("X") you encountered.

REVIEW

• Summarize in your own words the main ideas of what you read under each heading (5 W's and H on "L" of KWL Chart) to lock-in information gained.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>What I Know</th>
<th>What I Want to Know (Purpose setting Questions)</th>
<th>What I Learned</th>
</tr>
</thead>
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|             |                                               | Who-
|             |                                               | What-
|             |                                               | When-
|             |                                               | Where-
|             |                                               | Why-
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|             | (Purpose Setting Questions)                    | Who-
|             |                                               | What-
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What I Learned

Who-

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SUMMARY STATEMENT:

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Introduction

This lesson involves teaching technical high school students to write focused content in business letters using models. The students are juniors and seniors enrolled in a BOCES Career Center. These technical students have difficulty writing because their learning preference is hands-on rather than academic. Since these struggling writers are in a career center setting instead of an academic setting, having them write in their primary discourse (the language of their career areas) contributes to a higher success rate than writing in a secondary discourse (such as literary writing). They prefer writing about relevant topics. That is why a variety of business letters for career related situations were used. This lesson could be adapted to junior high or high school level students in an academic setting.

Identifying the Strategy

The goal of this lesson is to develop students' ability to write focused content in business letters for a variety of real life situations. Students feel
that because they were taught how to write a business letter in elementary school, that they know how to write one. What students confuse is "knowing what a business letter is" with "knowing how to write one". When shown the diagram below, students were familiar with what the business letter looked like and what information to supply in each part. They were unable, however, to identify what content to supply in each paragraph. This lesson gives writers a strategy for supplying the necessary content in a three-paragraph business letter using a model.
Modeling the Strategy

An assignment sheet containing the following Situation and Task was distributed to each student along with a model letter of inquiry (that I wrote) and the "Think Sheet".

**Situation:** You are interested in pursuing your education in the culinary field after high school, but don’t know which school to attend. Choose a school from the list provided that you would be interested in learning about.

**Your Task:** Write a three-paragraph letter of inquiry in full block form to a culinary college of your choice requesting information. Some information you are interested in receiving might be: financial aid packages, tuition and other expenses, college programs and course descriptions, job placement services, and transfer rate to four-year colleges, and student employment opportunities.

Students referred to their assignment sheet and model inquiry letter to figure out what information to write in each box on the "Think Sheet. Return addresses, business addresses, and the greeting were written in the first three boxes. The model made it clear to the students as to what information to write on each line of the return addresses as well as what to capitalize and punctuate.

Answering the questions in the three paragraph boxes of the "Think Sheet" made the students think about what information they were going to later write in each paragraph. They were able to deduce that the purpose for writing should be contained in the first content box (paragraph 1), that background information should fill the second content box (paragraph 2), and a conclusion should fill the third content box (paragraph box).

After the "Think Sheet" was completed, I had the students write their own rough drafts. They were able to use the model inquiry letter as a guide for content. While they were writing, I circulated the classroom assisting students. The basic writers progressed with relative ease. I found later that their rough drafts were almost identical to the model provided for them. A couple word choices differed, but the sentence structure, number of sentences per paragraph and general tone of the model letter and rough drafts were the same. This mattered little to me seeing that I wanted the letters to be well written, so they could be sent to the culinary institutes.

Rough drafts were edited, computer processed, and mailed to the
appropriate culinary school. Students were thrilled that they were actually sending their letters, but they were more thrilled to receive responses. The responses that the students received acted as positive reinforcement for writing.

Scaffolding the Strategy

Encourage students to write business letters where the content differs. I had students write cover letters in response to a mock want ad in their career field. Using a model cover letter to complete the “Think Sheet” helped the writers in thinking about what they were going to write and in knowing where to write the information.

The “Think Sheet” helped the students see the similarity among all business letters. The first paragraph stating the purpose for writing, the second paragraph containing background information and the third paragraph concluding the letter. Each time the “Think Sheet” is filled out, students will become more familiar with the questions that help them decide what to write in each paragraph.

In writing a letter like a cover letter the students are encouraged to individualize their second paragraphs in order to personalize their accomplishments and describe their skills. In doing so, the students are forced to be original. Therefore, they cannot borrow as much from the model. The model letter still guides the students in writing the first and third paragraphs but weans them of relying too heavily of copying the second paragraph.

As the scaffolding process continues, teachers can supply students with models that have missing parts and paragraphs. Return addresses can be left out to see if students remember where and what information belongs on each line. Teachers can even provide models that have the first paragraph blank and only paragraphs two and three written. With each letter that the students write, more paragraphs can be deleted from the model. The repeated use of the “Think Sheet” should reinforce in the students’ minds what content they should write in each paragraph despite the models not being complete.

Additional Practice

Throughout the year, the business letter has surfaced as a means of authentic correspondence for my students. They wrote thank you letters to
businesses thanking them for the opportunity to intern and follow-up letters after interviews. Before writing, they are able to visualize the business letter and think about what information and content belongs in each box when filling out the “Think Sheet”.

**Conclusion**

Visual diagrams, model letters and a “Think Sheet” are the key ingredients in this successful writing strategy. Through their use, students are able to visualize the letter they have to write, are able to rely on model letters for sentence structure and tone, and are able to construct content from formulating answers to the questions from the “Think Sheet”. These default strategies made writing business letters a manageable task for my struggling writers.
Model Business Letters

Why are you writing this letter?

What do you want to happen as a result of sending this letter?

What information do you want your reader to know?
1. 
2. 
3. 
4. 

What do you want to remind your reader?
THE END:
A Strategy for Teaching Students How to Improve Conclusions by Rephrasing Thesis and Topic Sentences

Janet Kumrow
Our Lady of the Sacred Heart School

Introduction

A well-written essay should have a strong and suitable ending, but students have difficulty composing solid conclusions for their essays. In my 7th grade Language Arts class, for example, my students were ending their essays with, “I hope you enjoyed reading my essay,” or “I really enjoyed writing this essay,” or “I hoped you enjoyed reading this essay as much as I enjoyed writing it.” This lesson involves teaching students to develop a conclusion by identifying and rewriting their thesis and topic sentences. This strategy is applicable to middle and upper grade students.

Step 1, Identifying the Strategy

The objective of this lesson is to develop students’ ability to write more appropriate conclusions to their essays. Students often ignore an easy way to sum up their essays - by rewriting the thesis and summarizing the topic sentences. The thesis is the main idea of the essay and the topic sentences are the main ideas of the paragraphs. Reviewing the thesis and topic sentences readily give the students the building blocks to construct an appropriate conclusion.
Step 2, Modeling the Strategy

Students are given an essay with the introduction and body paragraphs only. They are then asked to read the essay and write down the thesis and the topic sentences. Identifying the thesis and topic sentences was taught in a previous lesson. (See the "Tasks to Be Taught" prior to teaching this strategy page at the end of this lesson.) Pinpointing these sentences can be done individually or in groups. The students are then asked for the sentences that they chose. The teacher writes the correct ones on the board.

The students are given the conclusion to read while the teacher writes it on the board so that the relationship between the conclusion and the thesis and topic sentences can be seen. The students are asked what they notice about the conclusion or the teacher can explain the connection between the conclusion, the thesis, and the main points. I tell my students it is like math—just add up the sentences for the conclusion. I put a 1 on the board next to the thesis and each topic sentence so that it looks like an addition problem.

\[
\begin{align*}
(\text{thesis sentence}) & \quad + \quad 1 \quad \text{CONCLUSION} \\
(\text{topic sentence}) & \quad + \quad 1 \quad \text{showing restated thesis} \\
(\text{topic sentence}) & \quad + \quad 1 \quad \text{rewritten topic} \\
\quad & \quad = \quad \text{conclusion} \quad \text{sentences}
\end{align*}
\]

The class discusses methods for restating the thesis and summarizing the topic sentences. For example, one method would be to change the thesis into a question and use the topic sentences to answer it.

If my students are having difficulty with this strategy, I give them another essay with just the introduction and body paragraphs. The students will read it, and in groups, they will identify the thesis and topic sentences and compose a conclusion. These conclusions are shared with the class and critiqued.

Step 3, Scaffolding the Strategy

After students write a rough draft of their essay, they write their thesis and topic sentences on a separate paper or index cards. The index cards let the students experiment with moving the sentences around. Students can write the rough draft on an essay outline which isolates the thesis and topic sentences. See the sample included at the end of this chapter. Students then
work on rewriting these sentences into a clear and relevant conclusion. This can be started in class and finished as a homework assignment. The teacher can conduct peer or individual evaluations as students work on their conclusions. It is also helpful for volunteers to read their conclusions to the class and conduct class critiques. (The majority of the students volunteer!)

Using this strategy for writing conclusions helps the students to become more attentive when writing the thesis and topic sentences and less fearful about writing the conclusion. I was pleased with the conclusions that the students wrote for their essays. Students were easily able to write at least two sentences for their conclusions and neither one was, "I hope you enjoyed my essay."

**Step 4, Providing Additional Practice**

Students continually have writing assignments during the year culminating in an interdisciplinary research paper near the end of the year. Students write the rough drafts, which are evaluated by their peers. Volunteers read their conclusions and the class discusses the conclusions and offers suggestions and recommendations. Students who need additional practice learn from those who volunteer and from the class discussions. The final copies of the essays are handed in and graded. As students become comfortable with this method of writing conclusions, they can be introduced to other ways to close their essays by reading model compositions and discussing the techniques employed by the author to conclude the piece.

**Step 5, Other Applications**

Students are able to use this strategy in other subjects anytime they have to write an essay. In addition, students often have difficulty when asked to read texts and write pertinent, concise notes. This technique of relating thesis, topic sentences and conclusions is helpful in reading comprehension and generating effective notes. Also, the ability to summarize the main points is useful in listening and recording information. The skills of listening, recording, reading and writing are all contributive to the successful completion of the English Language Arts New York State tests.
TASKS TO BE TAUGHT
prior to teaching strategy "THE END" for writing conclusions using thesis and topic sentences.

Lesson: Identifying thesis and topic sentences (in the English textbook)
Students read excerpts and locate thesis and topic sentences.

Lesson: Cause and Effect Essays

1. I. Prewriting cause and effect essays (Step I in the writing process)

2. Students read "Pecos Bill and the Cyclone." which relates the effects of Bill’s wild ride on a cyclone - the formation of certain geographical features of the American Southwest. (in conjunction with literature unit on tall tales)

3. Do lessons associated with "Pecos Bill" which include identifying cause and effect and review of topic sentences. (in the English textbook)

4. Students identify causes and effects from “Pecos Bill and organize information on a form of a KWL chart.

    K (causes)      W (effects)  L (facts) chart.

(students look up facts about geographical features)

Example of this chart is included.

5. Review KWL chart in groups and whole class.

6. II. Rough draft - Students will choose 2 causes and effects and write their rough draft without a conclusion on an essay outline think sheet. An example of this think sheet is included at the end of this chapter.

7. Peer evaluations on the rough draft. (I use a form from a workbook)

8. We are now ready to discuss conclusions!
**THESIS:** The tall tale "Pecos Bill and the Cyclone" gives a fictitious account of the formation of certain geographical features of the American Southwest.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>CAUSE</th>
<th>EFFECT</th>
<th>FACTS</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>To save a herd of cattle, Pecos Bill lassos a cyclone and rides it.</td>
<td>The cyclone becomes angry and tears up all the trees leaving a whole</td>
<td>The Staked Plains, also known as <em>Llano Estacado</em>, is the southern</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>However, the cyclone becomes angry.</td>
<td>section of the country bare and forming the Staked Plains. It was</td>
<td>portion of the Great Plains in western Texas and eastern New Mexico.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>called the Staked Plains because people had to set stakes to find their way.</td>
<td>The area is barren.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>The rain fills the gully and the water rushes through and forms the Grand Canyon.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Pecos lands so hard in the sand that he forms a large depression which is known as Death Valley.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>One factor in the formation of the Grand Canyon is the erosion caused by the Colorado river which rushes through the canyon. the Downward cutting of the river formed the various features in the Grand Canyon.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Death Valley is the lowest point in the Western Hemisphere. It is below sea level. Sand dunes are one of the features of Death Valley.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
ESSAY OUTLINE THINK SHEET

NAME: ____________________________

THESIS: __________________________

INTRO: __________________________

FIRST MAIN POINT: __________________________

SUPPORTING DETAILS: __________________________

SECOND MAIN POINT: __________________________

SUPPORTING DETAILS: __________________________
THIRD MAIN POINT: ____________________________________________

___________________________________________________________

SUPPORTING DETAILS: ________________________________________

___________________________________________________________

___________________________________________________________

___________________________________________________________

FOURTH MAIN POINT: _________________________________________

___________________________________________________________

SUPPORTING DETAILS: ________________________________________

___________________________________________________________

___________________________________________________________

___________________________________________________________

CONCLUSION: ________________________________________________

___________________________________________________________

___________________________________________________________

___________________________________________________________

___________________________________________________________
Overcoming the Fear of Poetry: A Word Association Strategy

Brendan Brown
Frontier Middle School

Introduction

Many students have an aversion to poetry. They are reluctant to sift through the symbolism and figurative language of a poem. Many students do not feel confident enough of their understanding of a poem to make connections with other works of literature or even with their personal experience. In some students the language of poetry inspires fear. Students are encouraged to overcome their fear of poetry through a combination of strategies, such as multiple readings, word associations, and drawing.

Step 1, Identifying the Strategy

Students are first introduced to a basic word association game. Students are given a poem and asked to play the game with lines or phrases in the poem; in other words, at the end of each line or phrase (whichever seems appropriate) students write down whatever word occurs to them. Students are reminded that they may not know what the line or phrase means even after the third or fourth reading. (The “meaning” of the poem is not yet as important as the thoughts and ideas the poem’s words generate in the student’s mind.) The students replay the game two, three, or four times. Students then write a summary of the words or phrases that have occurred to them and take a guess at the poem’s meaning (either by telling what the poem is about or by identifying the theme).
Step 2, Modeling the Strategy

I model the technique at the overhead projector thinking aloud as I read through the poem. I write down a word or phrase that occurs to me as I finish a line (or other appropriate place in the poem). I repeat the process several times. With each new reading of the poem I write down a different word that occurs to me. As if talking to myself, I surreptitiously introduce other strategies in the successive readings by asking questions of the poem, making judgements, and occasionally guessing at the meaning. Then I try to give some explanation for the words that occurred to me as I read. (Often no explanation is possible.) I select some of the many words I wrote down to construct a statement about the poem’s meaning or theme.

Step 3, Scaffolding

Students begin as if playing simple word association game. Often their words have more to do with their interests than with anything suggested by the poem. With each successive reading it is hoped that the words the students write down come closer to the meanings suggested by the poem. Students may then be asked to share their word associations with a partner or with the class. They are encouraged to explain why a certain line or phrase in the poem suggested a word to them. Students use their words to write a statement about the poem’s meaning or theme. As an alternative students may be asked to draw the images suggested by the poem.

Step 4, Additional Practice

Throughout the year students are given longer more difficult poems. Students are given opportunities throughout the year to browse anthologies of poetry and select poems for interpretation. Students are encouraged to use this technique on their own whenever they encounter a difficult poem.

Conclusion

Through this technique or game students become actively involved in constructing the meaning of a poem. Students unconsciously acquire the habit of reading through a poem several times. They overcome their fear of poetry by approaching the poem’s meaning in stages without expecting to understand a poem immediately. Students learn that part of the magic of poetry is its appeal to a common store of associations and experiences.
Ask + Answer = Summary:  
A Strategy for Teaching Students How to Write a Summary Paragraph in Content Subjects

Nancy J. Kalieta  
Frontier Middle School

Introduction

I teach Science, Math, and Reading to approximately 50 sixth graders in the Frontier Middle School. In all of those areas, but especially Science, the students find it difficult to locate important information and then write a summary paragraph. For example, when asked to write about one of the planets in a well-organized paragraph that summarizes the important information about that planet, their first instinct is to locate a paragraph in their textbook and copy it. This paragraph they copy may or may not be a summary paragraph.

Because I have been faced with this problem for many years and because they are being asked to write more and more on the New York State Assessments, I designed a strategy to give them a method to write a summary. The strategy is simple and can be taught and modeled in one class period.

Step 1, Identifying the Strategy

The goal of this lesson is to help students locate important information by constructing a series of questions for which they will locate information. Students will be given a specific topic on which to focus. The student will generate a list of questions about that specific topic. For example, if the planet Mars is the topic, a student might write the following questions:

“How far from the sun is Mars?”
“Does Mars have any moons?”

After writing as many questions as they can think of, the student must choose the ten questions they feel are the most important. Those ten questions are the ones they will research and answer in a complete sentence. For example, if the question is “Does Mars have any moons?” the sentence to answer that question might be “Mars does not have any moons.” The student will continue to answer all ten questions.

After answering the ten questions, the student will then take the answers and use them to write a summary paragraph. The paragraph is now written in their own words.

**Step 2, Modeling the Strategy**

I model the “Ask + Answer = Summary” Strategy by writing a series of questions about the planet Earth on the board. These questions could either be my questions or questions the student’s want answered. With their help, I identify the ten questions that are the most important. I can control the identification process by making sure they emphasize the type of information I want in the summary paragraph.

Using our textbooks and other resource materials, we work together to find and write answers to the questions. This is a good time to emphasize that answers must be written in complete sentences.

When we have our ten sentences, we then put them into a summary paragraph that now contains only the important information about the planet Earth.

**Step 3, Scaffolding the Strategy**

After completing the modeling exercise, the students are put into pairs. They will choose a planet and work together to generate a list of questions about that planet. After they identify the ten most important questions, they will do the research. They will then write their answers in complete sentences. The last step will be to write the summary paragraph.

The students will take their summary paragraph and write it below a picture of their planet. These sheets can then be put into a booklet about the planets that they can share with younger students.

**Step 4, Providing Additional Practice**

Throughout the year, I will continue to have the students write summary paragraphs using the “Ask + Answer = Summary” Strategy. This can be used in conjunction with any Science topic.

This strategy lends itself well to longer research papers. The students will need to list more questions and write paragraphs to answer each
question rather than sentences. They will also need to group their questions by topics so that the research paper has a logical flow to it.

This strategy can also be used after reading a short story or novel. The questions will then reflect the story elements such as, characters, plot, setting, and theme.

**Conclusion**

The “Ask + Answer = Summary” Strategy is a simple method that will focus students on important information. By using this method, they can write summary paragraphs that truly reflect the important information that is needed. Eventually they should be able to use this strategy quickly and easily in all content areas.

This strategy can be used in all content areas and in all intermediate grades and higher. Each teacher can adapt this strategy to whatever grade level or subject they teach.
Ask + Answer = Summary

Name ___________________________  Topic ___________________________

QUESTIONS  ANSWERS
The 3 R’s: Modeling Practices for ‘riting simple Rhythmed, Rhymed Poetry

Nancy Paciencia
St. Amelia School, Tonawanda

Introduction:

Rhyming and rhythm
Can be such a chore.
An even worse thing
Is when it’s a bore!!
Dr. Seuss to the rescue
Our brain cells alive!
A booklet to make up
For grades one through five.

This lesson teaches listening, reading and ‘riting of rhythm, rhymed poems to middle school students. Many students at the middle school do not fully understand the concepts of rhythm and rhyme in poetry. This lesson first involves teacher modeling for middle school students, then middle school student modeling for early elementary students. The strategy was used in all middle school classes in conjunction with Dr. Seuss Day and took five class periods to complete.
Step 1: Identifying the Strategy

Students know nursery rhymes, but they haven’t really listened well enough to the cadences in the poetry to be able to write their own even-rhythmmed and well-rhymed poems. Dr. Seuss Day was a convenient excuse to stop and write their own Dr. Seuss-like poem booklet and have fun with the cadence and rhyme. Also, it served as a way for the older children to reach out to the early elementary children and model rhythm and rhyme for them. This was a big hit with the younger students.

Step 2: Modeling the Strategy

In reading class, students had read a number of Dr. Seuss books. The first thing to be done in my class was to put students in groups of three or four so they could collaborate. Then, because this was a Dr. Seuss Day activity, I provided the model for the first few pages of their booklet (see Thinksheet 1 and 2). I put two transparencies side-by-side on the overhead, so they actually resembled book pages and then read the pages to them. I overemphasized both the rhyme and rhythm so they could get a feel for the poem. Next, students read the pages with me, also over-emphasizing the rhythm and rhyme. Students were now told that they were to come up with an equal number of lines for their portion of the booklet. The groups brainstormed their ideas of where the poem should end up, remembering it should read like a Dr. Seuss poem.

All groups were given blank booklet pages and told to copy down the pages from the overhead. One member of each group was assigned to be an illustrator and the others began writing the remainder of their story (poem).

Step 3: Scaffolding the Strategy

As each group wrote, I circulated and helped them with their rhythm and rhyme. Some groups decided what they wanted to say but were having trouble with rhythm, so we clapped out the rhythm of the poem from the overhead, then spoke it. (The /u/ /u/ / or duh da’ duh duh da’ method ) so they could hear the way it sounded, which helped. Then, for rhyming problems, we put an alphabet line on the desk, so they could run down the alphabet as they were trying to find words to rhyme. I also told them to look at the Zane-Bloser alphabet over the blackboard for additional inspiration.

When a group finished their pages, I checked them over for two things: one, accuracy of rhythm - the duh da’ method again, and two, suitability for younger
elementary students. As a group “passed” these two tests, they made a final copy of their booklet, illustrated it, titled it, put their names on the back cover, and bound it to resemble a book. Booklets were collected and sent to the office for approval for use in the lower grades, then sent to the lower grades to read.

Step 4: Providing Additional Practice

Since Dr. Seuss Day, I have aggravated and annoyed my classes by speaking to them in simple rhythm ed rhymes. However, more and more of the students are able to speak in rhyme with me and most are beginning to hear and be able to clap out the cadences in the poems we read in class. This strategy has provided me with an interesting and lively way of teaching a poetry concept without falling into the boring teacher - to - student only interaction.

Step 5: Other Applications

Rhyme and rhythm are not necessarily associated with other subject areas, but patterns of repetition are. Teachers of other subjects can show students the patterns of repetition in their academic areas.

Step 6: Thinksheets (see next two pages)

In order to begin this activity, students will need a model. The next two pages are the springboard given to the students to begin. My students had more ownership in this activity because I wrote it for them, so both they and I were personally involved.
Thinksheet 1

Look, look
    Said the book,
At the words
    That I know!
Like sofa
    And
Chair
And sunshine
    And snow!!

I also know colors,
    Like blue and
Like green.
Is that not amazing,
    The best thing
You’ve seen?
Thinksheet 2

Ho hum
Said the boy
As he rode
On his bike.
I can do tricks
On my bike,
Which I like!!!

Why should
I read you,
What good
Would it do?
Why would
I read you,
When this
Is fun too???

-Nancy Paciencia