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Using process in the English classroom: a curriculum design guide for middle school teachers

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Using Process in the English Classroom:  
A Curriculum Design Guide for Middle School Teachers

by

Maureen McGuire Taylor

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INTRODUCTION

When I began teaching seventh and eighth grade English, right out of my undergraduate program, I thought I didn't need extensive training in composition theories and methods to teach thirteen and fourteen year olds how to write. I thought I could just use common sense and my own experiences to manage a writing curriculum. Two years later, I found myself in graduate school studying, of all things, rhetoric and composition theories. My experience at the middle school level taught me that it was composition instruction that my students needed most of all. And even though I had taken some college courses and workshop in-services on teaching writing as a process, the methods of composition instruction they presented weren't working as effectively as the presenters and instructors claimed they would.

Many of my colleagues, including myself, were eager to try the new ideas and activities from our workshops in our classrooms, and did include them when we could. We included brainstorming, freewriting and clustering activities in our lesson plans. We gave our students planning worksheets so they could organize their ideas. Before a final draft was submitted, we conducting peer editing workshops. But we were still disappointed that the activities didn't seem to have the long term effects in reforming our classrooms as our workshop presenters suggested their classrooms had changed. Some of the teachers even began to refuse to participate in these workshops and curriculum planning sessions, calling the ideas just another fad. We were trying to use writing process activities, which themselves were well-accepted by our students, but the final written products coming out of those process activities were no better than the non-process methods had been producing.

Results of the National Writing Report card confirmed the results of the efforts at our particular school. The 1989 National Writing Report Card reported no significant changes in writing skills from the last report card in 1984. In 1984, the evaluators found that more teachers were being trained in a process approach over the previous 10 years, and students reported more process training; yet in 8th grade and 11th grade, there were no significant differences in student performance between process classrooms and traditional drill classrooms (Applebee).

Now, after two years of study, I see that the reason for the lack of significant change isn't the result of the process activities or the process concept itself. The problem is the
training teachers received on teaching writing in a process approach. In my particular case, the workshops and lectures left out the key to making the activities work---the background information that supports the activities and the way a writing curriculum works, the principles they are based on. The presenters gave us manuals full of specific "fun" activities and writing assignments. But reforming a writing curriculum is more than adding new activities, it is changing the beliefs the program is based on and carrying the principles through every activity and every class period.

This manual is my attempt to present the grounding in research and theory needed to apply the principles of the process approach to designing a curriculum. The first half of the manual presents the grounding, information about the history, research and theories of composition to help teachers understand what the process approach to composition means. The second half of the manual models how one can apply the principles of the process approach to specific writing activities and how to set up a curriculum that establishes a process model in the classroom from the first day of class. Although there are specific assignments in this half of the manual, they are not universally-applicable assignments that, if used, will mean you are teaching in a process approach or will mean you will get the same results I did with my students. This manual is not a meant as a replacement for your school's curriculum guide or texts. It is a supplement about the process approach and how you can manage your curriculum and texts in that approach.
BACKGROUND
ON THE
PROCESS
APPROACH
TO
COMPOSITION
INSTRUCTION
Teaching Composition: Where Are We and How Did We Get Here?

Today, the emphasis in composition instruction is teaching students the processes of writing (focusing on what the writer does), not merely teaching them to plug information into standard formats and grammar rules (focusing on what the writer produces). This current process view of writing is not a method of instruction (prescribing principles to teach), but an approach (describing principles to base methods on) to teaching students how to write. Process is a foundation of ideas teachers can base their methods on. The ideas that make up this process foundation center on the belief that the act of writing is best understood and taught as an action with complex stages and activities. Writing teachers need to understand the stages and key activities of the writing process to use the approach effectively in helping students improve the quality of their writing.

Viewing composition as a complex process of different activities is not a faddish instructional approach rooted in the latest psychological studies. The process approach has deep roots in classical rhetoric, roots that are as deep as the traditional, product-oriented approaches to composition instruction still common today. But it is the product approach to writing classes that has been popular longer than the process approach. Questions many composition teachers may ask is why the product-approach has been more popular and why the process view should now be accepted. A brief look at the history of rhetoric (discovering ideas and ways of communicating ideas) will help answer these questions and put the current view of composition instruction into perspective.

The Roots of Composition Studies

English as its own discipline is a fairly new creature. The teaching of college English courses only goes back a little over 100 years. Actual departments of English are even younger still. Before the creation of college English departments in the late 1800's, literature and language were taught by cross-disciplinary teachers. Professors taught literature and language in connection with other subjects, like history. They didn't have a major in the subject they taught, but were typically "a doctor of divinity who spoke and wrote the mother tongue grammatically, had a general 'society knowledge' of the literature and had not specialized in this or any other academic area" (Parker 10). The emphasis at the high school level was on rules and mechanics (Thompson 112).
Upheavals in higher education in the 1880's and 1890's created actual departments for subjects being taught at the universities. But when deciding how to departmentalize, the responsibility of teaching composition was not immediately given to the English department. Teaching writing did not seem to fit with the teaching of language and literature. Up to that time, writing was a branch of rhetoric involving both speech and individual reading along with writing. It had been taught as part of the general core curriculum since medieval times and did not seem specific to the study of these new English departments (Parker 11).

The study and teaching of rhetoric goes back even farther than medieval times. The discipline has its roots in classical times, back to Plato and Aristotle. These philosophers considered how to speak most effectively about their philosophical ideas. They taught their students not only philosophy, but also effective communication, which at that time was oral communication. This teaching was the beginning of the study of rhetoric—the search for truth and communicating that idea of truth, in spoken or written form, to an audience. And as long as the idea of truth is open to question in a society, there could be rhetoric (Allen).

Some of the classical rhetoricians, the sophists, were probably the forerunners of the current process movement in composition. The sophists are considered the first rhetoricians (Barilli 3). They thought truth could be found by using common sense to interpret the world around them. They taught their students the importance of "everyday uses of language", that rhetoric was a practical social activity to help them become active members of the democratic state. The sophists taught students how to make choices to communicate in a particular situation based on the topic and the speaker's purposes (Kent 2). The students learned processes for working with the complexity of the situation rather than abstract theories for predicting what will work. Students were not taught how to make a speech, but rather a process "promoting skill in speaking" (Leff 25). In sum, the sophists taught a social process approach to rhetoric, using common sense to evaluate a communicative situation and to decide how to best present the truth in that situation. The sophists felt skill in communicating was important to becoming a true citizen of a democratic state. Since a democracy is created by the community for the community's benefit, members of that community need to be able to present their ideas to the group as effectively as their peers in that group so they can help shape the democratic state they have to live and work in.

In direct opposition to the teachings of the sophists was Plato, who was studying and teaching at the same time. He attacked the way the sophists taught rhetoric, contending the sophists' rhetoric merely manipulated language to win over the audience to their ideas, regardless of the
truth of the message. (Advertising is accused of being this kind of rhetoric today). Plato's concern with rhetoric was not the art of effective communication in a particular situation, but "truth" revealed through speech to make the audience better people and citizens; it was concern for the product, not the process. Plato believed there were ultimate truths about the world that would be revealed to the student through dialogues and logic, and these truths would direct the student's presentation of the ideas. There was no process using common sense to decide how to communicate a particular idea to a particular audience; the form would somehow come out of the meaning.

In the 300's BCE, Aristotle's teachings changed how rhetoric was taught in classical times, principles that still exist today. Like the sophists, Aristotle taught using a process approach, but instead of letting common sense guide the process, he gave his students specific steps to follow in producing a speech. The steps consisted of a series of classifications for the different variables that needed to be considered when making a speech. By classifying the purpose, audience, topic, etc., the speaker could discover the correct way to present a speech.

Aristotle especially emphasized the role of invention (idea generation and planning) in his rhetorical process. This invention stage included such strategies as definition, comparison/contrast, causality, and analogy for discovering information and relationships about an issue or topic before the topic could be presented to an audience. Idea generation was very important to Aristotle because he felt a speaker could not give a truthful speech if he had not explored the topic thoroughly first.

Although Aristotle's rhetorical process provided students with ways of discovering truth and how to communicate that truth to an audience, it was a very systematic process based on the belief that any speaking situation could be classified through his system and the result would be an effective speech. In fact, the majority of composition instruction was based on this premise until fairly recently. Students were taught to believe if they researched information on their topic and knew their purpose for the paper, they could go to a handbook and find how they should introduce, organize, and conclude that paper to make it effective.

This version of Aristotle's rhetoric that has been the basis for traditional composition instruction is missing an important original principle. Aristotle believed that although the classification system helped the speaker solve the communication situation, the final product was more than just the parts glued together. Once the parts came together, the speech was organic, taking on qualities of a unique speech. The version of Aristotle's rhetoric most
A commonly known today (missing this organic idea) comes to us by way of other rhetoricians after Aristotle who wanted to "cash in" on the popularity of Aristotle's ideas to attract students. These rhetoricians rehashed and reduced Aristotle's ideas into handbooks they could easily use in teaching rhetoric to their own students. Ease of teaching in this approach helped it survive and is where English instructors' reliance on handbooks as the language "bible" comes from (Allen).

Another reason the traditional "rules" approach to composition survived concerns political and social control. The democratic governments of the sophists and Aristotle's time became empires. Empires were not shaped by the ideas of the community, but the ideas of one man or the Church. The leaders' ideas became the unquestionable truth, and rhetoric was reduced to the role of rules and classifications. The invention stage was no longer necessary. In fact, the more comprehensive definition of rhetoric, combining the search for truth with the consideration of presentation, took on the reputation of being evil, an instrument of the devil. It was named so because it questioned the truth of the church and could manipulate language to prove "false knowledge." In 529 AD, Emperor Justinian decreed that any rhetorical study was banned because it was a pagan practice (Allen).

After the political power of emperors and the church, the social power of scientific studies kept rhetoric's focus on rules and formats. Like the church, science felt its methods of discovery revealed "ultimate" truths that could not be questioned. These truths were even more unquestionable than religion's because science had evidence, and the church relied on faith. Even today, society accepts the truths scientists present over most other versions of truth. Through science, people can discover the knowledge they then communicate according to the rules of rhetoric. This long-standing dominance of a product-concerned view of rhetoric gave rise to the reputation English teachers try so hard to change now, that English is all correct grammar and usage (Berlin 51-52).

Recent Changes in Composition Research and Instruction
The turn of the twentieth century brought changes in rhetoric instruction. The instruction was becoming a part of the new English departments. But not all English/rhetoric teachers were accepting the traditional product-centered view of composition instruction. Some teachers were trying to take control of their discipline again. This move toward control is evident by the founding of a professional organization for language teachers (the Modern Language Association) in 1884. The MLA was organized to deal with the new roles of English courses, to
teach language historically and comparatively, not just teach freshman themes (Parker 10).

But it wasn't only at the college level that new ideas were being tested out. Articles in the English Journal in the early 1900's show secondary teachers' concerns for teaching composition effectively. Teachers suggested working on group projects where the group controls the direction of the assignment and makes the decisions in creating a text (Hatfield). One author, C.J. Thompson, investigated teaching writing with the academic method (product-oriented) and teaching by the socialized method, where students learn to write in real social communication situations (process-oriented). After teaching high school freshmen by both methods, he concluded that the process approach or socialized class improved their writing skills (product) more and faster than the product approach or academic group (124, 130).

Even with these published accounts of different teaching methods, the product approach remained dominant. But more changes on the rhetoric front took place in the 1960's and 1970's, at the same time big changes were occurring in psychology, linguistics and literary criticism. In all of these disciplines, the dominant approach was now looking at how something happens instead of just studying the end result. Developmental psychologists were studying how children learn language and develop. Linguists were studying how language is stored to be used again and how memory is made. Literary scholars were studying how readers get individual meanings out of a text. Composition researchers attempted to explain the process of how good writers write so teachers could apply those activities to improving student writers.

The process view of writing has gained wide acceptance in the 1980's and 1990's as the best approach to understand and teach composition. This approach, although it has a unified foundation of beliefs, does not have a singular method for researching or teaching writing as a process. The first process researchers investigated the writer's cognitive activities during the process of writing; more recent research has focused on the social activities involved in the writing process.

Cognitive Activities in Writing

Influenced by the work done by cognitive psychologists and linguists into how the individual mind develops and deals with language, early composition researchers looked to the mind's activities to explain how experienced writers write. At first these composition researchers were interested in developing a general model of how good writing occurs. Their models were influenced by developmental psychologists like Piaget and Bloom, psychologists who
explained the development of children into adults by describing the stages they go through to become more mature and develop the ability to deal with the world around them. These psychologists described the general characteristics of each stage and the approximate stage they usually occurred so a child's activities could be understood in context of their development.

**Writing Process Models**

One of the first models of the writing process we have is based on research published in 1964 by D. Gordon Rohman and Albert Wlecke. They found through their research that students who were given time before they wrote to come up with ideas and to plan the composition wrote better papers (Faigley 529). From their research Rohman and Wlecke described the process of writing in terms of the writer's stages of thought, a linear stage model of writing made up of three stages: Prewriting --> Writing---> Revising (Faigley 532). Their research began the movement away from the traditional product approach to writing in composition research (Faigley 529).

By challenging traditional views of writing, Rohman and Wlecke's research spawned more research on the process of writing. Janet Emig, in the late 1960's, researched the composing processes of twelfth graders. She found her students did follow a process of writing including planning, drafting and revising that contrasted with the traditional textbook advice (telling students to create an outline before writing). But she also found the stages described by Rohman and Wlecke were not linear, but recursive, meaning that the writer was free to move between the stages to replan, write, revise as she wrote, etc. Although Emig's research did not provide a complete model of how the cognitive processes of writing worked, it gave motivation for other researchers to search for such a model (Faigley 532).

The most well-known research into the cognitive processes of writing was conducted by the team of Linda Flower (an English professor) and John Hayes (a cognitive psychologist). Their research did not describe the stages and sequences of thoughts the experienced writer uses, like the previous research. Instead, their model described how cognitive processes and other influences govern the choices writers make in the composing process (Flower and Hayes 365). The model assumes that writing is best described as those choices the writer makes in the process of composing, not as stages of thought the writer must go through (Flower and Hayes 366). Flower and Hayes' model of how experienced writers write describes three main elements present in the writer's world: outside constraints or the **task environment** involving the actual writing situation (topic, audience, purpose) and the developing draft, cognitive constraints or
the writer's long-term memory including knowledge of the topic and general writing plans, and
the actual cognitive activities or writing processes including planning the specific text, putting
the ideas into words, revising the drafts, and monitoring all the processes and the other
elements (Flower and Hayes 368). The writer, in creating a certain text, must move between all
these elements effectively, juggling all these constraints on their active thought processes.

In Flower and Hayes' model of the writing process, the focus is not on moving from one stage of
thought to another, but on how complex and interrelated the writing activities are. This more
complex model of choices, constraints and activities moves further away from Rohman and
Wlecke's simple three stage model. And the differences between Rohman and Wlecke's model
and Flower and Hayes' model parallels the differences between the Aristotle's view of rhetoric
and the sophists' view. Both Aristotle and the team of Rohman and Wlecke saw writing as a
process, but a systematic process that could be taught to all communicators. On the other hand,
the sophists along with Flower and Hayes saw the writing process as ever changing with the
changing communicative situation. The process could not be taught, but strategies for
managing the process could. Process was not a method of writing, but an approach to
understanding writing.

Specific Cognitive Activities
As researchers came to recognize the complexity of the composing process and began to
question how students developed their writing skills (innate or learned) (Bereiter 74), they
began trying to explain individual elements involved in the composition process of an
individual writer. Acknowledging Rohman and Wlecke's observation that planning helped the
writer write, a major focus of research became the elements of the prewriting or planning stage
of the process. Planning does not necessarily take place only before drafting, but it is a
necessary stage at the beginning of the process. Because each writing situation is unique,
planning is essential to direct the rest of the process effectively, from beginning to end.

One of the elements of the planning stage, that has strong roots in developmental psychology
and has received a lot of attention from composition researchers, is the idea of audience
awareness during the writing process. Researchers agree that mature writing is marked by
sensitivity to the reader of the text. But how the writer acquires that sensitivity has been
explained different ways. Barry Kroll and James Britton, picking up on Piaget's ideas of
cognitive development, describe the development of audience awareness as the achievement of
decentering. If the student is decentered, she has moved away from egocentrism or the
"inability to take any perspective but one's own" (Faigley 532). As the student develops g10
mentally from egocentric to decentered, her writing becomes more mature. She is able to take on the reader's perspective while planning, drafting and revising, seeing her draft through the eyes of her reader and shaping it to meet the reader's needs and her own purposes.

Linda Flower describes a similar phenomenon; however, she describes the movement as moving from *writer-based* prose, or writing only for one's self as the reader, to *reader-based* prose, or writing for a real audience outside the author. This movement, unlike decentering, is not based on innate development of the writer, but the development of the writer's cognitive ability to transform a writer-based draft into a reader-based draft that communicates effectively to the audience (Flower 268, 270). Through successive drafts, the writer is able to revise the original writer-based text, which is usually in narrative form, and produce a reader-based text meeting the needs of the reader.

As a corollary to the study of audience awareness during drafting and revising, researchers have also looked into *audience analysis* as a part of the planning stage. In audience analysis, the writer describes important information about her audience so she will be better able to draft a successful text. To do a complete audience analysis, writers need to look at both the social nature of the audience and the cognitive reading nature of the audience.

The social nature of the audience is like an audience at a performance, free from the cognitive constraints of reading. Audiences go to performances that match their likes. Audiences that read will read on topics they like or like what they read if it interests them, if it matches their interests and needs. To match these needs and likes, the writer can analyze her potential audience. She can look at such elements as education, age, culture, etc. of the audience she wants to reach and plan how her writing can meet those needs. For example, a writer works in the personnel department of a company. The president of the company may ask her to research and write a report on reducing absenteeism. The writer, knowing how busy the president is and that he is only really interested in the results and recommendations of her research, will put her findings, conclusions and recommendations early in her report to match the needs and wants of her readers, and probably keep her job.

Besides the social nature of the audience, the writer must also consider the cognitive nature or reader. The reader is different from the audience because the reader must actually perform the cognitive task of reading the text to get meaning. Whereas considering the audience requires sensitivity to lifestyle, age, education, etc., considering the reader requires sensitivity to process of reading and making meanings accessible. Research in understanding the reader
focuses on cognitive **schema** (or a framework of knowledge from past experiences) to help explain the relationship between reading and writing. Both writers and readers have these schema stored in their long-term memory and schemas help both writers and readers interpret new experiences by referencing them to similar experiences from the past. Where do these schema for writing come from? They come from reading and writing experiences. For example, after reading many mystery stories, a reader has a general schema for how a mystery story runs its course. When they begin reading a mystery, they expect certain progressions of events. The schemas help readers follow the story and interpret what is going on. If the story is way off of the general schema the reader has, they will have a tough time following the story; but if they can get through it, they will have an expanded schema including alternatives that might guide them in the future. Teachers can build these schemas in children by having them read and discuss genre-type literature, rather than basal readers (Grant-Hennings 8).

Schemas work for writers in a similar fashion. The writers can draw on their experiences as readers to access schemas for certain genres they are writing, like a thank-you letter. By accessing their experiences as readers to plan their text, the writer will be sensitive to the reader of their text. But the reader's reliance on schemas to understand a new communicative experience means writers have the responsibility of providing the kind of information in their writing to allow the reader to access the appropriate schema for interpreting the text (Crow 3). For example, if the thesis sentence in a student essay says the writer will evaluate a product by comparing it to another product, but in the rest of essay the writer merely describes the product to evaluate it, readers feel confused as they read and we teachers will give it a poor grade. The writer's text prompted the readers to access one schema to begin to understand the text, but then confuses the reader by organizing the information in the text with another schema.

Although keeping the audience/reader in mind is one of the keys to producing effective communication, the writer has to juggle other cognitive activities during the writing process. She has to be able to access what she already knows about her topic from her long term memory to plan her draft. The teacher can help the writer access this information by recommending several popular pre-writing activities such as brainstorming, journal writing and freewriting. If the writer decides she doesn't know enough about the topic, she must add to her knowledge by referring to outside sources and must store that new information in such a way so she can bring it into her active memory when she is composing. After she has her information, she must organize it in a logical manner to see relationships in the material while she is planning and to give overall structure to the text while she is drafting. Again, the teacher can help her by recommending activities such as outlining, idea-mapping or
clustering. Through this planning, the writer is creating plans and goals for her text. In order for the writing to proceed effectively, researchers have found that the plans and goals the writer uses must be set by the writer (Flower and Hayes 373). If the teacher appropriates the text in the planning stage by making all the planning decisions for the student writer, the writer will not feel she has control or ownership of the final product and will not write as effectively as she could if she was involved in the planning decisions.

Once the planning is done, the writer has to actually put words to paper, which takes most of the developing writer's cognitive activity. This is the drafting stage of the writing process. Besides physically writing, the writer has to make decisions on what comes next (planning), and what needs to be changed of what she has already written (revision). Add to all these constraints the further constraint the school setting often puts on student writers. Even though students are asked to write for a particular "real" audience, the teacher is the evaluator who will decide if the writing is right or wrong (Bereiter 76). The writer has to balance what she would say to her intended audience with what she thinks the teacher will find acceptable for the audience (or for the teacher herself). Further, research has shown that developing writers can only work with one to three of these cognitive activities in their active memory simultaneously. The activity that seems to take precedence over the others is the activity of getting the ideas into words, not larger content concerns (Bereiter 81). With all these activities and constraints simultaneously bearing down on students, it is no wonder they get frustrated with writing and say it is too hard. The student is expected by the teacher/evaluator to handle all the cognitive activities, but mentally can only effectively handle a few at a time.

How can the composition teacher help the developing writer manage all of those cognitive activities necessary to produce a readable text? One way is to help make some of the activities automatic, so the writer can use active memory to handle other concerns. Experienced writers seem to have fluency in lower level tasks like putting ideas into words so their active memory can coordinate more activities than less experienced writers (Bereiter 81). Teachers need to give students time to practice writing so they can begin to be fluent in those lower order content concerns that the inexperienced writer focuses on so they can learn to coordinate other activities.

Besides practice to make some activities automatic, teachers can help students manage and master their cognitive activities by encouraging multiple drafts of papers. This practice allows the student to work through lower order activities, such as getting words on paper through freewriting, in one draft and then revise that draft by concentrating on other cognitive
gactivities, such as audience concerns. Encouraging multiple drafts breaks down the complex processes of writing into manageable segments for developing writers (Flower 288). Multiple drafting also allows writers to develop revising skills.

Although experienced writers do most of their own revising (being able to take on the reader's perspective) and do it while they are drafting (not in a separate revising stage), inexperienced writers are happy just to get a complete product out of the drafting stage. Any "revising" students do with texts is merely recopying to make the draft neater and to clear up grammar mistakes (which is technically editing that should be done after the draft is sufficiently revised). Teachers need to set revising time aside after drafting so students will become comfortable reworking their draft and learn skills they can then apply while drafting.

Like most of the cognitive research into the composing process, there are differing views on how revising should be handled. Where researchers and teachers agree is that some kind of quality feedback on the draft-in-progress is necessary to motivate and guide revisions (Earls 49). If the writer cannot yet see through the eyes of a reader, a reader must look at the draft and give the writer some advice. The differences in opinions come as to who should act as the reader to give the most beneficial advice. The most obvious two candidates in the classroom setting are the teacher and other students.

Even though much of today's research and teaching advice centers on using peer feedback, teacher advice seems of higher quality for obvious reasons. The teacher has more experience in writing and judging writing and therefore can give more accurate, helpful feedback. Secondly, the constraints of the classroom setting come into play again. The student knows it is the teacher who gives the grade on the paper and thus will feel that it is the teacher's feedback that is most important. Students will probably do more than recopy if the teacher asks for more substantial revision, assuming changes in the draft will equal changes in a grade (Earls 50).

On the other hand, classroom constraints on the teacher make peer feedback more appealing. Having students respond to other students' drafts substantially cuts down on the teacher's paper load. She can read just the final polished drafts. Peer feedback should be more beneficial than teacher feedback if the audience for the draft is the class. The writer should then be able to "test market" the draft and make the changes necessary to meet the needs and interests of her reader. Finally, students can learn from reading other student work. They can
learn to use language more effectively by seeing how peers, as well as experienced writers, write (Earls 49).

Quality of the feedback from either the teacher or a student is the key to revision. Sometimes feedback hinders drafting because of vague responses like "It's good," or "I'd give it an A," or "This paper needs to be more concrete and specific" (Elbow 238). Teachers need to teach students how to give feedback to each other.

Beliefs Underlying Cognitive Research into Writing as a Process
What seems to be common to the various views on the cognitive activities of writing is that the individual writer is completely in charge and is completely responsible for the written product that comes out of their process. The focus in teaching with the cognitive process approach is to teach students to control their processes so they can control their text. This burden of responsibility can be frustrating to a writer. If the final paper the writer turns in to the teacher does not receive a good grade, it is the writer's fault for not managing the process correctly. Developing writers, according to cognitive theories, are expected to learn problem-solving strategies that they can then apply to any writing situation because all writing situations will lend themselves to the three stages of thought. This explanation of the writing process, as being wholly explainable as cognitive, did not seem quite complete to some researchers. More than just thought processes were in control of the composition process of most writers. Researchers began to also consider social influences on the choices writers made.

Social Activities in Writing
People who have written outside of the academic, structured assignments students write for know there are other forces shaping the writer's decisions while composing. They know effective writing is more than applying problem-solving strategies and more than mastering individual cognitive activities. Take for example the researchers who write about writing. They are not writing in isolation, brainstorming ideas on writing, deciding what plans match their reader's schemas, writing drafts, and expecting those drafts to be published in the English Journal. Their articles are spurred by what they are reading about and discussing with their colleagues, not by artificial assignments. Their writing is a part of their environment, their community. When they write down their ideas, they want the product to be a meaningful contribution to the on-going conversation about their topic, writing. They are reading what others have written about writing, talking to experts and colleagues about their ideas and evolving drafts, and trying to contribute something more to the composition
conversation they are a part of to move it forward. Writing then is not merely a process done by an individual writer, but a social activity associated with the groups of people we belong to. Most writers don't have to analyze who their audience is because they are a part of that group. They are writing for someone they know well. They work with their specific context to decide how and what to add to the conversation.

The idea of a social activity of writing has its roots in other disciplines including the sciences like social anthropology. Research on the social activity of writing considers how language develops and changes so as to understand how people use language to communicate. Social anthropologists and linguists studying this phenomenon found language was not a way of putting a correct label on an object, a label whose meaning had a one-on-one correspondence with the object it referred to. Instead, the relationship between the word and reference is arbitrary. The word given to the referent creates a reality between the speaker and listener or writer and reader. The word does not stand for a real thing, but creates that reality (Bruffee "Social Construction" 780).

We can see this arbitrary relationship of word and meaning if we look at how meanings of words change over time. As the social structures and realities of our world change, the meanings of our words change to interpret the reality. A good example in today's world is the word gay. Until recently, the word gay had positive connotations, and students had no problems reading a text with the word gay in it or using the word gay in their own descriptions. Today, with the public awareness and discussion about homosexuality, the word gay has taken on negative connotations and students giggle when they run across the term in older literature. The change in definition reflects the changes in how people interpret their world. Consequently, there is no concrete, real meaning of gay, or any word. Language helps us shape and share our reality and experiences with others creating a world where we can communicate, be understood and therefore think and work together.

In the realm of writing as a social activity reflecting and constructing how we see the world, there are three areas of research and discussion that I think are important in more fully understanding the writing process. These three areas are community, conversation and collaboration. All three of these ideas are interconnected, but need to be understood as separate terms first to understand their relationship to each other.
Community in Writing

The term *discourse community* has become a sort of catch phrase in current composition discussions. This term is attributed to Patricia Bizzell who described discourse communities as being a group of people who share similar beliefs and value systems. Many researchers such as Joseph Harris and Kenneth Bruffee believe these communities shape who we are. The reality of our language, our knowledge, our thoughts, what we consider facts and who we consider ourselves to be come not from our unique thinking processes, but from the communities we identify ourselves with (Bruffee "Social Construction" 774). Because our thoughts and knowledge are constructed by our communities, our written communication of these thoughts and our purposes for writing are not uniquely inspired "original" thoughts but reflect the communities we belong to; what the groups care about, believe in and are discussing. The groups are the reality our language helps shape (Harris 12). Similarly, the meanings of our writings do not belong to ourselves and our intentions, or to the words themselves (as if they had some universal, concrete meaning), but to our community. The meanings of the words will be interpreted according to the community's reality. Again, the idea of audience plays a key role in writing and writing research. But in the social view of writing, the audience is a part of the construction of a text, not another cognitive activity to manage.

Although the term community has connotations of consensus and working together, researchers working to explain community's role in how writers write have different views of its meaning. The first is the view that students can write more effectively when they learn about and become members of the academic discourse community. Students move into the academic community by learning the values, beliefs and conventions shared by academics (Harris 16). Learning is then more than acquiring new information or skills, like identifying indirect objects or how to analyze an audience. It is an acceptance of new habits, values, beliefs and ways of thinking. It is a shift in the social standing of the student, moving into new communities (Trimbur 90). So the teacher, representing this academic community students need to be initiated into, must act as the ambassador of this community and teach the students about the community (Harris 16). Once they understand the beliefs of this community, writing is no longer a frightening unknown. It is like gaining and maintaining membership in a school-sponsored club. They become familiar with how the club runs and are more comfortable participating in it.

A second view on discourse communities takes the authority away from the teacher knowing all about the correct community, the academic one, and gives the students authority and prestige for being a part of their own community of their peers. This peer view asks teachers to
let students recognize their own communities as being important, appreciating who they are, and only helping them to gain membership in a new community if they decide they want to communicate with that group (Harris 17). Paolo Freire, a Brazilian educator, says this recognition of everyday communication of students is important because he sees traditional education as teaching students to live within oppressive and alienating structures and to adapt to them. In other words, the students are no longer constructing their own reality within their communities but accepting the reality and the authority the teacher presents to them about the academic community. This second view of communities, that gives responsibility and authority to the communities the students already belong to, allows them to develop a belief in what they are doing and critically look at the other communities they do belong to or don’t belong to and decide whether or not they want to belong to them. Ownership of their ideas and importance of their community can give them the motivation to join the conversations they are familiar with, and the practice will help them strengthen their writing. Students can interpret everyday conversations as important and can use those conversations to gain confidence to shape their own reality (Trimbur 93).

These two views on the role of community seem to pivot on the idea that how we teach is what we teach. If we teach the teacher is the authority, the students will accept someone else’s reality and rules, whether they are the rules of the writing process or the rules of the academic community. If we teach students that they are important in their own communities, the students will take responsibility for their writing and feel it is important in its own right.

Working with, not against, middle school communities is very important to being able to teach writing in a process approach. Adolescent nature is "volatile and social" indicating not a poor attitude among young people today, but rather typical attitudes of that age. Working against these energies and needs will lead to a chaotic classroom; working with them will funnel great amounts of energy in communicating their attitudes to one another. Secondly, during adolescence, students are developing intellectually, even if the development is not as "cute" or noticeable as younger students' development. Middle school students are starting to form their own opinions on issues and want to be recognized as individuals (Atwell 25).

This development of identity corresponds with a third characteristic of the middle school community, wanting to become a part of an "adult reality." Students need more responsibility for their learning so they have a stake in academia. Their developing adolescent communities then become an important place of learning, in many senses (Atwell 26). When they feel their own conversations in their communities are important and they do not have to go grasping for
issues outside their realm just because they seem more adult, academic and important, they can strengthen their writing process.

**Conversation in Writing**

The second social activity of writing I feel is important is the idea that writing is a form of conversation. Michael Oakeshott defines education not as an accumulation of knowledge but as a conversation. Humans don't passively store information in a database, but want to discuss that knowledge. Education, then, should be an initiation into conversation. Education should allow students to talk about the knowledge they have (Bruffee "Collaboration" 638).

Conversations take place not just between people present at a given time, but also within the writer as she looks at what she already knows and tries to incorporate new ideas into her conversation, and also with people not present, such as when she reads what someone has added to the conversation in the past (Bruffee "Collaboration" 641). If writing includes the social activity of conversation, before a student can write effectively, she must be socialized so she can take part in these conversations (Porter 44). She needs to belong to the community and be able to talk within the community before she can internalize conversations and write about them to her peers. Writing, then, is not the work of an individual writer, but the work of a team, the community. All compositions are team-written because writers are always borrowing bits and pieces of what people have said before to add into their current conversation. In talking, the speaker and hearer depend on known cues and accepted interpretations to continue the conversation (Porter 37). The cues are known and interpretations accepted because community has used them or agreed on them before. To have a normal written conversation or normal discourse, as Bruffee terms it, your discourse community of knowledgeable peers has to understand and accept your contribution to the community's conversation, requiring the writer and reader to use accepted cues and interpretations (Bruffee "Collaboration" 642).

**Collaboration in Writing**

The idea of team-work and conversation in the writing process relates to the third element I want to discuss -- collaboration. Collaboration has received a lot of attention from educators lately because of its relation to the popular teaching methods based on cooperative learning. Instead of talking about the practical applications of collaboration in writing here, which I will speak to in the curriculum design section of the manual, I will discuss at this point the ideas underlying collaboration and its relation to community and conversation.
When writers collaborate in writing, they are working with others as a team to produce a text. There are several ways collaboration happens in composition. Most people think of co-authoring a text when they hear about collaborative writing. In this sense, collaboration means working directly with others in the planning, writing, editing and publishing of a text. Collaboration can also mean simply peer review of an individual author's work. A third way writing can be viewed as collaborative occurs when all discourse is viewed as collaborative. If we believe any writer relies on the previous conversations and what her discourse community to construct how she sees the world, she has to collaborate with the conversation and community to produce an effective text (Vipond and Reither 858 & 860). If this is the case, if writers are always borrowing from previous conversations and from our community, it would seem all discourse, whatever has been spoken or written, comes from a single network of conversation. The conversation has always been going on and can always be traced back to a previous idea or conversation (Porter 34).

Collaboration has some important theoretical underpinnings that explain its relationship to conversation and community. One is the importance of audience, which I discussed also in the cognitive processes section. As I said, most researchers agree that mature writing is marked by a sensitivity to audience. Obviously, if writing is collaborative, as a part of the conversation going on in the community, the audience is implicit in what is being said. It is not merely another factor to analyze as in the cognitive theories. A second principle of collaboration has to do with the power of peer influence. Teachers know this power well. The power of peer influence often gets in the way of what we are trying to teach. Thinking of writing as collaborative can allow teachers to take advantage of that power in teaching writing and other language arts. They can harness that peer power to teach students how to write more effectively. Third, by being a part of collaborative work in terms of co-authoring or helping revise, students can learn something about their own writing. By looking at and commenting on peer writing, students can learn to be critical of their own work. The fourth principle is the role of feedback in the conversation and collaboration of writing (Gebhardt 69). Students are not working alone because they have the community and the collaboration to depend on. To use this support to add to the conversation, feedback becomes the key, as it also is in cognitive theories. With feedback, the writer is no longer struggling with her own cognitive processes to solve a writing situation, but is a writer writing as a part of a community. Feedback gives the writer emotional as well as more mechanical benefits. Feedback incorporates the writer into a group and gives her moral support as well as providing her with other points of view during the writing process (Gebhardt 74).
Because of the great benefits from collaboration and feedback, collaboration with members of the community should not be left to the end of the writing process, as popular peer editing activities sometimes do. Peer feedback needs to include content and organization (to work best for her community). If the class is the real audience for the student paper when peer editing is needed, peers are a natural review board for the evolving text. The comments of the community will make a real impact on how the text can be re-visioned by the author. The community has become a part of the writing activity from the very beginning and should remain a part in the evaluation of the written product (Gebhardt 72). Unlike the cognitive theorists, social theorists endorse peer feedback over teacher feedback because of the paper's ties to the community.

Writing as a collaborative, social activity also helps the students shape their community, their reality and add to their own conversations, not the looming academic world they are unfamiliar with. They are in a social context, one constructing knowledge that their community accepts. If they argue why a certain school rule should be changed, they are add to their community's justification for the rule change, they grow to understand why their world should be changed, what their world should be like and why. They come to a base for their argument and learn argument itself within the community.

These three elements, community, conversation and collaboration, and the whole idea of writing as a social activity can be a very tentative approach for composition teachers to adopt as their sole philosophy of writing. Unlike cognitive theories, writing as a social activity does not describe the stages a writer goes through in producing a text. Social theories connect the process with the context, which changes with each writer, writing situation, and even with each draft of a particular assignment. Each time a text is written, it will be different from other situations and previous drafts because the context changes with more knowledge added to the conversation. Context becomes the key to writing in social theories; the process depends on the context. In cognitive theories, the process depends on the writer and context is just another element to factor into the analysis of the situation. Further, writing according to social theories is not aimed at an intended audience, with the author predicting whether or not her ideas will reach that audience out there. Instead, it is an activity that takes place in the community to continue membership in the community or to gain acceptance into other communities (Bruffee "Social Construction" 784).
A Cognitive/Social Process Of Writing

We probably cannot know everything (or even much) about the complex processes of writing, but we can use the research to understand the process more fully (LeFerve 9). Looking at research and theories on both cognitive and social views of the composition process helps us see how truly complex this process is. There do seem to be cognitive activities that a writer must learn to be successful; there are also social concerns and influences that must be recognized and dealt with. The process of writing is more than just cognitive or just social. It is a process involving both kinds of activities. With the information presented here, we can outline some principles of what this cognitive/social process involves.

1. Writing is an activity.
   - Writing is an activity that must be practiced to be improved. The writing classroom should be a place where students practice this activity often (Lindemann 149).

2. The activity of writing occurs as a process.
   - The process takes place within the writer's community, where the writer adds to the community's ongoing conversation on the topic. To add to the conversation, the writer collaborates with the community and with previous conversations.

   - The process encompasses a time frame beginning with the writer's need to communicate her ideas and ending with the interpretation of the text by the community (Lauer 54).

   - The idea of writing as a process is not a magic solution to teaching writing. Teaching in the process approach does not guarantee success, insight or improvement from the first draft to the last. But it also does not abandon the writer to write in isolation (Lauer 54).

3. The writing process is made up of stages.
   - The writing process has identifiable stages (planning, drafting, revising), but those stages are not distinct; they are overlapping and recursive. For instance, planning has to occur in some form before drafting can begin, but planning can also occur during drafting and revising.

   - Some of the activities in these stages are conscious and can be improved; others are not conscious efforts. For example, writing words on paper at the middle school level should be an automatic activity, although if the writer is sensitive to her handwriting, it becomes a conscious activity she tries to improve, taking away conscious energy from other improvements like organizing ideas effectively (Lauer 54).

   - The stages are the process itself. The strategies teachers use to teach students to write guide the students through the process. You cannot teach a process for writing (Lauer 55).
4. When working through the process of writing, the writer:
   • must work with her cognitive activities such as knowledge, schemas, and physically writing
   • must acknowledge the cognitive activities of her community (reading)
   • must work within her unique middle school community through collaboration and conversation
   • must adjust their activities in the stages to meet the community's needs and the writer's purposes.

5. To help students work the process of writing, the teacher:
   • must focus their teaching strategies on the process and how the process can produce an effective written product
   • must intervene in the process as the students write, rather than merely correct the final products
   • must see writing as an art that needs guidance for development. Giving students guidance is not the same as prescribing how they should work through the process. Developing writers (artists) need advice, principles or strategies to work through each new, unique writing situation (Lauer 54)
   • must encourage community involvement in the writing process through group projects, group planning, peer feedback, etc.

These principles are important for understanding the cognitive/social view of the writing process, and they are important for developing a writing curriculum based on this view. However, the principles listed here may suggest broad directions for teaching writing in a process approach. They are not in themselves strategies for teaching students how to write. The second part of this manual will present strategies for teaching writing and designing writing assignments based on these principles.
DEVELOPING A WRITING CURRICULUM FOR YOUR CLASSROOM
Like the foundation of process principles for different directions of research in composition, a base of knowledge is needed for different composition teaching methods. This base of knowledge, presented in the background section, illustrates how broad teaching strategies need to be to teach students how to handle their complex processes for writing.

The purpose of this section, the curriculum design guide, is to serve as a guide to choosing specific strategies (based on the principles in the previous section) in creating a writing program for your classroom. This guide does not prescribe how you should teach writing in the process view, but describes possible writing assignments designs and assignment sequences that will allow you to guide students through the cognitive/social processes of writing and make them aware of the complex and changing nature of those processes. The actual choices you make will depend on your teaching style, your teaching goals and other constraints.

The first step in designing a curriculum in the process approach is creating a community of writers to socialize the students in a particular class. Establishing the class as a community of peers is an important aspect of establishing this writing curriculum if the social activities of the writing process are to be taught effectively. The first section of the design guide presents activities and a writing assignment that help build community and that may take three to four weeks. It should then be an important part of the beginning of the school year (or semester) to build the community of that particular grouping of students for that particular school year. Building this community cannot be done with just one activity or in just one day. It takes time to build the bonds and positive atmosphere necessary for students to feel comfortable working together and to seek out peer commentary.

Once the idea of community and its involvement in the individual's writing process has been established, succeeding writing assignments, whether they are creative writing, book reports, essays, research projects, etc, must build on that foundation and continue to mesh social activity with the individual writing processes. The second section of the design guide presents general guides to the stages and strategies of the cognitive/social writing process and models of how those general guidelines can be applied to specific writing assignments.

Along with writing assignments, this design guide presents ideas for practicing other skills besides writing. The third section offers ideas on connecting reading skills to writing skills. The fourth section describes how the ideas presented in the manual for middle school teachers can be applied to other levels of instruction.
ESTABLISHING AND BUILDING A COMMUNITY IN YOUR CLASSROOM
COMMUNITY BUILDING ACTIVITY----SHOW AND TELL

TEACHER’S NOTES: I like to do this activity during the first week of classes. It is simply a version of the more elementary activity by the same name. The activity helps students learn how others view themselves, to discuss something that might have happened over the summer, and build a community of that particular class that semester or school year. Plus, it is fun. It makes English class less intimidating at the beginning of the year. I try to schedule 5 minutes per student to allow for longer stories and/or questions from other students, which should be encouraged, if appropriate.

GOALS • To learn something about others in class
• To create a positive atmosphere in the class early in the semester
• To begin to build a sense of community for that particular group of students for that particular semester or year.

ACTIVITY 1. A couple of days before the actual presentations, tell students you are going to have show and tell days. They should think of an item they own and can bring to class that says something about who they are. They should also be prepared to explain how the item tells something, a story, about them. You can assign presentation times or pick them on the presentation dates, whatever you prefer.

2. On the presentation days, have each student give their presentation, keeping an eye on the time. Maintain a positive atmosphere in the classroom in terms of comments and questions of other students. Make positive comments after each presentation.

COMMENTS • Typical items students will bring in are stuffed animals, models, and sports equipment. You may want to talk with students ahead of time to get a survey of the items and to encourage variety.

• Presentations may be short because students aren’t sure how to explain how the item represents them. You may have to ask questions to help the student tell the class about the relationship between the item and their personality.

• Show and tell can be a good warm-up activity for the student biography assignment (in this manual). Once the students starting talking about themselves and things they have done, the class usually wants to know more. The student biographies are a productive outlet for that energy and curiosity.
COMMUNITY BUILDING ACTIVITY----MONSTER DESCRIPTION

TEACHER'S NOTES

All of this activity can be done during class time, or parts can be done at home. It can also be extended into a revising activity. The extent of the activity depends on the time frame you are working with and which of the goals you want to meet. I like to have colored pencils, crayons, and/or markers for the students to add color to their drawings.

In this activity, the students are involved in both describing with words and describing with drawings. Try to keep the author's written and drawn descriptions private until the assigned sharing time.

GOALS

• To gain a sense of the reader's role in creating meaning of a written text
• To see the importance of peer feedback in drafting and revising a text
• To build community and a positive atmosphere in the class

ACTIVITY

1. Ask the students to describe, in a couple of paragraphs, the scariest monster they can think of. I further tell them not to describe a common movie monster, but a monster of their imagination. Inform the students that they will be drawing a picture of this same monster and thus should use as much description as possible.

2. After they finish writing their description, hand out drawing paper for their monster drawings. This can be done during class time, or can be assigned to do at home. Tell them to use colors to match the drawing to their written description. The coloring in of the picture can be done during class time the next day if desired.

**These pictures and descriptions should be kept private until step 3, when they are shared with one other class member**

3. Have the students exchange their written description with another student in class. The second student should read the description carefully and draw the monster based on the description.

4. Have the author and the reader share their drawings of the description. They can discuss the differences. The pairs can also share the two drawings with the whole class.

5. Revising activity. Have the reader work with the writer to revise the original written description so the reader could have drawn the monster more accurately. They can then compare the original with the revised version.
COMMENTS

• The students will want to share their descriptions and drawings before the designated time. To get the full impact of the activities, the descriptions and drawings need to stay secret.

• Once the students can share, they will want to share their drawings and descriptions with more than just their partners. To avoid uncontrolled sharing, you may want to set aside time for whole class sharing.

• The students' excitement can take the focus of the activity off of the power of language and the important role of the reader in the writing process. You may have to point these ideas out to make the activity a learning experience.

* This activity was taken from Writers in Training by Rebekah Caplan, published by Dale Seymour Publications, 1984, pages 17&18.
COMMUNITY BUILDING ACTIVITY---GROUP DECISION-MAKING

#1

TEACHER'S NOTE
This activity is meant to be challenging and maybe a bit unsettling, depending on the activity you choose to use. But the nature of the assignment should also make students do some critical thinking and build other aspects of the community you are developing in your classroom, namely cooperation and values. This activity works best if you can allow a whole class period for it.

GOALS
• To practice working together to make decisions
• To discuss ideas and feelings on values
• To build a writing community where students construct their reality
• To describe, in writing, the decisions made and the reasons for those decisions

ACTIVITY
1. Group students into larger groups, preferably groups of five. With this size groups you will get a variety of opinions.

2. Give students a copy of the activity sheet (included) and give them some time to read through it.

3. Discuss the activity as a class to make sure the groups understand the decisions they are supposed to make and how they are supposed to make them.

4. Give the groups enough time to talk through their opinions and to come to some group decisions. It will probably require 20 minutes.

5. Ask each group to write a group statement of their decision and why they chose the way they did. The statement will be turned in to the teacher.

6. Have a representative of each group present their decisions to the whole class. The class can then ask questions of the group and discuss the results.
Community Building Activity #1

SURVIVAL VALUES/GROUP DECISION MAKING ACTIVITY*

In this exercise, you will work in groups to decide the fate of fifteen persons. You and the following fifteen persons are the only humans left on earth. You had the foresight and vision to construct a home that has both a "neutron shield" and a "bomb shelter" designed to withstand any kind of bomb which could be created. The United States was attacked, but you and the following fifteen persons are safe in your bomb shelter following the attack.

From what you have know about the bomb, you have determined that it will take two weeks for the external radiation level to drop to a safe level. While the neutron shield was in place when the bomb was dropped, you have no way of knowing for sure that the living quarters in the protected house are safe, nor do you know whether or not the food there is safe for consumption. What you do know, however, is that the food and water supplies in your bomb shelter can sustain, at a minimum level, seven people, in addition to your "family" (the number of people your group, which is now "your family").

Your job is to decide, along with your family, which of the following people can stay in your bomb shelter...which seven will survive. Use group decision skills to come to agreement and provide reasons for your decisions. One member of your family should keep track of the ideas and reasons.

Dr. Franz 39, white, doesn't go to church, married, teacher, has one child (Bobby)

Mrs. Franz 38, white, Jewish, married, social worker, has one child (Bobby)

Bobby Franz 10, white, Jewish, in special education classes, likes pets

Mrs. Garcia 33, Mexican-American, Catholic, has 9th grade education, waitress, married at 16, divorced at 18, attacked by her father at 12, ran away from home, has one child (Maria)

Maria Garcia 3 weeks old, Mexican-American, depends on her mother for food

Mrs. Yamasaki 32, Japanese-American, Protestant, elementary teacher who has won outstanding teaching awards, divorced, one child (Jennifer).

Jennifer Yamasaki 8, Japanese-American, Protestant, 3rd grade, honors student.

John Jacobs 13, white, Protestant, 8th grade, honors student

Mr. Newton 25, black, doesn't believe in God, kicked out of medical school for being homosexual, wears "hippy" clothing.

Mrs. Clark 28, black, Protestant, married, electrical engineer, grew up in a ghetto, one child (Cherrie)
Mr. Clark 30, white, Protestant, married, company president, one child (Cherre)

Cherrie Clark 12, 7th grade, average student but has problems getting along with other students because of the mixed background of her parents.

Sister Mary 27, white, Nun, grew up in a small town where she helped to run her dad's business.

Amid Satra 9, Indian, Hindu, parents are not with him, very good student, computer whiz

Patty Dane 13, white, Catholic, 8th grade, parents aren't with her, grew up in the suburbs of a large city, average student, dresses well and tries to be the teacher's pet.

You will discuss this situation with your "family" for 20-30 minutes. Which of the fifteen will be the "seven who survive"? Be prepared to explain and defend your family's decisions to the class.

COMMENTS

• Students may have fun with the descriptions of the persons at first. After a while they will settle down and use the information to make their decisions.

• The decisions the groups come up with and the reasons for the decisions are usually insightful. I always am surprised at the variety of good conclusions and learn much about the students themselves.

• This activity can serve as a planning stage for an argument paper. The students can write a position paper defending their choices or write about their decisions in a problem/solution format, again defending their choices.

* This activity is taken from an activity by Melissa L. Beall for the College of Education, Iowa State University.
COMMUNITY BUILDING ACTIVITY---GROUP DECISION-MAKING

#2

TEACHER'S NOTE

The circumstances of this activity are meant to trigger the students' desires to help shape their environment. In this case, the students will help make school rule decisions. Because it is a topic they are interested in, the students will feel motivated to generate ideas. The possibilities I have listed on the assignment sheet should be modified to match your school.

GOALS

• To practice working together to make decisions.
• To build a writing community where students help shape their reality
• To describe, in writing, the decisions made and the reasons for those decisions

ACTIVITY

1. Give students a copy of the activity sheet (included) and give them some time to read through it.

2. Discuss the activity as a class to make sure the groups understand the decisions they are supposed to make and how they are supposed to make them.

3. Give the students time to come up with their top five choices, ranked, and written reasons for their choices.

4. Group the students in groups of five and give them enough time to talk through their individual lists and reasons. Have the group compile a group list with reasons.

5. When all the groups are finished, have each group give a class presentation of their decisions and reasons. The class can ask questions of the group. Both the individual and group lists with reasons can be turned in to the teacher.
SCHOOL POLICIES/GROUP DECISION MAKING ACTIVITY

This year, our principal has decided to make some changes at our school. The most amazing part of this plan is that she is using student input to make these changes. The only problem is each class is allowed to submit their top three ideas to the principal for consideration. So we have to make some group decisions.

The following activity has two parts. First, look over the list at the bottom of the page for ideas of possible changes. Also, you need to come up with at least two of your own ideas for changes. Next, on your own, decide on your top 5 choices and rank them in order... 1 for the best and 5 for the last. Along with your ranking, give a reason why you made the choice.

Then you will work with a group of five to decide on the top 3 suggestions for your whole group. Again, 1 means the best and 3 means the last. Remember, this is a group list. This is the hardest part of the activity. Not everyone in your group will have your same top 5 and not everyone will have the same opinion for the group's top 3. Work as a group to rank the top three. Try not to argue, rather try to explain why you have made your choices. Again, write reasons next to your group's rankings.

After all the groups have a top 3 list, each group will have to explain to the class what 3 suggestions they have chosen and why.

Make your individual list and reasons on notebook paper with a heading. The group list and reasons can go on one sheet with everyone's name on it.

POSSIBLE SUGGESTIONS...

- gum-chewing allowed in school
- an open campus (students are allowed to leave during lunch, study hall, etc.)
- students are able to choose the teachers they want for a class
- students are able to create the lunch menus
- students are able to "grade" teachers
- a student lounge to be used during free times with TV, stereo, game tables, etc.
- an air-conditioned school
- new desks in all classrooms
- more trips and assemblies
- a computer in every classroom
- a better library
- a committee of students, teachers and administrators to decide on a new discipline plan

Your own suggestions...
COMMENTS

• This activity can serve as the planning stage for an argument paper. Students can write a letter to the principal stating their position on a policy change or proposing a change with reasons for their proposition.

• Students want to know if their ideas will really be considered by the principal. To give a sense of a real audience, try to get the principal or some administrator to read all or a sample of the letters and give the class some feedback.

• Some of the ideas the students will generate will be outrageous. Keep the students on track by discussing the audience and the constraints of the situation so they can decide on the most realistic changes their audience will consider.
COMMUNITY BUILDING WRITING ASSIGNMENT
STUDENT BIOGRAPHIES

TEACHER'S NOTE

This writing assignment incorporates building a social sense in the class and beginning to look at the processes of writing. Although you will be giving students guidance in different stages of this assignment, you may not want to emphasize these stages as steps they have to go through to complete the project, but rather different stages writers usually go through to complete a similar assignment. The time frame of this assignment depends on how long each day you can devote to the work. An approximate time allotment is one week.

The students work in pairs for the best use of time. You may want to be in one of those pairs to help build the community feeling. If you are involved, you can model questioning techniques to get further information than the standard questions. You may also want to use written models of actual interviews and written descriptions taken from the interviews to help students see the planning required to do a good biography.

GOALS

• To learn effective questioning techniques
• To learn more about peers to help build a sense of community
• To promote writing as a social activity
• To promote listening skills
• To introduce students to the process element of writing
• To learn about making basic content and organizational choices
• To practice revising with peer feedback
• To practice editing for publication

STRATEGIES FOR PROCESS STAGES

Planning
1. Hand out a written assignment sheet explaining the basic procedures and goals of the assignment. This sheet lets students know exactly what you have planned and helps avoid the "I didn't know" syndrome. (A sample assignment sheet is included). Allow them to read over the sheet and discuss the assignment.

2. Have the class decide what their first step should be in beginning the assignment. This first step should probably be creating questions to ask their partner. [Accessing their schemas for interviews]. Then, as a class, have the students come up with potential questions they could ask each other to learn something new, yet appropriate. Record these ideas on the chalkboard. [Acquiring additional information].

3. Show the students models of interviews to see what kinds of questions are asked and how interviewers probe for more information on a topic based on one of the questions. [Acquiring additional information/ Integrating new information]. For example, if the original question is "What is your most interesting adventure?" the questioning can go as follows:

Q. "What was your most interesting adventure?"
A. "Going to Summer Camp two years ago."
Q. "Why was it interesting?"
A. "We did lots of different fun activities."
Q. "Like what?"
A. "Like exploring caves at night."
Q. "Why was that memorable?"

4. Model interview techniques by pairing up with a student for the biography. Have both yourself and the student ask questions, and have the whole class discuss the interview and comment on what worked, and what didn't. (Now you are done with your interview material and can move around the room to monitor the interviews in process.)

5. Pair up the students. Have them write out some basic questions that they can start their interview with and can use to take notes. You may want to let them use tape recorders. Conduct the interviews.

6. Discuss as a class how they can use the answers to their questions to write a short biography the class will enjoy (content choices). Questions to ask the students include: "Do you use all the information you got? If not, which parts do you use?" This question involves the reader in the writing process. The writer will have some idea of what the class already knows about the students and what they would find interesting. [Beginning to organize material.]

7. Discuss with the class organizational choices. "Do you order the information in the order of the questions you asked? Why or why not?" You can bring up organizational ideas like putting the most important idea first or last. [Beginning to organize material.]

Drafting
3. Model a written biography from interviews (or that could have been taken from interviews). [Putting words on paper.]

4. Allow the students drafting time in class so they can ask questions of their interviewee and of the teacher. [Learning what to do if the process breaks down.] Make sure they know this is only a draft that they will revise and refine so they don't think they have to make the draft "correct."

Revising
1. Have the interviewee read the draft of the biography to make sure it is fair and accurate. This revision meeting can be done informally, giving verbal feedback, or formally with a revision sheet (a general form is included in the manual). The writer can then work with the interviewee to make any changes. [Giving feedback at an early stage.]

2. Have a different class member read the draft to see if it meets the needs of the reader (the class). If the reader needs more information, the writer can go back to the interviewee to ask further questions and continue to revise the biography. That class member can then OK the revision as meeting the needs of the reader. This revision phase can also be done as a whole class where each student reads their draft aloud and gets feedback, and then OK from the whole class. [Learning how to remedy problems.]
Editing
Create pairs or small groups that serve as the editorial board for another groups' papers. This board will check for spelling, punctuation, complete sentences, etc, or a particular grammar principle you want to focus on for this assignment before the biography can be published in the Class Biography Book.

Publishing
Publish the biographies (for each class separately or all your classes together--you students can decide). You can distribute a copy to each student or just leave it on display in the classroom.

Tie-Up
In their notebooks, have the students react to this assignment. Ask them to focus on how it felt to be a writer in this assignment and how it felt to help other writers complete their biographies.

COMMENTS
• This assignment gives the students plenty of planning time which includes both cognitive (idea generation, schemas) and social (group idea generation) activities.

• Drafting in class allows students to ask for help. It also allows the teacher to direct the students to plan and revise during this drafting. Thinking of this stage in terms of drafting rather than writing takes the pressure off the writer of producing a perfect first draft.

• The reader of the biography (both the cognitive and social natures) is involved in all aspects of the writing process, building on the community involvement set-up earlier, since the biography is by, about and for the community.

• Teacher feedback may be beneficial in the editing stage. This should be cautious involvement so the students do not feel all the teacher is interested in is correctness.

• Once all the biographies are published, the students in all classes are eager to read them. You may want to allow class time for this reading.
Student Biography Writing Assignment

To help us get to know each other, we are going to write short biographies of another class member to be published in a class directory. You will play two roles: the interviewer/writer and of the person being interviewed. As the interviewer, you will have to practice being an investigative reporter asking the right questions to get an interesting biography. As the interviewee, you must be willing to talk to the interviewer, but will also help the writer write an accurate, appropriate biography about you that you would like the class to read.

Getting Started...
Once you are paired up with your writing/interviewing partner, you will have to conduct a good interview to get material for the biography. As a class, we will try to come up with some basic questions you can use to get started. If you know your partner well, you will probably have some good ideas of questions to ask because you know a bit about your partner's life.

Conducting the Interview
When you have talked about and thought about what would make good questions, you need to write those questions down so you will remember them, and so you can connect the answers you write down during the interview to a question.

When you conduct your interview, you will have class time to complete it. Remember to be polite to your interviewee. If they don't want to talk about a subject because it is too personal, allow them their privacy. But if they bring up an interesting topic you would like to know more about, ask more questions (even if they are not on your list) to get the whole story. Write down all the details you need, and don't be afraid to ask your partner to repeat information. When you are done, check with the partner to make sure what you have recorded is accurate.

When you are being interviewed, remember what it was like to do the interviewing. Answer as many questions as you can, using as much detail as you can for the class members who wouldn't know those details. Don't be afraid to keep some ideas private and please cooperate in repeating information if the interviewer needs it.

Writing the Biography
Read over the information you got from your interview and decide what information would make an interesting and fair biography for the interviewee and the rest of the class. If your partner is a friend of yours, remember that some of the details you already know may not be known by the rest of the class.

If you get stuck or have a question while you are writing, you may want to talk to your partner to get more information or to get some suggestions on what to write next. You may want to look at sample biographies the teacher has to get some ideas.

Before your biography will be published in the class directory, your partner needs to OK the content and a different class member will give you some input on how the class will react to the biography. An editorial review board will also help you polish up the grammar, spelling, punctuation, etc. so the biography will be ready to publish.
STRATEGIES FOR MANAGING THE WRITING PROCESS
The following information will help you create and implement writing assignments for your particular English curriculum to match the needs of that curriculum. It is not intended to replace your current curriculum guide or text, but to serve as a supplement for designing assignments. Each stage is first described using the key objectives for the writer. Then, strategies writers can use to manage a specific stage of the process are listed and described. When designing an assignment, you can choose the strategy needed to match your instructional goals, your students' needs, and the general objectives of each stage. The stages used are planning, drafting, revising, editing and publishing.

**PLANNING**

The planning stage is probably the most important stage of the process since it sets the direction the process will take. Students need plenty of time to plan since they will be called upon to do the following:

- Develop ideas about the topic
- Examine their feelings about a topic
- Acquire additional information or experience relevant to the assignment
- Integrate new information with previous ideas and experiences
- Begin to organize the material
- Examine relationships between their ideas
- Consider the role of their reader

Since the planning stage is so important, researchers and teachers have developed innumerable planning strategies.

**Strategies for Planning**

**Developing/Examining Ideas and Feelings**

**Brainstorming.** This unstructured, free-association listing allows students to explore what they know about the topic. After general impressions are recorded, students can begin to explore details of those general ideas. Brainstorming can be done by the whole class (recorded on the board), by a small group (collaborate on one list or each member starts a list and passes it on to another to add on to), or by the individual. Those individual and group lists can be shared with the whole class.

**Freewriting.** Students can write in a stream-of-consciousness mode to explore their ideas and feelings on a general topic. This is personal writing that is not for evaluation.

**Journals.** A journal can serve as a means to freewrite, brainstorm, keep notes and drafts. It can also be a means to explore a variety of topics on a daily basis. These daily explorations can help generate topics for open assignments.

**Condense ideas.** Students can write what they think about a topic in one sentence to begin to focus their ideas.
Discussion groups. This activity works well with issue topics. It provides a forum for students to tell what their opinions are and why, and to listen to other opinions. To avoid arguments or long speeches, I give restricted times to each student in which they can give their opinion or respond to another student’s views. Discussion groups can include the whole class or smaller groups. These groups also enable students to integrate new information with old, and understand how an audience might receive opinions.

Gathering New Information

Research. Beyond the class sharing of information, students may have to go to other sources to help plan their paper. Possible research strategies include:

- library searches
- opinion surveys
- observations
- readings
- interviews
- questionnaires
- field trips
- written requests for information

Integrating New Information with Old

Responses. After reading new information or learning about different viewpoints during discussion groups, students can write (informally in journals, or formally to be shared) what they learned, how they felt about the new information and whether the new information has altered their views.

Charts. Charts work especially well in description and evaluation papers. Students can make a chart of categories across the top and items to be described or compared along the side. From their knowledge and their research, they can fill in the chart, begin to see relationships and organization patterns, and see how the new information fills out their understanding of the old information.

Seeing Relationships

Clustering and Mapping. Graphically illustrating the relationships between brainstormed ideas is a popular prewriting activity. Drawing circles and lines to show connections among ideas, students can relate category to category and see hierarchies within categories. These relationships, viewed with the purpose of the assignment, provide possible organizational strategies for the drafting stage.

Heuristics. This is a planning strategy that actually dates back to Aristotle. Heuristics are systematic ways to explore a topic and its relationships through series of questions. Each set of questions encourages students to look at the topic from different viewpoints. You can assign a few questions from various categories to get the writer to see these different views on a particular writing topic.

Relationship
1. What causes ____? 4. Why does ____ happen?
2. What are the effects of ____? 5. What is the consequence of ____?
3. What is the purpose of ____? 6. What comes before and after ____?
Definitions
1. How does the dictionary define ____?
2. What earlier words did ____ come from?
3. What do I mean by ______?
4. What group of things does ____ seem to belong to? How is ______ different from other things in this group?
5. What parts can ____ be divided into?
6. Does ____ mean something now that it didn't years ago? What?
7. What other words mean approximately the same as ____?
8. What are some concrete examples of ______? When is ______ misunderstood?

Comparison
1. What is ____ similar to? In what ways?
2. What is ____ different from? In what ways?
3. _____ is superior to what? In what ways?
4. _____ is inferior to what? In what ways?
5. _____ is most unlike what? (What is it opposite to?) In what ways?
6. _____ is most like what? In what ways?

Circumstance
1. Is _____ possible or impossible?
2. What qualities, conditions or circumstances make _____ possible or impossible?
3. Supposing that _____ is possible, is it also feasible? Why?
4. When did _____ happen previously?
5. Who has done or experienced _____?
6. Who can do _____?
7. If _____ starts, what makes it end?
8. What would it take for _____ to happen now?
9. What would prevent _____ from happening?

Description/Narration
1. What was done?
2. Where or when was it done?
3. Who did it?
4. How was it done?
5. Why was it done?

Problem-Solving
1. What is the problem?
2. Why is the problem really a problem?
3. What goals must be served by a solution?
4. Which goals have the highest priority?
5. How can the goals be attained?
6. What kinds of consequences might the solutions have?
7. How does my solution compare with other possible solutions?
8. What is the best course of action?

(Lindemann 86-88)
Using Heuristics in the Planning Stage of a Particular Assignment

Element Explanation
Based on information in their chemistry course, the student needs to research an element and write an explanation of that element that will teach others in the class about it. This explanation is more than a report because it is meant to teach the information, not merely present it. Below is a possible combination of heuristic questioning to help the writer re-see her topic.

- What group of things does it seem to belong to? (definition)
- How is it different from the other members of that group? (definition)
- What is the purpose (or the uses) of the element? (relationship)
- What common form do we know it in? (comparison)

Position Paper—Freedom of Speech
This is a good paper to do in conjunction with a social studies class. Students can argue their stand on a specific freedom of speech violation, such as should a male student be allowed to wear an earring to school if the earring symbolizes a gang but the particular student is not in a gang? Below is a possible combination of heuristic questioning to help the writer re-see her topic.

- What is freedom of speech? (definition)
- What activities are included (and excluded) in this definition? (definition)
- What are other freedom of speech violations similar to this? How are they the same and different? (comparison)
- What circumstances allow this to happen? (circumstance)
- What circumstances would prevent this from happening? (circumstance)
- Is it really a problem? (problem-solving)
- How could it be solved? (problem-solving)
- What would be the consequences of the solution? (problem-solving)

Audience Consideration. Whenever possible, have the class be the readers for the papers. They know their peers and can easily determine how to meet their needs and interests. If they are writing for another audience, have the students, individually or in groups, consider the needs, interests, and special characteristics of the audience. Such characteristics include age (in relation to the writer), job status, education, social status, time constraints, attitudes, etc.
Unlike the planning stage, during the drafting stage the writer has to do most of the work herself. A successful drafting stage will assist the writer in working out her ideas while making feedback accessible to her should the writing processes begin to break down. Drafting is a complex, simultaneous activity involving:

- Putting words on paper (idea --> language --> symbol)
- Planning
- Decision-making
- Organizing
- Remembering information

Coordinating these many activities at once takes a lot of guided practice time.

**Strategies for Drafting**

**Drafting in Class**

- **Time in class to draft.** Student need class time so they can get immediate feedback from peers and the teacher and have access to helpful texts. Writing in class will ensure an environment conducive to drafting, free from distractions like chores, TV and siblings. Beginning the drafting in class will also help prevent the "staring at a blank page" syndrome students often experience when their homework is writing. If they begin the drafting in class, where the ideas are a part of the environment, they will bring those ideas into the home environment and will be stimulated to draft more.

**Freewriting**

- **The first draft.** Encourage freewriting as a first draft if the student is having trouble beginning to draft because of a fear of that first draft not being correct. Freewriting lets the student just get the words on paper without the worry that the draft will be seen by someone else. The student can then use the freewrite to construct a more structured draft.

**Progression of Drafts**

- **The evolving nature of drafting.** Unless writing an essay test, you shouldn't expect their first draft to be the best and neither should students. Help your students change their image of how writing happens. Even experienced authors are never happy with their "final" draft. Show students drafts of your own writing or stories of how professional authors manage their drafting.

**Focusing Drafting**

- **Controlling statement.** Have students put the following information on the top of their drafting page:
  - Audience/ Purpose/ Thesis, Topic Sentence, or Main Point
Having that controlling information in view while drafting will remind students of their original plans for the paper and will help them make better choices of content, organization, and words.

**Content Decisions**

- **Questions.** Have students create a question they want to answer with their drafting. Put the question at the top of the draft. Seeing their controlling question will help the student select ideas that help answer that question.

- **Daily focused journal writing.** These assignments allow students to work on specific content development. For example, give them a general statement like, "That girl is pretty" and have them practice using appropriate, adequate details to describe the pretty girl.

**Organization Decisions**

- **Mini-lessons.** Teach mini-lessons on the general characteristics of the writing assignment's format. You can begin the lesson by asking students how they would manage the planning stage information in a particular format (accessing their schemas for that form). For example, if they were evaluating a book, what information would they have to include in that book review? What information would come first? Why? How much detail would they have to use?

- **Models.** Provide models of the particular mode of organization. For example, if they are writing book reviews, bring in or have the students each bring in a book review from a newspaper or magazine. Have the students read the reviews and then individually, in small groups or as a whole class, infer from the various models what the possible organizational patterns are. Also, ask the students to evaluate the organization by asking how the pattern helps or hinders them as a reader.
Revision means re-seeing the text, not merely transcribing or re-copying. Students need to be taught how to "re-vision" their drafts in the positive sense, to think of it as critically reading their own writing to see how much better it can read instead of seeing it as a punishment for not writing correctly the first time. This revising stage does not necessarily take place after a complete draft has been written. Some of the strategies can be used during drafting or other stages. But after a complete draft is ready, feedback of some sort is necessary to help with redrafting.

Strategies for Revising

Group Response

• **Read aloud.** Have each student read a draft aloud to the whole class or a smaller group. While the student is reading, the other group members listen and write down their responses to the draft. Then the group will share those responses with the author.

• **Written feedback.** Form small (3-5 students) response groups. Members of the group can trade papers and write informal responses to the draft. Or they can use peer revisions sheets (a sample is included) to focus their response.

Teacher Response/Modeling

• **Mini-lesson.** Teach one revision strategy per paper so students can master it. For example, if they are writing descriptive papers, ask another student to draw the images described to see if there is enough detail. If they are writing a persuasive letter, have the peer write a letter back explaining why he did or did not feel persuaded (support).

• **Model.** Team with a student response group to model before the rest of the class how to give constructive feedback to the author.

• **Practice.** Make a transparency of a student draft (preferably a student not in the class so the whole class will feel free to respond). With the whole class, model how to read the draft critically and how to write constructive comments on the draft (more than "I liked it").

• **Movement.** Move around the room while the response groups are working, listening in on each group and helping them with effective responding and questioning.

• **Conferences.** Conduct teacher-student conferences where the students can come for one-on-one immediate feedback on their drafts. Ask the students what they want you to focus your feedback on (introductions, transitions, organization, etc) so they are thinking about and working to control their writing.

• **Devise criteria.** Work with the students to devise the evaluation criteria you will use to grade the assignment. Since they are involved with generating the ideas and form, they should also be involved in how the papers should be rated. This
involvement gives the students more ownership in their work. For example, work with
the students to devise criteria for an A paper and a C paper for that assignment.
Knowing how the paper will be graded will help the writer focus; having the students
come up with the criteria will help you evaluate the final papers.

Writer Re-Vision

• Revision sheets. Have the writer use a peer revision sheet (like the one included)
to focus her reading of the draft.

• Time to ripen. Allow the paper to rest for a day before trying to re-see it through
the eyes of the reader.

• Adjustments. Re-read the paper and decide if the draft indicates a need to redefine
the audience, purpose and/or thesis.

• Outline. Make an outline from the draft to more clearly see the structure and what
changes may be necessary.

• Find the main points. Write next to each paragraph the main point of that
paragraph. Match those ideas to the thesis to see if they explain the thesis and if they
are in a logical order.

• Transitions. Highlight the first and last sentences of each paragraph to see if there
are clear and effective transitions.

• Checklist. Create a criteria checklist from the class generated evaluation criteria.
The author can then use the simple checklist to look for overall features.

EDITING

Editing involves polishing the mechanics, spelling, usage and style of the paper. It is the
correctness stage and the last, but very important, step of the process before the paper is
submitted or published. If the writing is personal writing that will not be read by others,
editing is not necessary.

Strategies for Editing

Group Editing

• Editorial boards. Create editorial boards of five or so students who look over another
boards' final copy to check for mechanical, usage or spelling errors and proofreading
mistakes.
• **Editing sheet.** Use a form similar to the peer revision form to focus editing on specific mechanical, usage or style concerns for that assignment.

• **Lost readers.** Have the readers mark particular sentences they "get lost" in while reading and explain why it was hard to follow. The writer needs then to make the sentence accessible to the reader.

**Teacher Help**

• **One rule.** Focus on one usage rule per assignment. For example, if they are writing a story, the focus can be on how to use quotation marks. It makes editing less overwhelming and allows them to learn the rule through practice.

• **Practice.** Practice specific editing techniques before the students are required to do that editing on their own paper. For example, if the focus is to cut extraneous words out of sentences, use a student sample essay (preferably not a class member's) to pick out the overstuffed sentences, options in editing those sentences, and the effects of the new sentences.

**Individual Editing**

• **Checklist.** Use an editing checklist to focus on specific grammar usage.

• **Map out the paragraph.** Look at a paragraph at a time. In that paragraph, use circles and arrows to indicate how the sentences connect to one another and to the topic sentence of that paragraph.

• **Paramedic Method.** Use the "Paramedic Method" to edit for clear and concise sentences:

1. Circle the prepositions.
2. Circle the "is" forms.
3. Ask, "Who is kicking who?"
4. Put this "kicking" action into a simple (not compound) active verb.
5. Start fast--no mindless introductions.
6. Write out the sentence on a blank sheet of paper and look at its shape.
7. Read the sentence aloud with emphasis and feeling.

(Lindemann 193)

**Proofreading**

• **Time to ripen.** Allow time before the paper is submitted for last minute proofreading (spelling errors, typos, missing words or sentences, etc.).

• **Look at the words.** Read the paper at the word and sentence level, rather than at the overall level, like in revising. Students can focus their attention on this level by reading a sentence at a time, a word at a time, or reading word-for-word backwards.
PUBLISHING
Provide some means for the real readers of the audience to read the product of their work.
• **Books.** Create anthologies of pieces on the same topic
  
  • **Real Reader.** Submit the piece to the intended audience
  
  • **Readers' Day.** Have Readers' Days when students can share their work aloud
PEER REVISION SHEET

WRITER'S NAME: READER'S NAME:

NAME OF THE PIECE: DATE:

1. Read all the way through the draft. Record your first impressions of the piece here.

2. Briefly describe for the writer what you remember the piece is about.

3. Were you able to follow the piece completely as you read or did you have to stop anywhere to go back and re-read because you felt you were kind of lost? Mark any place you felt lost in the piece with a question mark(?).

4. Which words or descriptions really drew an image for you or were memorable? Mark these words or passages with a star (*).

5. What did you like most about the piece? Why did you like it?

6. Where might the author help you, the reader, more? (For example, with more description, with connection words to help you follow the piece, with a chunk of information you need to understand the piece, etc.) Underline this section. Then, below, tell the writer why you need more help at this point and give the writer some suggestions on what he or she could do to help you.

7. Do you feel the writer is writing for you, as a peer in the community, or for someone else? If it is someone else, who?
MODELS OF WRITING ASSIGNMENTS
SAMPLE WRITING ASSIGNMENT
WRITING A STORY

TEACHER'S NOTE
I have used this assignment with my eighth grade students and it is fairly successful. Although the assignment is based on a pretend situation, it does flow well out of class conversations on Robert Peck's lifestyle, as described in A Day No Pigs Would Die. We spent time discussing his life because it was so foreign to my suburban students. The audience for this story is the other students in the class.

GOALS
• To compare what the students have learned about Shaker life in the 1920's to life in the 1990's.
• To use details in writing
• To practice the phases of writing and the social activities of writing
• To assimilate meanings of the story

ASSIGNMENT STAGES
Planning
1. Hand out the assignment sheet (included). Have the students read over the assignment and discuss what the assignment asks.

2. As a whole class or in small groups, have the students brainstorm together to describe elements of Robert Peck's life in the 1920's, using as many details from the book as they can.

3. Have the group(s) of students describe their own lifestyles.

4. With the information on both Robert and their lifestyles, have the students create a chart to compare the two lives. Across the top they can list the categories being compared (clothes, family, school, entertainment, friends) and along the side list Robert's name and their name.

5. Have the students help each other decide which comparisons of their own life to Robert's seem most interesting and would make the best story. The story can be funny, serious, or sad.

6. Use description/narration heuristics to begin to decide what details are best to describe the comparison in the two lives.

Drafting
1. Allow the students time in class to draft their story so they can ask the teacher and other students questions as they draft.

2. Talk with the students about how they can begin a story like this. They will probably have some good ideas to share from similar stories they have read.

3. Present a mini-lesson on a specialized skill of story-telling. Some examples would be ways to write dialogue, ways to develop characters, ways to design plot.

4. You may want to discuss models of these "displacement" stories, either from other stories you have read in class, or movies they have probably seen. A good
example would be the Back to the Future series of movies. These models can show students how to work with the two contrasting lifestyles to bring funny or sad results.

Revising
1. Using peer review sheets, have another member of the class, or their original planning group if you used small groups, read the story and give the writer feedback. The feedback should probably focus on detail in the comparison and truth in the characters. The writer can then work with the reader to discuss the comments and make any changes they need.

2. Work with the students, after they have done some drafting, to develop acceptable criteria for you to evaluate the final product. Ask them to decide what general characteristics a good story of this sort should have for these readers.

Editing
Students can use an editing sheet to check for specific grammar rules. Any mini-lesson material presented during this assignment (dialogue punctuation) should be emphasized in editing.

Publishing
The stories could be printed in a book format or posted on a wall or bulletin board so other class members and classes can read them.

COMMENTS

- Students may at first complain about the “make believe” situation, but after they really start considering what the switch would be like, they start to have fun putting the characters in outrageous situations.

- Students like to write and share stories, so allow them time to somehow share their final products.

- Some students may have trouble describing, in detail, their own lifestyle. You may have to, as a class or in small groups, help the students “re-vision” their life to see the details and idiosyncrasies of it.

- You could have the students write in a reverse situation of this assignment. Instead of Robert being transported to 1990, they could be transported back to the 1920’s. What would they do if they found themselves in Robert’s shoes?
A Day No Pigs Would Die  Writing Assignment  Final Copy Due:

From our reading and discussions, we know Robert Peck led quite a different lifestyle than we do. We have seen how he lived, the kinds of things he did at home and at school. We know he was a Shaker and that Shakers have certain beliefs. These beliefs include:

- frills are evil
- singing and dancing in church for God is a good thing
- Shakers are plain people and should wear plain, homemade clothes
- everyone should share and help others
- work is good and every person has their own mission
- people should live a simple, peaceful life

We also know from our readings how Robert feels about and lives by the Shaker beliefs.

Pretend YOU are Robert Peck. You (Robert Peck) have found some sort of time machine and this machine has taken you to our town in this year. As Robert, write a story for our class about what you do, think and feel in this new world.

Getting Started...
In order to describe how Robert Peck would react and act today, you need to think about what his life and world were like and look at how they are different from your world today. Work with your group in finding as many details as possible to describe Robert's old world. You may have to check the encyclopedias or other books to get information.

Now describe your world in as much detail as possible. Think about what you do at home and at school, as you did for Robert. This will take some thinking and discussing to describe what you do everyday that might be unusual to someone from the 1920's. The description of your own world will have some details different from any other person in your group.

Think about how Robert would react in your shoes. Would it be a funny story? Or a serious one? Or a sad one? Why? Think about movies you have seen or stories you have read where a character is in a new world, like the Back to the Future series. What happens to Marty?

Writing the Story
Try writing out what you think would happen to Robert today, living your life. Be as creative as possible but using details from Robert's and your life to plan the story and describe what happens. You will have time in class to write and to get input from the class. You will also have the opportunity for peer review of your draft and help in editing.
A major goal of this assignment is to get the class to help with the research and idea generation for each individual paper so that a "research" paper doesn't overwhelm the students. With the help of the other students in the class, a student will learn to do research and to use research results in their writing.

This particular sample assignment asks the students to write for a different audience than the members of their class. They are writing for the principal, whom they should know and should be able to address fairly effectively. The issue I have used with eighth graders before was "Should students be allowed to wear shorts to school before May?" The school had a rule restricting such dress and the students were upset when warm weather came in April, and students who wore shorts were called down to the principal's office. Also, the particular sample topic is an issue I have used with my eighth graders because it was an issue in the school the students were talking about during classtime. Their interest in the issue gave them the motivation to respond with their opinions. A good topic for this type of assignment will evolve in the same way. There is no written assignment sheet because they control the assignment as it goes along.

- To practice research techniques
- To include outside sources to support personal opinion
- To write an argumentative paper
- To add to the conversation on an issue
- To control the direction of a writing project

1. Use discussion groups to let the students in class get their views out. Since they are probably already discussing the issue, they will appreciate the class time to have their say.

2. Once they have talked about the issue, ask them what they can do about it if they feel that strongly. Don't tell them, help them find out what they can do (ownership of the project).

3. When they decide they need to make their opinions known to the principal or other administration, work with the students to decide what kind of support they will need to have the principal take their ideas in to consideration (support for their individual opinions from the school as a whole, from parents and/or community, from experts or precedents).

4. Having decided on the additional information necessary, the students need to decide how to best get that information for this particular situation. The
particulars of this situation are important because some kinds of research or support will not be as effective as others. Discuss the pros and cons of each research method for this assignment until the class agrees on the methods that will work best. List those methods on the board.

5. With the research methods decided, have the students choose the kind of research they would like to do (fairly distributed). Have the students form those groups and work with the groups to come up with the procedures for conducting that kind of research (How to write a questionnaire, how to conduct an interview, whom to interview, what materials in the library would work for this issue, where to go to get additional materials, etc.). You will probably want to give them some input on the best procedures.

6. Allow class time for the students to conduct their research (you will probably want to inform administration of possible interviews and ask other teachers to allow the students to come into their classrooms to do polls, questionnaires, etc.).

7. After the information has been collected, allow class time for the groups to put the information into a useable form (calculated statistics, written answers to interview questions, etc).

8. Have each research group present their findings to the rest of the class to add to their knowledge. They should probably have handouts or overheads of information that the class can use to write their own paper.

9. Present a mini-lesson on how to use outside sources (research findings) to back up their own opinions and ideas in their paper to the principal.

10. Discuss the different forms these papers can take (position, proposal, etc.). Each student should choose a form that matches what they want to say to the principal. You can show models of the different forms so the students can visualize the purposes of each.

11. Use heuristics to sort out the information they have generated and gathered. From the heuristics, they should be able to come up with a thesis or at least a question they will answer with their paper on the rule. This thesis or question should help them consider how they will begin to draft.

12. As a group, talk about special concerns of a student writing to an administrator to change a school room. How will this situation affect their content, organization and word choices?
Drafting
1. Have the students work in groups writing in the same format so they can help each other along when they have questions during drafting and so you can do some mini-lessons in the group that will help all the members.

2. Work with the students in describing the general organizational and content choices associated with the paper form they are working with. (For example, if they are writing a proposal, they need to tell the reader why there is a need for a change, what change they are proposing, and why it will work).

3. Allow them time to write in class so they can get immediate feedback from their group and from you. Have them put the audience, purpose and thesis at the top of the draft to remind them of their writing situation.

4. Encourage them to write their first draft only as a way to get their views on the issue out on paper. They can work on refining the draft for their situation in successive drafts.

5. Show them models of editorials about a law people feel strongly about or want changed. The students can discuss or write about how the editorials are organized and what content and word choices were made. They should also consider if the choices made the editorial effective or not and why.

Revising
1. Have another student (or more if possible) read the draft, using the eyes of the intended audience. The reader can give the reader written and oral feedback on what was convincing what wasn't and why.

2. As a class, devise general criteria the class thinks their audience will have for reading a paper from a student. You have more knowledge about the audience and may want to give some input.

3. Have the students outline their drafts to make sure the paper reads smoothly.

Editing
1. You may want to use editing groups to edit this assignment since it will be read by the administration and the students will want them to seriously consider their ideas.

2. Edit for clear and concise sentences. The "Paramedic Method" would work well.

Proofreading
Before the papers are submitted, have the students do a last minute check for any spelling mistakes, typos, or missing words.
Submitting the Papers
After all their work, these papers need to be submitted to their intended readers. The papers can be considered for policy changes, or, if no action is planned, the reader can give the writers some feedback on how they perceived their ideas and plans. This response time should be cleared with the administration before the papers are submitted.

COMMENTS
• This is a good assignment for adolescents because they are starting to form their own opinions and want to express them.

• This is also a good assignment to learn to use research in writing. Research is necessary for this assignment but the students will be motivated to do the research. They will also not be overwhelmed by the research since each student will only do some of it.

• Writer's decisions in content, organization, and word choice become more conscious in this assignment because of the audience and purpose. Drafting may be difficult for some of the students.

• Students can learn that writing can get things done if care is taken during the process.

• Some of the students may want to co-author their papers because of similar opinions and for strength in the final product.

*This assignment is based on ideas from a group project Carole Teator and I designed for a college composition course and an article by Wilbur Hatfield called "The Project Model of Composition" in English Journal 12(1923) pages 11-23.
OTHER ACTIVITIES
AND ASSIGNMENTS
READING NOTEBOOK

The purposes of a reading notebook are similar to those of journals that are often used in writing classes. I prefer to call this "journal" a reading notebook because it chronicles the ideas and experiences of the student readers that then can be accessed by the student writers. This notebook also trains the student to think about what they are reading, promoting critical reading skills and helping to develop the intimate connection between reader and writer. The kinds of reading experiences and responses that can be chronicled in this notebook vary. Here are a few ideas on how to focus the student reader on their reading experience:

- **Have Students Collect articles and news stories** about a topic or issue they are interested in. They can include the article (or a summary of the story if they heard about it on TV, radio, or in the halls) and respond to it with their views.

  The writer can then use this information for paper topics or for outside research on a paper topic.

- **Respond to stories, essays, articles, etc.** that they read in class. They can react to what they liked or didn't like and why, what made the story unique, how the author organized the story, what genre the story is and what the characteristics of that genre are.

  The writer can use these reader responses when making decisions in their own writing.

- **Record their responses to papers written by peers** and discussed in revision sessions. The responses can be similar to the questions listed in the last idea.

  Again, the writer can use her response as a reader when writing similar papers.

- **Respond to their own writing.** They can record what they did that they liked, what they weren't happy with in the final draft, writing strategies and editing tips they learned, etc.

  The writer needs to learn to become a critical reader of her own writing.
SCHEMA-BUILDING THROUGH READING

Student writers, along with practicing writing skills and responding to a writing situation, also need to build schemas of how readers read so they can access those schemas when reading to have help following a piece, and to access them when writing to know how to help their readers follow their piece. This schema-building happens when they read. Students need to think about what they read so it gets stored in their long-term memories.

There are many ways to get students to think about what they are reading. Below, I have suggested ways you can help students store schemas from their readings and help them learn to access schemas when they read and write.

**Storing**
When the students have read several pieces from the same genre (initiation stories, position papers, business letters, etc), analyze the genre. What seem to be the common characteristics? Why do the authors make the choices they do? Then sketch out the general model of that genre so that the students can keep it in their notes, along with models of the genre that they can refer to.

**Storing and Retrieving**
When the students are reading in class, use prediction to analyze the story as they go along. For instance, have them read the title and look at any opening "teaser" lines and pictures at the beginning of the piece. Ask the students, after just reading that information, what they think the piece is about and why. As they go along in the story, stop at different points so they can revise their original predictions and make new ones.

A common example of this prediction in a story is when an adult tells a child not to do something because the child will get hurt. If you stop at that point and ask the students what will happen next, they will probably respond that the child character will go ahead and do that action, will get hurt, and will learn something. But you also need to ask the students why they know this is a valid prediction. That "why" question will ask them to think about their schemas and examples of those schemas, thus further cementing those ideas in long-term memory.

**Retrieving When Writing**
1. During the planning stages of a paper, have the students decide what steps they need to take, what kinds of choices they need to make for that particular writing situation. In doing so, the students have to access schema of similar writing situations to guide them in their current situation.

2. During the drafting stages, if the drafting breaks down and the writer gets frustrated, work with the student to access different schema (choices, models) that might work better in that writing situation and solve the writing breakdown.
APPLICATIONS FOR OTHER LEVELS
OF INSTRUCTION
APPLYING THE PRINCIPLES AND ACTIVITIES TO OTHER GRADE LEVELS

The basic premises of writing theory this manual is based on apply to any level of instruction and to the practice of writing itself. The premises do not need to be amended to meet the instructional differences of different grade levels.

But the applications of these premises to developing a writing curriculum presented here are based on the instructional, cognitive and social needs of eighth graders. I feel that it is at this seventh and eighth grade level that students really begin to be exposed to the varieties of writing and to be taught to consider their writing processes.

High school teachers must take those beginnings of understanding and practicing the processes of writing and develop them more fully so that whether students are going into the work force or going to college after high school, they will be prepared to be a part of the conversations going on in their communities of peers. These real world conversations will be, for most students, non-fiction and expository writing, not just creative story and poetry writing. Narrative (story) writing is a basic form of writing most writers use to communicate with their community. In eighth grade this story-telling provides a comfortable base for students to begin exploring other forms of writing, such as explanation, argumentation, etc. If they learn about choices, schemas, social interaction with narrative writing, they will eventually be able to apply that knowledge to other forms of writing.

On the other hand, high school students should be focusing more on these expository forms of writing, since that is the kind of writing they will encounter the most outside of the classroom. They will have to write proposals, descriptions, evaluations, etc. in whatever job they have. Learning those schemas and how to make choices in those kinds of writing situations is what high school writing programs should be focusing on, building skills from grade level to grade level and focusing on different skills depending on the ability levels of the students.

Regardless of this change of focus, if the class is going to work together in the classroom to fuel, monitor and support the writing of their peers, the beginning of the school year should involve some way of establishing that community of that class. Some of the activities presented in this manual, or variations on them, could be appropriate, as long as the same students aren't doing the same activities year after year. Somehow the students have to begin working together from
the beginning of the year so they can work effectively as a community for the writing throughout the year.

What worked very well for my college freshmen, and thus could work equally as well for upper level high school students, is keeping a different version of the reading notebook that I presented in the activities section of this manual. It was more of a current events notebook. I asked the students to include four articles per week from newspapers or magazines. Those articles were to deal with an issue or news item they found interesting or important. Besides including the clipping in the notebook, they had to write a brief summary of the article and why they chose to include that article (what made it interesting or important to them). Then every class would begin with a five minute presentation from two students about an article they read about. They would give us a summary of the article and their thoughts on it. The class could then ask questions of the presenter or comment on the story.

For high school, I would request fewer articles per week and would only have one presenter per day, because of time constraints. But the results of such a year-long project should have similar results of the college level version. Students remarked to me that they never really thought about what was going on in the rest of the world, but when they did start reading, they were overwhelmed. They wanted to talk about what they read. Moreover, these activities get students to read outside of school assignments while they provide some interesting topics for writing assignments. The students, if they start to follow a particular story, cutting out all the articles and editorials on that topic, begin to feel like experts and can share that knowledge with others in the class. Although it may seem like busy work, it will only be so if you don't tap into the possibilities the project can hold for students. Making the project possible with appropriate requirements and time frames enables students to develop discourse communities as well as writing schemas.

A second suggestion for application of ideas to high school levels is the group project idea presented in the manual. Again, I used a version of that project with my college freshmen and it too was fairly successful. However, instead of all the students working on such narrowly defined issues as was presented in my example here, at the college level we considered a broad topic, freedom of expression, and how that issue would relate to their potential future careers. Through research and discussion, they focused on an aspect of freedom of expression that would affect them, and decided what professional journal they would address their article to and what form that article would take.
For a high school class, I think there are many possibilities for using a similar group assignment. Students can all work on the same question but all try different ways of responding to that question (stories, poetry, lyrics, letters to the editor, articles, etc). Or, at a more advanced level, they can work on a broader topic and relate it to the organizations they are involved in, or can do research about the appropriate colleges or careers for their class, etc. The key is that high school writing should get students more involved with their world and potential worlds, and should get students to make more decisions, find out more of the information that they need on their own, with the teacher to help when their processes break down. This is different for the plans laid out for eighth grade classes. Since those eighth graders are just beginning to make writing choices, the teacher needs to make some of the decisions for them, to help them focus on other decisions and activities and make them fluent. As they move from grade level to grade level, more of the decisions about the direction of the assignment as a whole, and of their individual papers, should be given to the student.

One way to help them focus on, and think about these decisions, is to have the students turn in a sheet with their final draft telling you, the teacher, about one decision they made in writing the paper and why they made it. This analysis of their own writing processes will help them think about the reasons and consequences of their decisions.

Applying the principles to other instructional levels is a matter of pushing students beyond what they could do and were responsible for before. Eventually, they will have to learn to find out about the conversation, about whom to work with and how, how to direct the writing processes, and how to take on the role of the reader in the community of peers in revising without the teacher standing over them telling them what to do. This weaning process needs to begin in high school, not teaching them formulas, but how to view and do writing as a social and individual activity. Helping them help themselves needs to be the teacher's guide as she works with her students at any level.
SOURCES FOR MORE IDEAS ON PLANNING A WRITING CURRICULUM


*In the Middle* is especially helpful in designing a writing curriculum mainly in a workshop format. Ms. Atwell explains in much detail the planning, implementing, day-to-day work and evaluating of this workshop format. The book also contains helpful information on adolescence in general and on reading's role in writing instruction.


*Writers in Training* comes out of Ms. Caplan's experiences working with the Bay Area Writing Project. The major assumption underlying the book is that writers, like any artist or athlete, require regular, guided practice to improve. Her writing program has four major sections: Daily writing practice in "Showing, Not Telling," Daily student practice in commenting on writing; Using the "Showing, not Telling" idea in revising texts; and Teaching the students specific writing techniques. The book contains specific examples and activities you can use in your own program.


This handbook does not contain writing theory, nor does it just focus on composition instruction. The handbook does contain many ideas for physically setting up your classroom, planning your curriculum, getting materials, grading, along with teaching ideas for reading, writing and language. There are also an appendices indicating where you can get more information for your teaching or for your students.
WORKS CITED


