



# Success Stories from a Literacy Initiative

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## 2014–2017



# Acknowledgments

Write for Texas is a partnership of The Meadows Center for Preventing Educational Risk at The University of Texas at Austin, the Texas Education Agency, and the Institute for Public School Initiatives at The University of Texas at Austin. Write for Texas is funded by the Texas Education Agency. The online resources and materials were designed with the support of many individuals whose names do not appear here but whose work and ideas are represented throughout, including national and state content experts, researchers, and staff members from the participating organizations.

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This publication is dedicated to the coaches and staff members at the education service centers and National Writing Project sites who brought Write for Texas into schools across the state. The snapshots here show just a fraction of their hard work in forging relationships and working side-by-side with teachers and educational leaders on a regular basis to improve reading and writing instruction and academic outcomes for students. As highlighted in this volume, it is the enthusiasm and expertise of this committed group of educators that brought the Write for Texas project to life over the past 3 years.

## **Project Staff**

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For more information about the project staff, please visit [writefortexas.org/about-us](https://writefortexas.org/about-us)

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# Write For Texas

The Write for Texas initiative began in 2013 at the behest of Michael Williams, the Texas Commissioner of Education at the time, and the senior leadership of The Texas Education Agency (TEA). The goal of the initiative is to provide direct support to classroom teachers, often in small, struggling school districts, to improve the writing skills of secondary students across Texas. The initiative has two main professional development components: 1) face-to-face workshops and classroom coaching and 2) online resources freely accessible to any teacher in Texas. Classroom coaching and online resources are based on the following Guiding Principles of Effective Writing Instruction.



## **Write for Texas Guiding Principles of Effective Writing Instruction**

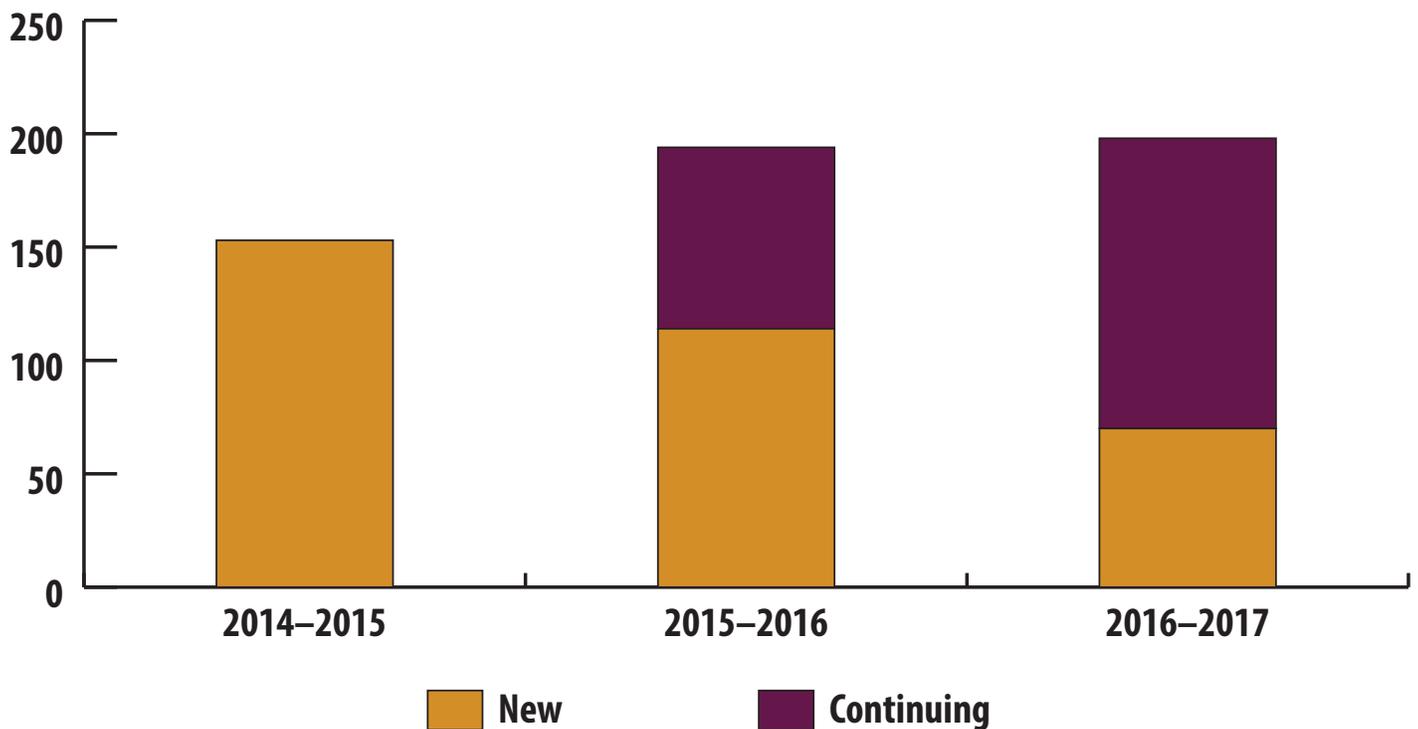
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- 1. Use writing and reading to support student learning in all content areas.**
- 2. Teach students the thinking skills, processes, and knowledge to write effectively.**
- 3. Teach students the skills for writing effective sentences in order to create coherent texts.**
- 4. Provide extra assistance and instruction to students who experience difficulty learning to write.**

To meet the goal of reaching as many classroom teachers as possible, TEA provided funding to The Meadows Center for Preventing Educational Risk (MCPER) and the Institute for Public School Initiatives (IPSI), which are both at The University of Texas at Austin. MCPER and IPSI contracted with the 20 education service centers (ESCs) and 7 Texas sites of the National Writing Project (NWP) to provide instructional coaching services to high-need schools across the state. MCPER and IPSI staff created tools and avenues for communication among the coaches and convened virtual and face-to-face meetings to discuss coaching models, research-based reading and writing approaches, and solutions to challenges.

The ESCs and NWP sites were provided with names of priority districts and schools based on low test scores, but were also instructed to reach out to schools where they had prior relationships and knew administration and staff would be receptive to instructional innovation. During the initial year, 2014–2015, coaches served 153 schools. The following year, 2015–2016, coaches served 194 schools, with 80 continuing from the previous year. This year, 2016–2017, coaches served 70 new schools in addition to 128 continuing schools, bringing the total to 198 schools.

## Write For Texas Schools



## Impact on Classroom Instruction

### *Instructional Coaches*

The instructional coaches employed by the ESCs and NWP sites are at the heart of Write for Texas. Coaches support content-area teachers as they implement writing-to-learn strategies such as note-taking, quick writes, and summarizing. Through the coaches, the English language arts and reading teachers learned successful techniques for teaching the writing process and developing a classroom community of writers. From developing workshops for administrators and teachers to modeling lessons in classrooms, the coaches have exceeded expectations for changing the instructional landscape in the Write for Texas schools.

### ***Summer Institutes***

Summer vacation presents a unique opportunity to provide extended time for professional development. As part of Write for Texas, the ESCs and NWP sites offered intensive learning programs and networking opportunities to participating educators. As part of their model, the university-based NWP sites accept teachers into an intensive, graduate-credit-bearing institute focused on developing teachers as writers and teachers of writing. The NWP Summer Institutes typically run all day Monday through Thursday and last for several weeks. Participants are simultaneously exploring their development as writers and applying insights to lesson planning. Participants create a model lesson that is refined in the classroom and presented to peers as a professional development session. Teachers who successfully complete the Summer Institute are invited to serve as teacher consultants at their home campuses to support other teachers during the school year.

The ESCs took advantage of extended learning time during the summer months by offering multiday conference style Summer Institutes to educators in their respective regions. The Summer Institutes included a range of topics presented by nationally recognized experts, ESC staff, school administrators, and teachers. Participants spent time discussing and reflecting on new strategies and considering adaptations based on student needs. Many ESCs also used the Summer Institutes to offer foundational strategies that were revisited and refined during the school year through a combination of classroom coaching and professional learning community discussions.

## **Impact on ESCs and NWP Sites**

Project staff members from the ESCs and NWP sites cited institutional and individual professional growth as a result of participating in the Write for Texas initiative. One of the more frequently mentioned benefits was the opportunity for project staff to work alongside teachers and students during the school day. Historically, both ESCs and NWP sites have primarily offered workshops, Summer Institutes, and other forms of professional learning outside of teacher classrooms. The Write for Texas initiative focused on coaches working directly with classroom teachers in school settings, which benefited teachers, students, and administrators.

### **Writing-to-learn**

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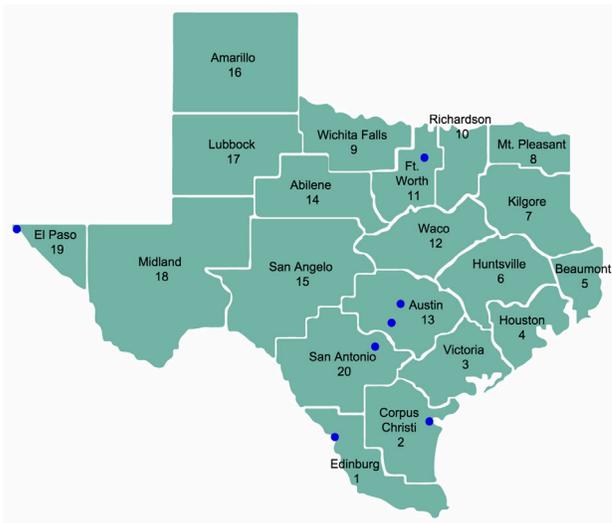
**Students use short, informal writing tasks to think through or process learning about key concepts or ideas presented in a course.**

### **Writing process**

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**Students use elements of the writing process (e.g., planning, drafting, revising, editing, and publishing) to compose text.**

Another positive outcome of the initiative was the development of a statewide network of literacy coaches across the ESCs and NWP sites. The virtual and face-to-face meetings convened by MCPER and IPSI helped coaches to form lasting relationships that crossed regional and site boundaries. Coaches readily shared experiences, strategies, and ideas for improving classroom instruction.



**Write for Texas coaching support is provided by Education Service Centers 1–20 and seven National Writing Project sites (blue dots).**

## Spotlight on Site Achievements

The following pages showcase one successful aspect of Write for Texas work at each site, helping to illustrate the breadth and depth of work happening locally and statewide. These snapshots are meant not only to document and recognize the work of these Write for Texas sites, but also to inform and inspire other educators to adopt similar practices. Copies of Write for Texas materials specifically mentioned can be found in the Appendix. All Write for Texas materials and online courses are available at [www.writefortexas.org/resources](http://www.writefortexas.org/resources).

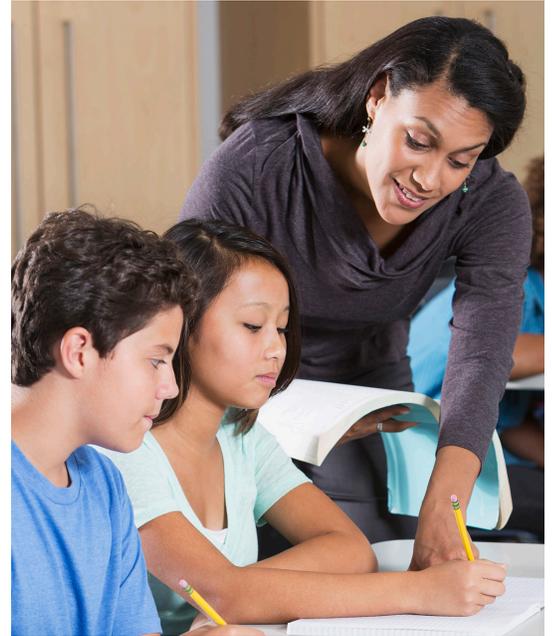
The site snapshots are organized into the following sections, which begin with introductions containing general advice or tips for educators.

-  Focus on Classroom Coaching
-  Spotlight on District and Administrator Support
-  Think Big to Reach Groups of Teachers

# 1

## Focus on Classroom Coaching

The following stories illustrate the importance of coaching classroom teachers to enhance instructional practices. At any given time, Write for Texas supports more than 100 instructional coaches who work directly with classroom teachers to improve reading and writing instruction. These coaches have worked with a range of teachers, from novice teachers, who were eager for support in the basics of effective instruction and classroom management routines, to experienced teachers, who were eager to learn how to better integrate reading and writing instruction into all the content areas. As these site snapshots highlight, it has been crucial for coaches to develop strong, trusting relationships with teachers, relationships that grow over time as teachers see improvement in student achievement and attitudes.



### Advice and Lessons Learned for Successful Classroom Coaching

- Focus on developing a respectful relationship as a means of facilitating changes to instructional practices.
- Help teachers develop as writers themselves to improve writing instruction.
- Model and co-teach to show teachers exactly how to integrate new routines and behaviors into the classroom.
- Student feedback and responses can act as a great motivator of teacher change.
- Include administrator support and involvement as key elements of classroom coaching.

# The Evolution of an Instructional Coach

## Region 5 Education Service Center, Beaumont

Instructional coaches who work directly with classroom teachers are at the heart of Write for Texas. Making the transition from a highly qualified classroom teacher to an instructional coach is a journey, as a coach from Region 5 Education Service Center describes. Her journey, which is typical of Write for Texas coaches over the last 3 years, offers many lessons to those making the transition.



### ***Relationship Building***

One of the most important aspects of coaching is a good relationship with classroom teachers. Teachers sometimes hesitate to have coaches observe in their classrooms because they have misunderstood the coach's role or because they did not voluntarily sign up to have a coach.

At first, the Region 5 coach noted, instructional coaches often find themselves relegated to the back of the classroom. As an observer in the back of the room with an observation form or laptop in front of them, coaches can slip into the incorrect mindset of looking for what's wrong or how the instruction can be fixed rather than focusing on building a trusting relationship with a teacher, which is essential to growth. In the coach's words, "When I closed my computer and rolled up my sleeves—that is when the challenge went away."

This coach went on to describe the excitement and nervousness that came with her new role as an instructional coach: “When I decided to focus on my ultimate goal of helping teachers to help students become more effective writers, it became easier.” She realized that she needed to be “a little more humble and compassionate,” noting that she no longer brings in her observation forms, but instead writes notes after she leaves the classroom. The coach also reported a shift in her thinking as she let go of old habits and focused on being more open-minded. This shift was essential, as she pointed out: “I can’t ask the teacher to be open-minded if I’m not.”

To begin the conversation about classroom instruction, coaches often bring materials, supplies, and other resources to teachers. Although this coach originally believed that bringing materials put her in a savior role, which stood in the way of building an authentic relationship with the teacher, she soon realized that it was actually an important step to developing the relationship. “It was about more than supplies and materials,” she reflected. “Those things have monetary value, but it wasn’t about that. I was able to build a deep, meaningful relationship with the teacher—a relationship that I will have for life.”

*“I was able to build a deep, meaningful relationship with the teacher—a relationship that I will have for life.”*

### ***Impact in the Classroom***

As the relationship grew, the coach began to focus on aspects of teaching practice that would have an immediate, positive impact, such as pacing and time management. This focus opened the conversation to specific activities and strategies to implement in the classroom, such as charting a text and using graphic organizers. Through modeling and co-teaching, the coach assisted teachers in developing routines to implement more reading, writing, and conferring activities into their lessons.

The Region 5 coach recalled several moments when she saw the effects of her efforts in the teachers’ changing instructional practices. The coach noted that teachers were integrating more authentic writing activities into their lessons rather than having students simply copy notes from a sit-and-get slide presentation. The coach noted that teachers were even more inclined to adopt new practices upon seeing the resulting impact on their students. “When teachers started asking me to bring them additional resources or to model something for them, I knew they were receptive to growth,” the coach said. “Then I witnessed the growth first-hand, when I visited the classroom and saw anchor charts on the wall and the teacher modeling how to write in front of students.”

Changes in instructional routines also resulted in increased student engagement and participation. The coach recalled a pivotal moment when she was working in a classroom with a teacher helping small groups of students. “We were working together as a team and you could feel a hum for learning in the classroom,” she said. “After I conferred with students at one table, the teacher would go over to the same table and continue the discussion with the students. We just worked beautifully together. It felt like we were one big happy family working together in a classroom. We were all in sync.”

Students responded to the active reading and writing strategies, showing increased proficiency in note-taking and thinking skills. The coach described it as a time of real empowerment for students as they developed a voice through writing about their ideas and engaging in thoughtful discussions with their peers and teachers.

### ***Transitioning Roles***

The transition from classroom teacher to instructional coach can be challenging for many reasons. The coach recalled moments when she wanted to revert to using her old curriculum and lessons, but ultimately realized that what worked for her and her students in the past may not work for the teachers she supported as a coach. For her, like many other coaches, the process of adopting the mindset of an instructional coach required thoughtful reflection, introspection, and networking with other coaches to develop new strategies and approaches.



### **Tips for New Coaches**

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- **Be patient: it takes time to build trust with teachers.**
- **Start with students: what are they responding to and how can you help the teacher develop effective practices?**
- **Reflect with teachers:**
  - **How did the lesson go?**
  - **What would you like to improve?**
  - **How can the lesson better meet the needs of students? What were students responding to during the lesson?**

# Beginning with General Instruction to Improve Writing

Region 18 Education Service Center, Midland

Coaches at Region 18 Education Service Center determined that the best way to promote the Guiding Principles of Write for Texas is to help teachers improve general instructional practice before introducing them to specific strategies for writing instruction. By focusing on intentional planning and effective overall instruction, coaches made an immediate positive impact and built trusting relationships with teachers, which opened the door for them to try new writing-focused strategies down the line.

## ***Planning for Student Learning***

Coaches first met with teachers to discuss lessons that would be modeled, co-taught, or observed. In those meetings, they were surprised to learn that many teachers' lesson and unit plans were like sketches—the basic outlines were there, but the details had not yet been fleshed out. For example, some teachers cited a learning standard that they were going to address in the lesson, but their specific lesson elements and measures of student learning were vague. Coaches worked with the teachers to narrow the focus of their lessons and write objectives including skills that could be taught, practiced, and demonstrated in those lessons.

Once lesson objectives were clarified, coaches guided teachers to envision each aspect of the lesson ahead of time, intentionally planning out precisely what students—and the teachers themselves—would be doing at each point during the class period while working toward the set objectives. The coaches also guided teachers in thinking about how to adapt these plans by selecting topics and texts that matched with student interests and by taking into account their variable energy levels throughout the day.



### ***Modeling Strong Instructional Practice***

When coaches modeled literacy lessons in the classrooms, general instructional practices often first caught the teachers' attention. They were impressed with how the coaches had managed students and materials to save time for instruction. They were eager for the coaches to help them adopt these strategies to get bell-to-bell student engagement.

Teachers also noticed how the coaches modeled skills and set students up to do the thinking and hard work of learning themselves. When teachers saw that students were capable of working at a higher level than they had expected, they were inspired to emulate the coaches' approach of being a facilitator in the classroom.

### ***Opening the Door for Improved Writing Instruction***

The coaches demonstrated planning and modeling that paved the way for improving writing instruction. By giving teachers valuable skills that they could implement right away, coaches ensured higher levels of student engagement. For new teachers who were "just trying to survive their first year," it was a lifeline.

The teachers' success helped the colleagues foster a trusting relationship; teachers saw that the coaches were not in the role of evaluator or critic and that they had something valuable to bring them. As a result, teachers grew more open to learning and trying out new practices with the coaches. In using more effective classroom practices, the thinking, reading, and writing lessons grew more effective as well.

To help teachers avoid feeling behind schedule after a benchmark week or pep rally day, coaches had them look at the whole calendar year and block out days where they could anticipate interruptions to instruction. With this kind of practical guidance from coaches, teachers were able to plan more realistically and better incorporate reading and writing strategies into their instruction.

Coaches also demonstrated how to "spiral" the English language arts and reading skills throughout the year, offering suggestions to complement planned units of instruction. For example, one coach brought in a poem that worked well with the drama unit the teachers had planned and gave students the opportunity to develop skills in comparing text types.

With the foundation of trust and collaboration established, teachers were receptive when coaches introduced them to the many resources and classroom materials that support effective reading and writing practices at [www.writefortexas.org](http://www.writefortexas.org).



### ***Changing Views: Teachers & Students***

Coaches reported that the approach they took in working with teachers to support stronger instruction was like planting seeds, and the flowers started to bloom. Teachers “looked at their kids and their planning differently” after witnessing what their students could do. By starting where the need was, these Write for Texas coaches helped teachers to get students to develop a sense of themselves as writers, which is one of the most important goals of the project.

Teachers and coaches noticed that students were more willing to write and generate ideas. “Kids started giving them [the teachers] more work,” one of the coaches noted. “They became more prolific writers—including the newcomers (English learners who recently arrived from outside the U.S.)!”

Teachers changed their planning to facilitate student thinking, discussing, reading, and writing. Coaches saw a lot less sit-and-get instruction and a lot more interactive learning in the classrooms. As new teachers were empowered with foundational instructional skills and even seasoned teachers embraced new approaches that showed positive results, coaches began working with interdisciplinary teams to build capacity for writing instruction across the curriculum.

# Helping Teachers Develop a Thoughtful Planning Process

Region 3 Education Service Center, Victoria

Coaches from Region 3 Education Service Center helped teachers to enhance their planning processes so that they could integrate more reading and writing strategies into current instructional practices and develop new knowledge of literacy strategies for all content areas. By focusing on reading and writing to support learning, coaches succeeded in building relationships with teachers and cultivating a reflective planning process that improved lessons and teaching practice.

## ***Planning for Vertical Alignment***



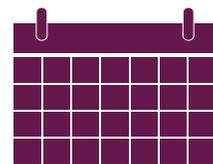
In one small district, a Write for Texas coach brought secondary English language arts and reading teachers (one per grade level) together for alignment meetings. At those meetings, they looked at data, narrowed down specific student needs, and worked together to identify the state learning standards related to the targeted skills. This deeper level of planning—looking at data, identifying trends across grade levels, and digging into the concepts underlying the content—led to a shift in

framework for planning and teaching beyond the lessons and units they were working on at that time.

During the planning sessions, vertical teams noticed that the data revealed a need for focusing on oral and written conventions. The coach guided the group to look at how those skills were taught at each grade level and to think about why students were missing the mark with those skills and concepts. As a result of this reflection, teachers were able to identify the gaps in instruction across grade levels and the coach could provide professional development in those areas. The coach then modeled the strategies discussed in the professional development sessions so that teachers could observe the strategy in a classroom with students.

## ***Shifting Focus in Social Studies Planning***

In another small district, a coach worked with the middle school social studies teacher to integrate reading, writing, and discussion strategies into lessons. They started by looking at the district's Year at a Glance document, which identified the standards to be taught at different points throughout the year.



The coach showed the teacher how to organize instruction around social studies concepts, rather than organizing it sequentially around a textbook. In the words of the coach, "The teachers realized that they needed to think about teaching concepts based on the needs of their class," as opposed to simply teaching pages in the textbook. "We need to set the textbook aside—it's now a resource," the social studies teacher reflected.

The coach and teacher then collaborated on a plan to integrate active routines, such as magnet summaries and writing rounds, into their lesson plans to engage students in meaningful discussions about those concepts. The coach initially modeled the routines, demonstrating what it looked like to empower students to figure things out for themselves instead of waiting for the teacher to give them the answers, as they had previously done.



### ***Building Great Teachers***

At all campuses receiving support, teachers embraced the new ways of teaching. Working closely with the teachers in these districts, the coaches realized that there were many novice teachers who needed support for overall instructional practice. One coach noted that these districts are small and often have trouble recruiting experienced teachers. “We need to build great teachers,” the coach concluded. The coaches were able to work one-on-one with many of these teachers to target their specific needs. For example, the coaches helped them with classroom set up and organization, classroom management, and the basics of lesson planning and delivery.

One district purchased a curriculum management planning tool and the coach showed teachers how to use it to map out 10 to 20 days of instruction and identify vocabulary for their units. Based on that general framework for instruction, they then worked to narrow the focus for specific lessons within the unit. Coaches modeled the thinking needed to plan out the lesson, not just to identify the pages in the text to cover.

### **Teachers learned to ask themselves the right questions:**

- **What will students be reading?**
- **What will they be writing?**
- **What vocabulary do they need to learn?**
- **How will I differentiate instruction?**
- **How will I pace the lesson?**

## ***Increasing Student Engagement***

Coaches have seen improvements in classroom instruction, with more active student engagement and more student-directed thinking, discussing, and writing. As the teacher began integrating the new routines into lessons, coaches witnessed students leave their seats to engage with the content and with one another. Worksheet packets were a thing of the past.

In one social studies class, it became regular practice for students to interact with the historical concepts wall—similar to a word wall, but for social studies. The students would ask reflective questions of themselves and each other, and then share ideas via posts on the wall. It was common for students to ask deep questions such as, “Is that a historical concept? Is it political? Is it social? Could it go in more than one concept category? Why?”

The positive effects of coach support are also reflected in the data and in the relationships that developed between the district and the service center staff. In one district, student writing scores on state writing assessments improved by more than 20 percentage points. Teachers who were at first hesitant to work with the coaches sought out support and professional development from them, an opportunity they could not have afforded without Write for Texas funds.



# Developing New Teachers with Write for Texas Online Resources

Region 15 Education Service Center, San Angelo

Using online resources from Write for Texas, the Region 15 Education Service Center coach helped a new teacher in a small district to build more continuity and clarity into her instruction, resulting in greater confidence and performance for both the teacher and students.

## ***Struggles of a First-Year Teacher***

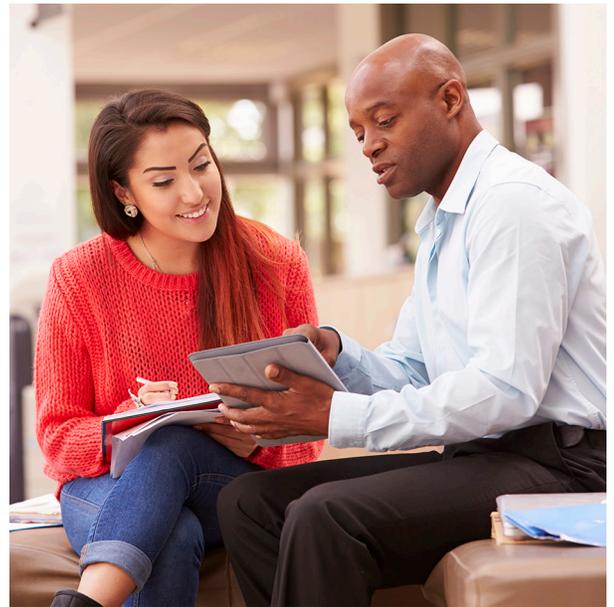
In this small district, the high school English teacher taught all four levels of English—a challenge for any teacher, let alone one in her first year. The coach noticed that the teacher brought great ideas to the classroom, but the ideas weren't cohesive in terms of the scope and sequence of the courses.

Students struggled. When it came to expository writing, “they were lost,” the coach noticed. The teacher showed them sample student essays that had scored high on the state assessment (3 and 4 on a scale of 1 to 4), but the students “weren't seeing what really made it an expository piece.”

## ***Building a Coaching Relationship***

The coach began to build trust by working with the teacher on her terms. As the teacher “welcomed observations,” the coach began there. Throughout the fall semester, the coach continued to visit her classroom and bring her materials to support her instruction.

By second semester, the teacher was ready for more assistance from the coach. The teacher and coach worked together on planning lessons and discussing student work. The coach began to teach classes while the teacher observed, and then shifted gradually so that the teacher was eventually teaching the lessons independently.



## ***Success with Write for Texas Online Resources***

The coach was especially successful in helping students read, discuss, and write expository texts. The students had received instruction and feedback pointing out the need for better “development,” but they really didn't know what that meant. As an alternative to the materials that the teacher had collected from different websites, the coach suggested using the Write for Texas online resource Teaching Expository and Persuasive Texts.

The coach showed the teacher how the materials were intentionally aligned, with one lesson flowing naturally to the next. For example, the lessons first have students read mentor expository texts and notice the author’s purpose, next they have students focus on text structure as they learn to write text summaries, and later they prompt students to use what they learned about expository texts to write their own controlling idea and then move through each stage of the writing process to craft their own text.

The coach collaborated with the teacher to implement this approach in her classroom, using mentor expository texts and analyzing the author’s purpose and the text structure. First, the coach began by sharing the Authentic Writing Purposes handout from the Write for Texas collection. “Students were amazed that there were reasons to write other than ‘because the teacher told me to,’” she said.

Then, the coach modeled how to craft a text summary using the annotated model from the sample lesson that labeled the topic sentence, which came from the controlling idea of the original text, and the summary sentences, which stated the main ideas in that text. Students began to understand the concept of text structure as the coach explicitly modeled how to write a summary that followed the structure of the original text.

After that, the coach guided students in using the graphic organizers from the Write for Texas materials to go through this process themselves, noting the structure of the text, taking notes on the controlling idea and the main ideas, and then crafting those into a summary of their own.

Teaching Expository and Persuasive Texts  
Gateway Resource TEPT0001

Handout (1 of 1)

### Authentic Writing Purposes

Purpose for Writing	Description
To inform and explain	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• State main point and purpose</li> <li>• Convey information accurately and objectively in an interesting way</li> <li>• Combine facts and information with writer’s knowledge and experience</li> </ul>
To express and reflect	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Communicate personal thoughts, ideas, feelings, and life experiences</li> <li>• Think back to gain insight and contemplate what was learned</li> </ul>
To persuade	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Attempt to persuade reader to accept a particular position</li> <li>• Describe the problem, propose a solution, and provide justification and evidential support</li> </ul>
To analyze and make inferences	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Take apart and closely examine phenomena, people, places, or things that are difficult to understand or explain</li> <li>• Ask “how” and “why” questions that lead to a deeper understanding</li> </ul>
To evaluate and make judgments	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Focus on the value or worth of a person, object, idea, or other phenomenon</li> <li>• May specify the criteria as either “good” or “bad”</li> </ul>
To question and explore	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Wrestle with a question or problem</li> <li>• May lead to further in-depth research of a topic, another avenue of thinking, or a new area of inquiry</li> </ul>

Source: Gallagher, K. (2011). *Write like this: Teaching real-world writing through modeling and mentor texts*. Portland, ME: Stenhouse.

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## Annotated Model Summary

The annotation in the model summary explicitly shows the structure of an expository text summary.

### Annotated Model Summary

In 1793, doctors believed in the healing power of nature [*paraphrased topic sentence from original text*]. They used gentle procedures, such as teas and brandy [*main idea 1*]. They also used more drastic procedures, such as phlebotomy, or bloodletting [*main idea 2*], which was an ancient medical practice [*important detail*]. During this procedure, doctors would drain a small amount of the ill person's blood to hopefully make the remaining blood flow more freely [*important detail*]. Bloodletting was used for a variety of illnesses [*reduced list of other illnesses to a category: "variety"*], including yellow fever [*important detail*].

#### Sources:

Murphy, J. (2003). *An American plague: The true and terrifying story of the yellow fever epidemic of 1793*. New York, NY: Clarion.

Pasquarelli, S. L. (2006). Expository summary writing. In S. L. Pasquarelli (Ed.), *Teaching writing genres across the curriculum: Strategies for middle school teachers* (pp. 105–119). Greenwich, CT: Information Age.

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From  
**Teaching Expository and Persuasive Texts**  
**Gateway Resource TEPT0002**  
**Handout 1, page 1**

One day, a student read over her summary and said, “I think this would get a 2” on the state writing assessment. After briefly discussing why the student rated her summary as a 2, the teacher, coach, and class agreed.

“Do you want to get a 2?” the teacher asked the student.

“No, I want a 3 or a 4,” she replied. The rest of the students agreed.

This was a light bulb moment for the class, and it helped motivate them to learn how to improve their writing. Students had been told many times that their writing needed more “development,” and now they understood what that meant. “They could see the difference between the details and the development of details,” the coach recalled.

### ***Impact on Teacher and Students***

The teacher seized this moment to reinforce the idea that thinking is key to good writing: “Let’s see how you can get that 3 or 4—how you can use this process even if you are doing it in your mind.” Over time, the teacher was able to translate that pivotal activity into a key strategy that students had internalized and could use independently. The coach noted: “The students understood what they needed to do—it erased that confused look on their faces when the teacher talked about expository text structure and development of ideas. They expressed more confidence in what they were doing.”

The teacher gained confidence as well. The Write for Texas materials gave the teacher’s instruction more structure and served as an example of how to connect lessons so that they flow naturally, from reading and analyzing mentor texts to thinking about and crafting texts through the writing process. “It helped the teacher see how things work together,” the coach said.



# Discovering the Benefits of Classroom-Based Professional Learning

San Antonio Writing Project at the University of Texas at San Antonio

Write for Texas staff members at sites across the state have cited flexibility in serving their schools and districts as one of the keys to their success. The coaches at the San Antonio Writing Project (SAWP) at the University of Texas at San Antonio discovered how being flexible and creative helped to turn a potential obstacle into an asset.

Coaching often calls for meeting with teachers to plan, debrief, reflect, and engage in professional development. SAWP staff members encountered one campus where school schedules and constraints meant that the coach was only able to work with teachers during the school day when they were actively delivering lessons to students. Therefore, the SAWP coach gave up the plan to work with teachers outside of the classroom and found creative ways to work with teachers where they were, in the classrooms.

The coach learned the teachers' strengths and areas of need through observing lessons. She demonstrated effective practices by modeling with students and facilitated teacher growth by co-teaching. The extensive time spent in the classroom allowed the coach to build strong relationships with educators and students, which had a positive effect on reading and writing instruction as well as student achievement.



## ***Building Trust Through Consistent, Responsive Support***

Visiting classrooms regularly, understanding the school culture and students, possessing expert knowledge of curriculum and instruction, and listening to teachers and administrators were key to the success of building trusting relationships with teachers and students. School administrators supported the coach as she dedicated time in the classroom to work side by side with teachers and students. The consistent visits provided the structure for the coach to become a true partner, mentor, and co-teacher.

Initially, time was spent observing instruction and identifying strengths and areas of need for each teacher. Based on observations, plans were created to better support the specific needs of the diverse classrooms. Still, the coaching plans were flexible and could be adapted to what was occurring in the classroom at any given moment. The coach and teacher worked together to tailor approaches based on how students responded to the lessons and content during each class period.



### ***Realizing The Benefits of In-Class Coaching***

The process of implementing new practices and refining existing ones was supportive and collaborative and exemplified quality, job-embedded professional development through coaching in the classroom.

The in-class coaching format included modeling, co-teaching, and observation. Based on the teacher's need, the coach introduced and modeled a specific strategy or served as a co-teacher during the introduction of a new instructional strategy. The coach and teacher worked together to teach multiple class periods during the school day, which provided time for practice and refinement. This structure allowed time for the coach to observe, model, and support the teacher as he or she delivered multiple lessons using newly learned reading and writing strategies.

The coach was able to think strategically and differentiate instruction based on the academic and language needs of each class and the teachers began to develop a greater understanding of the need to adapt during instruction based on student responses and questions. These reflective conversations with the teacher also helped the coach gather information for additional coaching or refinement of strategies.

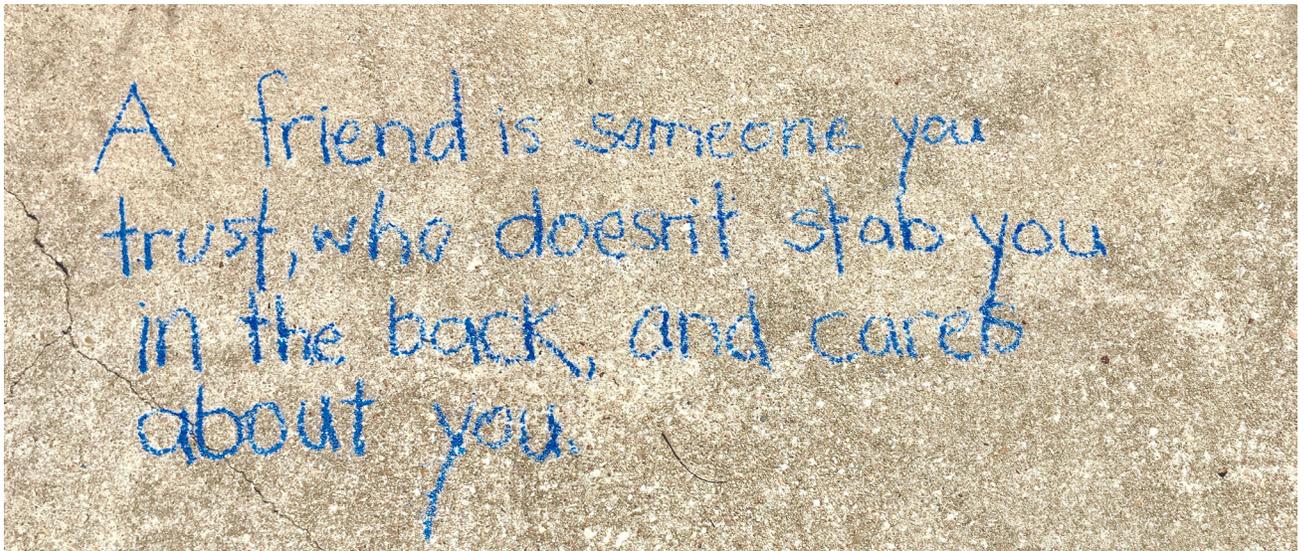
### ***Modeling Effective Instructional Practices***

As the coach modeled instructional practices in the classrooms, the general instructional practices and tips often first caught the teachers' attention. The coach recalled a moment when one teacher said he was inspired after noticing how effectively the coach managed students, distributed materials, and promoted collaboration and engagement in the lessons. As a result, this teacher began to adopt the coach's practices himself.

The coach noted, "When the learning was generated from students' own questions, it was more meaningful. It was the small subtle changes that the coaches helped implement that made big differences over long periods of time." With explicit modeling, teachers felt confident and empowered and were willing to take instructional risks that led to improved classroom instruction and student progress.

Teachers also learned from the coach as she modeled how to deeply engage students and set them up to do the thinking and hard work of learning themselves. For example, the coach modeled a lesson called Sidewalk Sentences, in which students chose a favorite sentence from their journal, collaborated with peers to correct it, and wrote the corrected sentence on 3 × 5 cards. Students worked hard to get their sentences correct because they were expressing something important from their own writing, and the coach told them they were going to publish their sentences for the school to read.

***"When the learning was generated from students' own questions, it was more meaningful. It was the small subtle changes that the coaches helped implement that made big differences over long periods of time."***



When all students had completed revising their chosen sentences, they headed outside and wrote them on the sidewalk in chalk. Students were excited and focused. The coach recalled that an English learner who was usually quiet in the classroom wrote a beautiful sentence, drew a frame around it, and signed his name. This quick act of publishing produced a great sense of pride and enthusiasm for writing.

### ***Increasing Confidence for Teachers and Students***

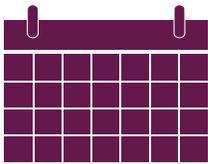
Teachers valued the coach's help with not only instructional practices, but also classroom management, discipline, and emotional support. Supported in all of these areas, teachers gained confidence in their teaching abilities, increased their expectations for students, and allowed students to take charge of their own learning. They delved deeper with their teaching and engaged in more reflective thinking about why they did things a certain way. Students also showed greater confidence in themselves and an eagerness to engage in classroom activities that led to deeper learning. The ongoing, job-embedded coaching in the classroom—at first a response to scheduling challenges—turned out to be a powerful strategy for directly benefiting teachers and students.

# Building Trusting Relationships

## South Texas Writing Project at Texas A&M International University

Write for Texas staff members from across the state have cited building trust as one of the key components to their success. The work of coaches from South Texas Writing Project (STWP) at Texas A&M International University in Laredo at one middle school illustrates how trusting relationships can lead to powerful results.

### ***A School in Transition***



When the coaches from STWP started working with this school, students were struggling academically and the administration was about to change. The coaches met with the English language arts and reading teachers in the spring and circled back with the new administration team in the summer. This team made a plan for the coming school year, and the Write for Texas coaches were included in that plan.

At the start of the school year, the administrators shared the plan with the staff, positioning the coaches in the role of helping teachers accomplish the goals and improved outcomes laid out by the administration. By clearly stating their expectations and their trust in the coaches, the school administrators set the coaches and teachers up for successful relationships.

### ***Scaffolding Teacher Support***

The coaches took a gradual approach to working with the teachers at this school, beginning with less intensive support. The coaches began meeting with teachers weekly in their professional learning communities. Teachers got to know the coaches a little better through these weekly collaborations. Next, the coaches encouraged STWP staff members to serve as mentors or coaches to individual teachers. Once they began working at this collaborative level with teachers, the coaches began co-teaching or modeling to support teachers' learning of new techniques and strategies.

With this guidance, many teachers tried out new strategies for teaching reading and writing in a meaningful context. The coaches continued to meet with them weekly to guide them in reflecting on what worked and what needed work. With support from the coaches, these teachers incorporated strategies that focused on different purposes for writing, using mentor texts to analyze effective writing and revising to better communicate the writer's message to the intended audience. These strategies "eventually led to improvement on the [state reading and writing] test," the coaches noted, though it took a leap of faith on the teachers' part to try new instructional approaches.

Not all teachers were willing to make that leap. With school ratings in the news and state assessment scores low, some teachers feared that shifting away from grammar drills and test-focused practice meant not preparing students for success on state exams. The coaches noticed one veteran teacher, for example, who attended all mandatory sessions, but left the Write for Texas resources in their original folders. The coaches continued to invite the teacher to all the professional learning opportunities and leave her notes, just as they did for the teachers who were actively using the Write for Texas resources and approaches. The coaches recognized that she was trying her best and that she deeply cared about her students. Sometime during the second semester, she started to come around and began trying out some of the new strategies. The following year, the teacher came back to school with a very different outlook; she was now extremely positive and engaged in learning from the coaches.

### ***Facilitating Communication***

In addition to meeting with coaches weekly, the STWP director also met with administrators regularly. Through those meetings, it soon became clear that although administrators were visiting classrooms, there was a communication gap between the leaders and teachers. Write for Texas staff members were working with both groups separately, but there weren't really established times or means for principals and teachers to talk to one another about instructional practice.

The STWP director was able to use her monthly meetings at the school to bring these two groups together. Administrators were interested in what the teachers were learning and trying out in their classrooms. They began to ask questions such as, "What type of support is needed to implement the practices modeled and recommended by the STWP?" When teachers and administrators didn't see eye to eye, the STWP director and coaches were able to serve as mediators and help them understand each other's points of view as they worked together to achieve the best outcomes for students.

### ***Changing the School Climate***

One coach noted an experience in which she modeled a small group writer's workshop in a classroom. At the end of the session, she asked the students about their struggles with writing. "I hated to write. Writing was painful. It was so hard," one student said. "I feel differently now and realize writing can be fun and interesting!"

This student noticed a change in himself that reflected a wider change in writing instruction at the school. In response to an open-ended writing prompt, he chose to write a story about his grandfather who had recently passed away. He was motivated to write about the many stories his grandfather told him about his life when he was growing up. The student now had a real purpose for writing—he had a story to tell.

When the coach asked this student what changed his mind about writing, he said, "Teachers are happy when they teach writing, and we write about things we want to say." The coach interpreted that to mean that the students themselves had noticed the changes they were seeing in teachers: a shift in mindset. As teachers moved away from isolated grammar exercises and other test-focused practices, they were able to reconnect with the joy and excitement that writing with a purpose can bring.

This shift was made possible for students with the support of their coaches and administrators. The weekly coaching sessions, the monthly meetings with administrators, and the extensive collection of resources provided by Write for Texas helped teachers to try new approaches. Coaches noticed that teachers not only changed their approaches, but also grew more confident in the process. "Teachers were valued, listened to, and supported," one coach noted. In that climate of support and collaboration, both teachers and students thrive.

***"I hated to write. Writing was painful. It was so hard," one student said. "I feel differently now and realize writing can be fun and interesting!"***

# Differentiating Strategies to Enhance Student Learning Across Content Areas

## Region 1 Education Service Center, Edinburg

Coaches at Region 1 Education Service Center worked with teachers of all content areas to tailor instruction to the needs of English language learners, who comprise a large portion of the student population in South Texas. Teachers in this region were taught strategies for using reading and writing to support learning, and they received additional support for implementing the techniques with English language learners.

### ***Learning Needs***

In addition to the unique learning needs of the student population in Region 1, coaches identified professional development opportunities for the teachers, many of whom were new to the profession or, in several cases, had come to teaching via alternate certification routes. Coaches identified one campus where every teacher was in his or her first year of teaching. They also knew of schools where entire departments were staffed with long-term substitute teachers.

The suboptimal situation, coupled with the high number of English language learners in the student population, convinced the coaches that basic literacy strategies would be inadequate. They determined that all content area teachers would benefit from intensive support to identify students' areas of need and to adapt instructional strategies to meet them.

### ***Using Writing as Formative Assessment***

As Region 1 staff members visited classrooms, they noticed that teachers primarily assessed learning at the literal level (i.e., simple factual recall). Students were not asked to apply reading and writing skills as they learned new content and teacher-led discussions were driven by simple questioning, which did not give teachers a sense for how much of the content students understood, interpreted, and connected to other knowledge. Therefore, Region 1 staff members decided to introduce all content area teachers to the idea that writing can be used as a means of formative assessment.

Coaches developed lessons focused on using informal writing strategies, and they showed teachers how these strategies supported content mastery. As they worked with content teachers, coaches focused strategies on how reading and writing can be used for content learning. They worked to correct any misconceptions about content teachers being expected to teach essay writing. Furthermore, the coaches helped teachers embrace informal writing exercises, such as an entrance/exit ticket or quick write, to evaluate student learning of content concepts.

**Formative assessment, including diagnostic testing, is a range of formal and informal assessment procedures conducted by teachers during the learning process in order to modify teaching and learning activities to improve student attainment.**



### ***Differentiating Instruction***

After teachers were comfortable using writing as an assessment tool, they were ready to address the identified gaps in student knowledge. Teachers discovered that students were lacking in both content knowledge and basic literacy skills and that they struggled to comprehend the long, often-dense text found in textbooks or novels. With the coaches' help, teachers understood that they would need to provide more scaffolds in their instruction to help English language learners master the content. Coaches and teachers worked together to adjust their instruction and approaches to meet student needs as they learned new language and content.

Coaches modeled how to use short passages and text excerpts to teach content topics, such as figurative language or characterization, as an alternative to trying to cover entire textbooks or novels. Coaches found that many teachers used whole published texts, as opposed to shorter, more manageable texts, and that they did not provide adequate scaffolds to help English language learners with comprehension. For example, they may not have used any visual supports, and although they may have offered students an audio recording, that recording may still have been too rapid for language learners.

Coaches worked with teachers to adjust their instructional practices by creating lessons using text excerpts. Coaches modeled how to pick the excerpts and how to annotate them in preparation for teaching a particular skill. Coaches and teachers practiced together using dialectical journals to record and respond to text features or literary devices. Then, coaches and teachers planned lessons that would offer these same strategies to English language learners to support their comprehension of text.

Coaches modeled for teachers how to incorporate graphic organizers into their lessons to support students. They practiced using charts to support learning how to make inferences or to encourage reader responses (e.g., “I see... I think... I wonder”). These additional visual supports helped students organize their thoughts and understand the content of what they read. Coaches also introduced differentiated strategies for vocabulary building, such as preteaching select words and analyzing sentence structure using color-coding that engaged students with more visual and hands-on learning experiences.

### ***Impact on Learning***

As teachers differentiated instruction more and more, the impact on student performance was apparent. Using modified strategies, students learned to annotate, summarize, paraphrase, and color code the important features in the texts to aid in comprehension. When teachers asked students to state the main idea, they were impressed with the evidence of content mastery in the writing samples they received.

Coaches also noticed a marked increase in student engagement. They saw students responding positively to the strategies through their increased skills in dialectal journaling and making sense of new content through short answer responses.

In one instance reported by coaches, a class of students who had never passed the state assessment worked with a teacher who differentiated her instruction using strategies introduced by the Region 1 coaches. After learning and applying the techniques of using reading and writing to support learning, all students passed the test. Several even received commended scores.

# Enhancing Student Learning Across the Content Areas

Write for Texas coaches at several sites prioritized working across the content areas (i.e., English language arts and reading, science, social studies, and math) to ensure all teachers had the knowledge and skills to integrate reading and writing activities into the classroom. In most cases, strong administrator support was essential. Administrators introduced the idea of writing across the content areas and assisted with the selection of teachers who were receptive to the idea. Administrators also played a critical role in providing coaches and teachers with time and opportunities to meet before, during, and after the school day.

## ***Teacher Workshops***

To support teacher growth, coaches offered extended workshops to provide additional information and planning time to teachers. At one site, a coach delivered an interactive presentation prior to the beginning of the school year. Teachers learned about the reading-writing connection and how they could use writing to strengthen student learning. A coach at another site offered a half-day session at the ESC that featured Write for Texas resources to introduce new strategies for teaching informal writing activities in the content areas. This same coach later offered a follow-up session in which teachers presented lessons based on what they had learned and implemented in the classroom with the support of the instructional coach.

Some coaches offered teachers after-school specials, or hour-and-a-half sessions, to go over specific strategies. At these sessions—which took place in classrooms—coaches used authentic classroom materials to demonstrate strategies and approaches for enhancing reading and writing activities across the content areas. They shared information from the Write for Texas website to help teachers learn new strategies and consider how to adapt the strategies for their specific content areas. The coaches then followed up the sessions with classroom coaching to help teachers practice implementation.



## **Examples of Content Area Informal Writing Activities**

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- **Quick Writing Rounds**
- **Daily Journals**
- **Stop and Jot**
- **Magnet Summaries**
- **Admit and Exit Slips**
- **Structured Note-Taking**

**Additional information in the Appendix.**

# Region 11 Education Service Center, Ft. Worth

## Region 12 Education Service Center, Waco

### Region 16 Education Service Center, Amarillo

Coaches also worked with groups of content area teachers during designated professional learning community meetings on individual campuses. Coaches used those meetings to model lessons, share strategies, and brainstorm implementation plans with teachers. The meetings were also useful for discussing adaptation of instructional routines to specific topics and assignments within content areas. Teachers reported that it was beneficial to have the coach with them, and the coaches reported that the small group format was conducive to sharing ideas and planning lessons.

### ***Classroom Coaching***

In addition to workshops, coaches also spent considerable time in classrooms modeling, co-teaching, and supporting teachers as they practiced new activities. The classroom coaching sessions were invaluable as teachers learned how to plan and adapt new techniques. Coaches visited classrooms on a weekly basis and reported improvements in instruction based on their efforts. Many teachers eagerly observed coaches modeling in one class period and then used the knowledge gained to teach their remaining classes. Coaches received many questions between visits and were a valuable resource across the Write for Texas campuses. Teachers and coaches examined student work together and adjusted instruction and approaches to meet student needs and guide students forward.

One coach reported working intensively with science teachers to help students understand the similarities and differences between narrative and technical texts through reading and writing activities. Students also worked on sentence writing skills by answering targeted questions in two to three sentences. This activity involved peer editing and teacher and/or coach feedback to help students develop strong sentence writing skills by focusing on sentence structure and flow. Students also participated in formative assessment activities in which they explained their understanding of different concepts by responding to picture prompts or short readings.



### ***Impact on Students***

As content area teachers experimented with more reading and writing activities, they saw improvements in student learning. Strategies such as brainstorming activities supported by graphic organizers were embraced by many teachers. One science teacher commented, "I am never, ever going back to the way I was teaching before!" Across the content areas, teachers realized that not every writing assignment needed to be a formal essay. They saw the benefits of frequent, brief writing assignments that enhanced student learning and improved reading and writing skills through instruction and guided practice. In one math classroom, the teacher created "Writing Wednesdays" in which students wrote about the math concepts they were learning and deepened knowledge by explaining steps and procedures in writing. Quick-writing rounds, expository text summaries, entrance/exit tickets, and journals were all successful activities used by teachers across the content areas.

### ***Impact on Teachers***

Coaches described specific shifts in how content area teachers perceived teaching reading and writing. Teachers began to see how the activities were flexible and could be incorporated into current instruction to enhance learning through a connected sequence of close reading followed by writing and then discussing with peers. Many teachers developed a sense of themselves as readers and writers by experiencing the activities as learners prior to teaching them to students.

One of the most important changes that occurred was a shift to verbalizing thought processes. By experiencing the activities, teachers were better able to notice and expand on their thinking to model it for students. For example, teachers learned how to describe their thoughts as they approached different aspects of writing, such as developing an idea, composing text, and connecting new ideas and concepts through reading and writing. Teachers developed new skills and were better able to plan lessons that incorporated fluid, integrated reading and writing activities. To teach students the skills necessary to be successful, teachers used activities that connected new concepts in the classrooms to prior knowledge. One coach described shifts in teacher approaches as “second nature and essential during instruction.”



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## Spotlight on District and Administrator Support

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Coaches at multiple Write for Texas sites developed deep relationships with district leaders and school administrators, which enabled them to reach many teachers across campuses. From hosting experiential workshops for administrators, to working with teams of teachers to align efforts at the middle school and high school levels, to creating a community of teacher writers across campuses, Write for Texas coaches magnified their impact by working with campus and district leaders.

The following site snapshots illustrate the importance of higher-level systemic support to bolster changes to classroom instruction. Often, it was an inquisitive district administrator who learned about Write for Texas and opened doors for coaches to work in and across schools in a district. In one case, Write for Texas coaches focused efforts on fulltime school-based instructional coaches who were then able to support all teachers on a campus as they integrated reading and writing activities across the content areas. In almost all instances, coaches noted the importance of communication and developing shared vocabulary and understanding of research-based instructional practices for all levels of educators to further implementation and support.



### Advice and Lessons Learned for Successful District and Administrator Support

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- Engage administrators with the reading and writing activities as first-hand participants to get the buy-in and support needed for the initiative to flourish.
- Involve educators at all levels, including district leaders, campus principals, and teachers. Principal support is essential; efforts at the classroom level are difficult to sustain or grow without it.
- Communicate with all levels of educators involved in the initiative. Hold administrators accountable for implementation with fidelity, even if the investment isn't monetary.
- Decide on and use common vocabulary for literacy terms such as *thesis* and *main idea*.

# Expanding Impact Through a Coach-The-Coach Model

Region 20 Education Service Center, San Antonio

Write for Texas coaches often noted that relationships were key to coaching success. One coach from Region 20 Education Service Center found that leveraging existing relationships with instructional coaches employed by the school and district she supported was her best avenue to success with the campus teachers.

## ***Coach-The-Coach Model***

The coach-the-coach model originally unfolded organically. While working with a high school in a small district, a Write for Texas coach noticed that the local instructional coach already had the kind of trusting relationship with the teachers that she knew was necessary for coaching to be successful. So she decided to offer her coaching efforts to the coach as a step toward effecting positive change in classroom instruction.

The principal at the school was key to the model. The Write for Texas coach worked with him to define campus goals for writing that were aligned with the Write for Texas Guiding Principles of Effective Writing Instruction, and then communicated them to the campus. The Write for Texas coach provided professional development for teachers supporting those goals. The district's instructional coach participated along with the teachers so that he was aware of the skills they were learning.

Many small districts face the challenge of supporting all content area teachers with a single instructional specialist who may not have a background in all teaching fields. As that was the case in this district, the Write for Texas coach worked one-on-one with this local instructional coach to build knowledge and skills related to literacy. The local coach learned what to look for in the classroom in terms of literacy instruction. The Write for Texas coach modeled how to coach teachers on topics presented in professional development sessions and topics addressing specific areas of need at the district. She gave the local coach a specific to-do list to work on between Write for Texas coaching visits. In this way, the local coach and teachers were able to continue building capacity and developing skills.

## **Tips for Applying a Coach-The-Coach Model**

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- **Leverage existing relationships**
- **Work with campus- and district-level leaders to define goals and communicate them to the staff**
- **Connect with existing initiatives**
- **Value what is already in place**
- **Understand that it will take time to see results**



### ***Increasing Coaching Capacity***

The Write for Texas coach identified teacher buy-in as the biggest success of her efforts, as it provided evidence that the model worked. Teachers implemented Write for Texas materials and strategies in classrooms because of the support they received from the local coach. Writing scores improved and the high school principal became a strong advocate for Write for Texas approaches. The principal served on a panel at the Write for Texas Summer Institute, which was attended by the superintendent of this district.

The coach-the-coach model worked to increase the Write for Texas coach's impact by empowering a local coach who already had strong working relationships with the teachers. In this way, the district-level instructional coach supported teachers of all content areas throughout the district—going far beyond what one Write for Texas coach (who served many other districts as well) could have done on his or her own.

When other Region 20 staff members witnessed the model's success, they decided to put the model into action with other coaching relationships. The coach-the-coach model took many forms across the participating districts depending on the relationship of the teachers with their Write for Texas coach. In most cases, the Write for Texas coaches made sure the local coach and/or supporting staff members were included in the work to varying degrees ranging from participating in staff development, to helping develop a plan of action for implementation, to co-teaching and connecting student data analysis with teacher needs in instructional delivery.

The Write for Texas project has also made an impact at the regional level. To support Write for Texas coaches, ESC staff members started hosting quarterly meetings for coaches based on the professional learning community model. These meetings and the Write for Texas approach to coaching featured in what became a framework for other initiatives at the regional service center.



**Write for Texas coaches** are employed by the 27 sites around Texas and receive state funding and support from the Meadows Center for Preventing Educational Risk at The University of Texas at Austin. The Write for Texas coaches provide professional development to improve literacy instruction at the individual teacher, campus, and district levels as needed. These services are focused on the Guiding Principles of Effective Writing Instruction for all content areas.

**Local coaches** are employees of an independent school district. Large districts may have the resources to provide subject-specific coaches or specialists, but in many small districts, it is common to have only one or a small number of instructional coaches that come from a variety of teaching backgrounds. These instructional coaches support all content area teachers in a wide range of grade levels, often at multiple schools. They usually focus on general instructional techniques rather than literacy-specific techniques.

# Gaining Administrator Support through Targeted Workshops

Coastal Bend Writing Project at Texas A&M University at Corpus Christi

Staff from The Coastal Bend Writing Project (CBWP) at Texas A&M University–Corpus Christi determined that support from administrators was essential for the Write for Texas initiative to reach its full potential. To get that essential support, based on the idea that all participants need to understand Write for Texas’ guiding principles for reading and writing instruction, they designed a professional development workshop for superintendents, principals, and curriculum directors.

## ***Summer Institute for Administrators***

Outreach to administrators began with a day-long Summer Institute uniquely tailored for the audience. Recognizing the many demands placed on administrators, who often take on multiple roles on campuses, the CBWP staff presented a workshop where participants engaged in reading and writing activities to better understand research-based instruction and how it supports learning in all content areas.

The administrator session included “learning stations” where participants engaged with reading, writing, and reflection strategies designed to promote discussion and collaboration among participants. Administrators generated original written work in one station, examined text and responded in writing in another station, and discussed personal reflections to text with colleagues in yet another station. Station materials and texts were selected with the administrator audience in mind, but could be adapted for students across multiple grade levels and content areas. In addition to participating in the stations, participants attended a panel discussion featuring administrators who had successfully implemented the Write for Texas initiative on their campuses. Administrators appreciated the connection between the activities and what to look for during observations and walk-throughs in terms of exemplary classroom instruction.

Feedback from participants attending the Summer Institute was overwhelmingly positive. One principal shared, “I had a great learning experience and gained insights on effective teaching methods for writing.” Administrators from one district who attended the Summer Institute together were so inspired by the experience that they decided to turn the training around for all teachers in their district. These administrators helped teachers see the importance of writing in all content areas and made it a district-wide priority. As one principal stated, “Through activities, conversations, and reflection, all students should be able to put their thoughts on paper to demonstrate understanding.”

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### ***Prioritizing Reading and Writing: Spotlight on a District***

To reach the goal of research-based reading and writing instruction in all content areas, one district committed to working with the CBWP coaches for additional professional development. Administrators arranged for teachers at the middle and high schools to receive classroom coaching support on a regular basis. With administrator involvement, competing priorities were minimized and the coach could work intensively with teachers in their classrooms to incorporate reading and writing strategies into their instructional routines. The coach was also able to tap the wealth of professional knowledge of teachers by facilitating virtual conversations and networks between teachers. In multiple classes, the coach observed common questions and concerns; when she identified a technique that might be of interest to the group, she was able to use the online discussion platform to help teachers support one another as they integrated reading and writing strategies in their classes.

With the support of district- and school-level administrators, the coach was welcomed on the campuses and was able to form meaningful relationships with the immediately enthusiastic teachers. Administrators understood and supported the goals of the Write for Texas initiative, which led teachers to welcome the collaboration and embrace the opportunity to work with each other across content areas. With the support of the coach, teachers recognized and capitalized on the strategies that they were already successfully using and incorporated new practices, such as using interactive journals and integrating writing strategies into lab reports.

# Tailoring Support for a Small Rural District

Region 7 Education Service Center, Kilgore

The needs of school districts supported by Write for Texas are as diverse as the geography of the state. Staff at Region 7 Education Service Center excelled in providing support to small, rural districts, which are often underserved in terms of professional development due to size and location. Region 7 supports 96 districts across 13,305 square miles in 17 East Texas counties. Through the Write for Texas initiative, Region 7 provided classroom coaching and on-site professional development to these small rural districts, one of which serves approximately 550 students in prekindergarten through grade 12.

## ***Challenges Faced By a Small Rural District***

Region 7 staff members noted that small, rural districts often encounter similar challenges. At one particular district supported by the Region 7 coaches, challenges included teacher recruitment and retention, teacher preparation/certification, and placement. At the outset of Write for Texas support for this district in 2015, coaches worked with administrators to develop an understanding of the district needs and started with a foundational approach to support teachers. Initially, professional development focused on strategies for explicit instruction, classroom management, lesson planning, and reading and writing instruction. Coaches noted the high percentage of alternative certificate holders and worked to transform what was described as “drive-by teaching” into authentic teaching with thoughtful lesson plans informed by research-driven instructional strategies.

Another challenge that the district administrators faced was a rapidly changing student population. The surrounding community for this district centered around a seasonal economy that initially employed transient workers. Over the years, the employees have chosen to remain year-round and the school district experienced a shift, particularly a growth in numbers of students who are English language learners. Despite a great commitment to supporting teachers and students, district administrators experienced growing pains, which sometimes resulted in a scarcity of resources. Through the Write for Texas initiative, Region 7 provided student dictionaries to the school, and teachers reported that students enthusiastically embraced the resource when reading and writing across all the content areas.

## District Demographics

**539**  
Students  
in pre-K–12

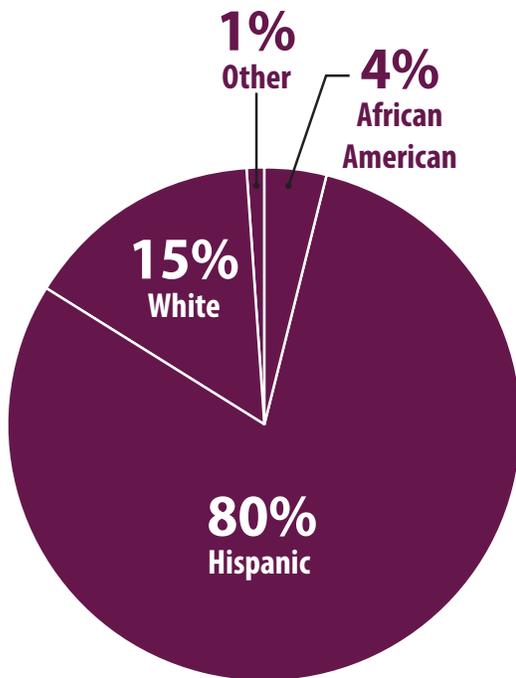
**95%** Economically disadvantaged

**38%** English language learners

**7%** Special education

**12%** Student mobility rate

## Percentage of Students by Race/Ethnicity pre-K-12



opportunities for students to learn and apply new concepts. The coach supported teachers as they learned how to incorporate writing activities into lesson plans as a means of increasing student learning, fluency, and writing proficiency. "I feel like I know how to teach school now!" remarked a novice teacher who worked with the coach to develop greater knowledge and experience.

The principal at the high school showed his commitment to the initiative by observing the coach as she worked with teachers. By shadowing her, he developed a better understanding of quality reading and writing instruction. His new knowledge translated into more useful interactions with teachers as he was able to articulate what he was looking for in terms of instruction.

### ***Coaching for Improved Instruction***

The Write for Texas coach initially spent 2 days a week supporting secondary teachers by modeling lessons, co-teaching, and demonstrating strategies. The coach made the most of her time at the schools by conducting before-school tutoring sessions to show teachers how to conference with students, coaching in the classroom during the school day, and leading after-school workshops to further enhance teacher knowledge. Teachers valued her visits and incorporated new strategies and routines into classroom instruction. The district curriculum director remarked, "Everybody loves the coach. The teachers love her and the students love her."

During workshops with the coach, English language arts and reading teachers examined expectations set forth in the Texas Essential Knowledge and Skills and made those expectations for skill mastery the basis for lesson and unit planning. Through careful analysis and planning, teachers learned how to create meaningful lessons that incorporated reading and writing activities.

The coach noted how teachers engaged in more purposeful planning and created multiple



Although small districts face many challenges, their small size enables coaches to help multiple teachers across content areas. Staff members observed that the schools transformed into real learning environments across the content areas, and they credit the Write for Texas initiative for the change.

### ***Impact on District and Regional Levels***

In addition to working directly with classroom teachers, Region 7 staff hosted region-wide Write for Texas workshops in Kilgore for the district curriculum director, principals, and teachers. The workshops provided the district staff with the opportunity to develop new skills and network with other educators. District staff members also took advantage of dedicated time for planning and discussing district needs. As a result, they developed and implemented a K-12 writing initiative involving teachers across all content areas.

The region-wide workshops conducted by Region 7 also had an impact on ESC staff members who were not working with Write for Texas. Specialists across the service center have adopted an attitude of “we’re all writing teachers” to support teachers across the content areas. One of the English language learner specialists developed workshops to link the state’s English Language Proficiency Standards to content standards and modeled the writing process for teachers to help them understand how to use visualization and conversation strategies when teaching writing across the content areas.

# Building Sustainable Practices through Collaboration

## West Texas Writing Project at the University of Texas at El Paso

Collaboration between Write for Texas, the West Texas Writing Project (WTWP) at the University of Texas at El Paso, and a nearby district led to several ongoing district initiatives that will support the improvement of reading and writing instruction now and into the future.

### ***Connecting Graduate Studies and District Professional Development***

Based on principles of Write for Texas and the National Writing Project, WTWP staff developed a graduate-level course at the university on teaching writing to diverse learners. WTWP staff taught the course and invited educators from schools designated to receive Write for Texas support to enroll in the course. The cohort represented educators from multiple grade levels and from a variety of districts in the region. Upon completing the course, educators were equipped to support other teachers as they implemented Write for Texas strategies and approaches in their own classrooms, schools, and districts.



One Write for Texas coach, who served as the curriculum coordinator for English language arts and reading in a small district in the area, had participated in WTWP training and recognized the benefits of having campus leaders engaged in professional development alongside the teachers they support. She enrolled in the graduate course with teachers from her district.

During the weeks when there weren't class meetings, the coach held professional development workshops for her colleagues in the evenings. These workshops complemented what was being learned in the university course and connected the graduate course activities with instruction occurring at their home campuses. The coach found extensions of the content they were learning in the graduate course and helped the teachers integrate the concepts into their teaching practice.

She used educational articles to elicit dialogue about writing instruction in relation to collaborative strategies that the teachers practiced. In addition to supporting their own professional learning, the activities selected by the coach could be adapted for student instruction. Topics included the challenges of using the writing process, inquiry using the I-chart, and how to use student writing to inform instruction.

### ***Expanding the Reach of Write for Texas Approaches and Resources***

As efforts to integrate Write for Texas evolved in the district, the coach also established professional learning community meetings during work hours and developed a grade-level cohort to continue the Write for Texas work. She also garnered the support of the other district curriculum coordinators (math, science, and social studies). Through them, she made connections with teachers outside of language arts who might not have been focused on writing instruction.

The success of this professional learning community led to the creation of a task force to address the lack of writing in 8th grade, a “non-tested” grade.

The task force provided a framework for collaboration to be sustained among the curriculum coordinators and campus administrators even beyond the Write for Texas grant period. What started as colleagues learning professionally together blossomed into a districtwide initiative.

### ***Impact on Students and Teachers***

The success experienced by the professional learning communities and the middle school task force was evident in student engagement, teacher practice, and student assessments. These results had an impact on administrators on many levels; the high school principal, for example, requested support from the coach and committed to Write for Texas as a priority on her campus.

In addition to the rapid and wide growth of the Write for Texas initiative across this district, the collaboration has led to increased collaboration between educators at the district and campus levels. The project brought curriculum coordinators from the four core content areas together for the first time to collaborate on implementing writing-to-learn activities. They developed a comfort level and rapport with professional learning communities of the other content areas and created connections through their common goal of improving student learning through writing.

**Writing across the curriculum typically refers to process writing that is meant to be published and reflects a purpose and format particular to a content area.**

***Examples:* a lab report for science, a poem for English, an essay for social studies**

**Writing-to-learn activities are short, informal writing tasks that help students think through or process learning about key concepts or ideas presented in a course.**

***Examples:* a notecard, a foldable, a poster, a chart**

Whereas professional learning communities had been exclusively content-focused, classroom teachers began using them to collaborate on instruction across content areas. Through the professional development offered by the Write for Texas coach, groups of teachers from very different areas (e.g., advanced calculus, science, physical education) reached a shared understanding of the definition of writing to learn. They understood how the strategies could be used to promote and measure student learning.

Anecdotal reports about the positive impact of the workshops came from teachers in a variety of content areas. One social studies teacher who participated in a workshop about collaborative annotation was eager to implement the strategy the next day. A middle school teacher who was originally hesitant to implement writing to learn in science class later sought out the coach and her colleagues to share his success with using the techniques. He reported that student engagement had increased and he was impressed by the volume of writing that they produced.

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**Participants in the Write for Texas professional development workshop were asked to rate their understanding of workshop content. The majority of respondents reported a '2' or higher.**

**1- I can describe writing-to-learn strategies**

**2- I can integrate writing-to-learn strategies in instruction**

**3- I can evaluate student learning using writing-to-learn strategies**

**4- I can teach others writing-to-learn strategies**

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# Vertical Alignment Between Middle School and High School

## Region 9 Education Service Center, Wichita Falls

After witnessing how successful the staff at Region 9 Education Service Center were in one-on-one coaching, administrators from one particular district enlisted their help to facilitate a larger vertical alignment effort at the secondary level. This district determined that improving student literacy skills could not be done in isolation—not in a single classroom or even at a single grade level—and so, with the help of the Region 9 coaches, they committed to aligning reading and writing instruction both within and between the middle school and high school campuses.

### Sample unit planning alignment

Skills addressed in unit	What students will be able to do at end of unit
Mechanics: Grammar, punctuation, capitalization, sentence structure	Ability to use proper mechanics, which eliminates the need to take a grammar class in college based on entrance exams
Planning: Brainstorming, note-taking, graphic organizers	Ability to think critically to create written words
Revisions: Peer review, constructive criticism, proofreading	Ability to make predictions and inferences about texts
Text types: Variety of texts	Ability to write a variety of essays
Publishing: Modern Language Association (MLA) style	Knowledge of and ability to use MLA style

### ***Road Map for Vertical Alignment***

Region 9 staff members met with all English language arts and reading teachers in grades 4 through 12 (a group of approximately 12) four times during the year, including three times while school was in session and once in the summer. The full-day meetings were held offsite at the regional service center to eliminate interruptions that teachers often face on campus.

Coaches provided an important foundation for the alignment efforts by helping teachers use available data to inform reading and writing instruction. While looking at data was not completely new to the teachers, the coaches showed them how to plan lessons based on what the data revealed about student learning needs.

The coaches also guided the group in examining and analyzing the literacy standards at their grade level and at the grade levels just above and below them. The teachers looked at the district's Year-at-a Glance report to determine the expected pace of their instruction, they compared student learning needs with skills to be taught, and they planned where and how to "spiral" literacy instruction (i.e., weave previously addressed skills into new units to review and expand instruction on certain concepts as needed).

During the alignment meeting for each grading period, teachers worked in their grade-level groups to identify what the coaches called "In's and Out's" of literacy skills. An "In" is a skill that students are expected to have at the beginning of the unit. An "Out" is a skill that students are expected to have by the end of the unit. Grade-level teams were directed to identify five of each type of skill for each marking period, which they shared with the whole group.

Coaches then facilitated structured conversation among teachers so that they could determine which writing skills were an instructional priority. This kind of communication allowed teachers to speak directly about which writing skills were weak among their students and how they could vertically align their instruction on those skills to close learning gaps.

### ***Professional Learning Impacts Instruction***

Region 9 coaches began each meeting by modeling an activity to engage the teachers in writing practice and writing instruction. Coaches sometimes invited teachers to demonstrate a strategy that they had applied in the classroom and share their experience of how it worked. Other times, the coaches led an activity from the Write for Texas online resources, such as an informal writing strategy or peer conferencing technique.

Activities were adapted to correspond with learning standards and content that was the focus of each alignment meeting. Coaches put a new twist on strategies that might already be familiar to teachers. Coaches challenged the teachers to incorporate one or more Write for Texas strategies into their plans for the upcoming grading period.

Teachers worked in grade-level groups to plan instruction for the next grading period. Teachers created poster-sized charts outlining what they would be teaching and presented them to the group, soliciting feedback from coaches and colleagues to flesh out the details. This collaborative planning time with support from their peers, as well as from the coaches, was crucial to refining the vertical alignment of instruction.

### ***Follow-up coaching visits***

As coaches worked with the teachers in weekly sessions at their campuses, they observed changes taking place in the classrooms. They noticed more reading and writing extensions in lessons and an increase in structure and continuity of literacy instruction. For example, coaches reported that when teachers used a certain mentor text for a grammar exercise, they also used that text for a writing prompt.

At the middle school, reading teachers and writing teachers who used to work independently began to collaborate on lesson plans. When the reading teacher was teaching *Hatchett* by Gary Paulsen, for example, she began to talk with her colleague about what connection he might make during writing instruction.

Coaches noticed that teachers became more excited to try new strategies. One teacher texted the coach to ask when she would be back on campus: "I want you to see me do this!" she said...It had an impact on me, seeing the teacher's excitement," the coach shared. "Thinking their way through the lesson cycle gave them more confidence."

Student writing scores at every grade level improved that year. As the coach noted, "Kids benefit from the teacher's planning and implementation of the strategies." Not surprisingly, the district asked the coaches to conduct the vertical alignment sessions again the next year. Another district heard about the project and its success and requested planning support as well.



# Aligning Instructional Approaches Across a District

## Region 19 Education Service Center, El Paso

Region 19 Education Service Center staff in El Paso built upon existing relationships in a small rural district to improve literacy instruction across multiple campuses. The superintendent, top district administrators, and Region 19 staff led efforts to ensure reading and writing instruction was research-based, coherent, and targeted to student standards across grade levels.

### ***Launching a Teacher Academy***

The collaboration began when the district superintendent attended a workshop at Region 19 for administrators of small districts with campuses facing Improvement Required (IR) status. The intermediate school in this district had been rated IR and the leadership and staff were motivated to learn how they could make impactful changes for lasting improvement.

Impressed by the impact of the Write for Texas approach, the superintendent made a commitment to prioritize literacy as the vehicle for improving student performance. She recognized that succeeding in this endeavor would require a collaborative approach and recruited district principals to build campus teams that would receive in-depth literacy training and lead change efforts. The principals identified groups of five or six teachers from each of their campuses (elementary, intermediate, junior high, and high school) to participate in a teacher academy led by Region 19 staff. Those selected teachers represented multiple grade levels and disciplines, setting the framework for vertical alignment.

The teachers in this first iteration of the teacher academy received comprehensive training in multiple literacy strategies. Region 19 coaches supported them in integrating writing across the curriculum and writing-to-learn practices, and blending instruction in reading and writing. Region 19 staff also developed workshops with a focus on incorporating a variety of text types (e.g., expository, persuasive, narrative) and conferencing with students on academic writing skills in the classrooms. Region 19 coaches worked hand-in-hand with teachers to build their confidence, providing support during planning, demonstrating instructional routines in the classroom and debriefing after observations.

### ***Impact at the Junior High***

The impacts of the initial training were significant, particularly at the district's junior high. Soon after implementation of the teacher academy, the intermediate school achieved release from IR status. The teachers who had participated in the teacher academy were key to spreading the initiative with others at the junior high, supporting colleagues to learn and apply similar instructional strategies. Campus administrators were so persuaded by the success of Write for Texas that they adjusted schedules to permit time for teachers to work with others new to the initiative. These lead teachers were provided with release time dedicated to coaching colleagues as they developed research-based literacy instructional practices.



### ***Learning Walks***

As more teachers in the junior high integrated reading and writing instruction, the Write for Texas initiative blossomed. Experienced teachers opened their classrooms to others in a true collaborative spirit. Classrooms became laboratories where colleagues could observe and learn from one another. With an eye toward continued engagement of educators at multiple levels, the Region 19 coaches implemented learning walks, where groups of teachers and administrators spent an entire day observing instruction at the middle school.

The learning walks were attended by campus- and district-level administrators as well as teachers from the high school. The purpose of the walks was to familiarize administrators with the literacy practices that they should be looking for and to identify ways to help teachers. Region 19 staff facilitated the walks and helped the administrators develop a deeper understanding of effective literacy practices during the classroom visits. Coaches provided overviews of the professional development teachers had received and offered guiding questions for the administrators to consider as they assessed progress during the walks. One administrator noted, "During the learning walks, observing instruction from a holistic perspective, instead of from merely an evaluative view, changed how I evaluate and provide feedback to teachers."

### ***Expanding to the High School***

The increase in collaboration and professional learning prompted the high school principal to request additional support from Region 19 as the high school teachers began to implement the strategies promoted through Write for Texas. The high school teachers fully embraced the shift and increased opportunities for reading and writing activities across the content areas. Region 19 staff noted that several math teachers actively sought out more opportunities to implement writing into their math lessons as a way of improving and monitoring student learning.

Further, administrators recognized that students benefited greatly from the alignment of approaches across the campuses and grade levels. During one meeting, principals noted that responsibility for student success in academic writing could not be placed on any one campus or seen as relevant for only certain grade levels. The administrators agreed that they must work together as a team to continue efforts at making writing a districtwide priority. Practical solutions for scheduling (i.e., using paraprofessionals to cover certain periods) and creating time for teachers to collaborate and grow together as professionals were successful due to the support and enthusiasm of the district and campus administrators.



# Building a Districtwide Community of Writers

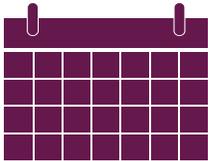
## Central Texas Writing Project at Texas State University at San Marcos

The model of professional development at the core of NWP affiliates is rooted in an immersive Summer Institute where participants engage in training that challenges them to unpack the writing process and “live like writers.” Frequently, educators who completed one of these intensive, multiweek institutes reported that the experience had an enormous impact on their teaching philosophy and practice. It was not unusual for one of these individuals to say that it changed his or her life.

In one district, Write for Texas coaches with the Central Texas Writing Project (CTWP) at Texas State University found ways to align professional development with districtwide literacy priorities while meeting the specific training needs identified by teachers. The result was a vibrant community of writers.

Teachers from each of the core content areas on each of the secondary campuses (two middle schools and one high school) were selected to work one on one with a Write for Texas coach from CTWP. Coaches provided specific support such as instructional strategies for developing vocabulary and building sentence skills. As word about the success of this initial outreach spread among the teachers and administrators in the district, two teachers from each of the secondary campuses enrolled in Summer Institutes led by Write for Texas staff at CTWP.

### ***Developing a Year-Long Institute***



The Write for Texas coaches decided to offer a year-long institute modeled after NWP Summer Institute practices, and they solicited applications from English language arts and reading teachers on the three secondary campuses. The year-long institute was developed as a way to increase the number of participating teachers and provide support as teachers implemented strategies in the classroom.

Additionally, the Write for Texas coaching staff reached out to instructional coaches on each of the secondary campuses in the district to closely align the Write for Texas support with district goals. Ten teachers (double the number anticipated) from both the middle school and high school campuses committed to the year-long institute.

This new cohort of teachers and instructional leaders met once a week throughout the year and for an additional 4 full days in the spring. Activities included professional development in reading and writing instruction, practice and feedback on implementing the activities, and preparation and delivery of demonstration lessons.

Participants in the cohort also practiced and honed their own writing craft to become better teachers of writing. Along with CTWP staff, the six district teachers who had completed the CTWP Summer Institute acted as Write for Texas coaches with the new cohort enrolled in the year-long institute.

### ***A Cross-Campus Community***

The district went from having 6 to 16 participating teachers, and the growth did not stop there. The 10 English language arts and reading teachers in the year-long institute cohort shared the literacy instructional practices with professional learning communities on their campuses. With continued support from administrators and collaboration among the faculty, the three secondary campuses in this district developed a cross-campus community.

Colleagues connected both in person and online to examine and develop their literacy instruction. Teachers became more willing to try new strategies and grew more confident in selecting instructional practices that would benefit their students. Teachers changed their perception of themselves as writers. Through their experience with the intensive professional development, they learned how to teach writing more effectively. In the words of one Write for Texas coach, teachers were “energized” by their learning and felt equipped to make stronger instructional decisions for their students. Professional learning, practice, and reflection led them to recognize strategies that would provide the best results for their students.

The intensive support and professional development designed by CTWP helped build the capacity of each teacher to implement new instructional practices and sustain the goals of the writing initiative by supporting their colleagues to do the same. Relationships among cohort participants from the three campuses were formed and collaboration was encouraged. The teacher leaders shared experiences, demonstration lessons, and ideas with fellow teachers and coaches from the different campuses.

Even with changes in staffing at the district level (a new superintendent, new director of secondary education, a new high school principal, and new ELA coaches), the support from Write for Texas has resulted in a cross-campus, districtwide community of writers. CTWP staff have received recognition for their ongoing investigation of practice and have been called on for advice. The Write for Texas impact will consequently be a lasting one.

# 3

## Think Big to Reach Groups of Teachers

Coaches at several sites learned to “think big” to expand professional development efforts to include large groups of teachers. Their various professional development efforts included Summer Institutes, before- and after-school meetings, academies lasting the whole school year, and virtual sessions to reduce travel costs and time. By working with large groups, coaches created strong communities of learners through shared experiences and discussion, strengthened collegial frameworks and meeting protocols, and developed new ways to plan lessons and examine student work. Funding from the Write for Texas initiative allowed sites to offer these additional opportunities for learning and increased the number of educators who benefited from the initiative.



### Advice and Lessons Learned to Successfully Make an Impact on Groups of Educators

- Develop a community of like-minded people who can work toward the same goals.
- Capitalize on existing meetings (grade-level meetings, professional learning communities, etc.) and technology (webinars, classroom videos, etc.) to make an impact on groups of teachers.
- Create engaging shared experiences to foster understanding and commitment to change.
- Recognize that change can be a slow process and use groups to support growth.

# Providing Quality Professional Development Through Summer Institutes

## Region 14 Education Service Center, Abilene

Every summer, coaches at the 27 Write for Texas sites hosted Summer Institutes to provide teachers with the opportunity to engage in professional learning about reading and writing. With a focus on the principles and goals of Write for Texas, coaches at each site tailored their offerings to the interests and needs of the educators they served.

### ***Designed for Their Regional Educators***

Staff members at Region 14 Education Service Center, for example, designed and led a highly successful institute focused on integrating writing into all content areas and maximizing the use of technology in writing instruction. The full-day institute was free of charge to all interested educators. Write for Texas coaches at Region 14 sent a personal invitation to educators at every campus in the region. Participants came from districts all over the region, including some who were already involved with Write for Texas through on-campus coaching and others who were new to the initiative.

### ***Formatted as a Conference Experience***

Region 14 staff intentionally designed the Summer Institute to give teachers a conference-style experience, exemplifying the principles of effective professional development. Throughout the day, participants had the opportunity to attend breakout sessions of their choice and to meet other participants to share ideas and reflect on learning. Furthermore, time was built into the schedule for campus teams to meet and develop plans together.

### ***Example Breakout Sessions***

- Reading and writing connections for all content areas
- Supporting English language learners with reading and writing activities
- Writing instruction in science
- Integrating technology into writing instruction
- Incorporating discussion into reading and writing instruction

## Summer Institutes at Write for Texas Sites Across the State

<b>18.5%</b> used keynote address format	<b>63%</b> 1-day sessions	<b>20%</b> 2- or 3-day sessions	<b>17%</b> spanned several weeks
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Sessions sizes ranged from groups of 15 to more than 200 participants; roughly 40% of Summer Institutes served approximately 100 participants.

### ***Teacher Response***

Teachers appreciated the conference-style event. They also liked being able to choose which sessions to attend, ensuring that they could select topics that fit their particular learning needs.

Participants found the time set aside for reflecting on their learning and planning with colleagues especially useful. Participants received reflection journals to record their thoughts and responses to questions raised during the sessions, such as “What is one thing you learned?” or “What is one strategy that you will try in your own teaching?” Participants spent time planning to adapt the techniques they had just learned for use in their own classrooms.

At the Summer Institute, teachers built awareness and skills for think-alouds, learned to integrate technology into writing instruction, and practiced techniques for implementing writing portfolios. Discussions about integrating technology into writing instruction inspired some campuses to consider investing in computers and additional software to support student writing practice. Features of technology applications that were particularly appealing included giving students more immediate feedback on their writing and increasing their motivation for practicing writing.

The Summer Institute also laid groundwork for supporting campus-based coaching in the following school year. Coaches continued to work with teachers on the skills they learned as they tried out and refined the instructional strategies in their classrooms.

### ***More than Reading and Writing Strategies***

Coaching staff at Region 14 Education Service Center observed that all teachers continued to need classroom management and student engagement strategies to use alongside content instruction strategies. There was demand for more training related to these skills from special education experts. Staff members began to integrate these skills into sessions on teaching reading and writing strategies, which many participants found helpful and coaches said had a direct influence on improving instructional practices.

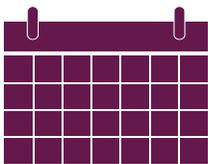


# Growing Teacher Leaders

## Region 13 Education Service Center, Austin

To develop capacity on Write for Texas campuses, coaches from Region 13 Education Service Center identified a cohort of teachers from three campuses to participate in a Teacher Leader Academy (TLA). The purpose of the academy was to strengthen pedagogical and practical knowledge of writing across the content areas and to build professional development and leadership skills to promote the work among peers. The goal was to grow teacher leaders at each campus.

### **Teacher Leader Academy**



Coaches developed a semester-long learning plan culminating in a Summer Institute that featured presentations created by the teacher leaders in collaboration with each other and the coaches. The TLA consisted of a book study (*Reading Nonfiction: Notice & Note Stances, Signposts, and Strategies* by Kylene Beers and Robert E. Probst), an online course focused on writing-to-learn activities, and classroom coaching from Write for Texas coaches who incorporated the online Write for Texas materials into coaching sessions.

Teachers were selected based on their prior participation with Write for Texas coaches and with administrator input. Invited teachers were seen as having “a voice” on campus and were willing to work with peers to strengthen classroom instruction. In time, teachers would become “embedded experts” and serve as important resources on each campus for others to turn to for ideas about how to integrate reading and writing across the content areas.

After the school year ended, teacher leaders participated in half-day workshops focused on a particular content area (English language arts and reading, social studies, and science). The workshops were developed by the Write for Texas coaches as experiential workshops for the teacher leaders. Teacher leaders participated as students in a series of core content-area lessons that included a rich variety of reading and writing activities, culminating in an interdisciplinary model lesson. The workshops highlighted the importance of including writing-to-learn activities and information on how to incorporate substantial pieces of writing to help students learn content-area concepts more deeply.

The coaches also created sessions related to working with adult learners to further enhance the leadership skills of the teacher leaders. These sessions included training on how to create presentations for other teachers, tips for visually displaying information, and how to lead engaging workshops for other teachers.

In addition to attending the opening session at the Summer Institute, teachers were able to choose from the following sessions:

- **Magnet Summaries: Informal yet Powerful**
- **Annotation: The Essential Link**
- **Observations in Nature: Practicing the Osprey's Art**
- **Writers Exploring Curiosity and Explanation: Generating Deep Ideas**
- **PEG-Online Formative Assessment of Writing**
- **T.A.L.K. Together. Analyze. Learn. Know. – Collaborative Pre-writing**
- **Social Studies through Writing and Film**
- **Writing to Extend Learning in the Science Classroom**
- **Pictures Speak: Concept Building in the Social Studies Classroom**
- **Expository Writing with R.A.F.T. (Role, Audience, Format, and Topic)**
- **Writer's Workshop: Using the Big Picture**
- **Read, Write, Listen and Speak to Learn**

### ***Impact on Instruction***

Coaches noticed teachers taking ownership of helping students understand the content at a deeper level through teaching student-specific strategies for reading and writing across the content areas. Another notable shift in instruction was the incorporation of frequent reading and writing activities throughout a unit of study. Teachers developed ways of including processing and reflecting activities through writing to strengthen student learning and build reading and writing skills. Examples of some of these included displaying anchor charts, using student journals, annotating text, and using writing-to-learn activities such as short written explanations of a process or concept.



Participants in the TLA also developed new ways of looking at student writing as a means of guiding instructional decisions. Initially, teachers looked at student writing in terms of length or with an eye for correcting errors. Their mindset shifted to looking at student work to determine content area learning needs, development of ideas, and writing skills. This shift led to much more intentional teaching to target specific skills and develop student ideas and written responses to text.

### ***Expanding and Sustaining the Impact***

Teacher leaders' presence on the individual campuses has been beneficial as other teachers visit their classrooms to observe lessons, ask questions in meetings, and invite the teacher leaders into classrooms to model or co-teach. The efforts of the Write for Texas coaches and teacher leaders created a model for sustainability and growth of the initiative into additional classrooms and is a valuable tool for expanding the efforts to include reading and writing activities across the content areas.

The TLA expanded into a second year with a new cohort of teachers. The prior year participants opted to continue with the rich professional development and serve as mentors to the new cohort. The mentors served as additional support to the new teacher leaders by sharing how they implemented various reading and writing activities into their own classrooms. The first cohort of teachers worked to extend their knowledge through developing and implementing intervention lessons for students needing additional support. These lessons will be presented at the next Summer Institute.

# Examining Personal Writing Histories

## Heart of Texas Writing Project at The University of Texas at Austin

Starting with the simple question, “How do people really thrive and grow as writers?” the Heart of Texas Writing Project (HTWP) staff at The University of Texas at Austin designed and delivered professional development to help participants transform as writers and teachers through examining their personal writing histories. With the aim of getting teachers to consider writing instruction as something beyond grammar skills or lists of vocabulary to memorize, HTWP staff engaged teachers in thinking about their own memories of learning how to write. The deep inquiry facilitated by this process helped teachers develop new ways of thinking about what it means to teach writing and how to develop rich, meaningful lessons for students.

### ***Personal Writing Histories***

HTWP staff engaged participants to reflect about their personal experiences with learning how to write in a school setting. They prompted teachers to respond to several questions regarding positive and negative aspects of their writing histories. Teachers then discussed their reflections and developed a collective experience from which to develop instructional practices to support their students as writers.

Not surprisingly, the writing history reflection uncovered shared experiences, some discouraging and others encouraging. For example, teachers recalled the disappointment of receiving writing assignments back with red correction marks all over them, and conversely how proud and respected they felt as writers when they were given choices about the writing topic. Teachers reflected on the feelings of being celebrated as writers when an instructor had encouraged development of ideas and commented on what was good in their emerging drafts.

### **Guiding Questions**

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**How do our own experiences affect how we teach writing?**

- **Where did you feel strong as a writer?**
- **Where did you feel shut down?**
- **Who mentored you as a writer and made you believe this was something you could do?**
- **Who made you feel like this was something you couldn't do?**

HTWP coaches led participants to think about what these memories suggested writers need to grow. Teachers then asked themselves, “What does that mean for our teaching?” Many participating teachers experienced a shift in thinking about teaching writing when they realized that, as one teacher noted, they needed these conditions as a writer, and yet they were not providing them to their students. Other important instructional elements uncovered during the reflective experience include the following:



- Providing regular, dedicated time for students to write
- Developing a community of writers
- Writing to real audiences
- Making thoughtful, purposeful decisions about the topics, content, and the design of their lessons

### ***Impact on Instruction***

HTWP staff helped teachers use this pivotal moment of reflection as a foundation for developing a writing curriculum and lessons to help students thrive and grow. An important shift occurred when teachers gained a new perspective about ways of teaching grammar to focus on correct examples found in the context of reading rather than relying on worksheets and error correction drills. Additionally, teachers renewed a focus on composition and began to explicitly teach students how to elaborate on initial ideas, how to organize their texts, and how to revise a text with the reader in mind. As teachers reasoned together that too much emphasis on conventions before generating ideas in writing can shut down the most vulnerable writers, they developed ways to encourage idea generation and discussion as a starting point for writing.

Examining their personal histories helped teachers realize that how they taught, assigned, and provided feedback had a direct impact on student engagement and performance. Assignments that allowed students to choose topics helped them develop as stronger writers. As their thinking evolved toward new possibilities, bigger implications came into focus. Teachers grew more aware of the amount of time it takes to write. They were reminded that writing is personal and requires risk. To thrive, students need “teacher champions” to help them develop strategies for becoming more fluent writers. Too often, writing is simply an assignment that is turned in for a grade, but through Write for Texas students are taught how to compose and are given freedom to engage with the writing process, build on their ideas, draft, revise, examine mentor text, and craft beautiful sentences and imagery.

# Taking a Closer Look at Student Writing

## Region 8 Education Service Center, Mt. Pleasant

Staff at Region 8 Education Service Center developed workshops for secondary teachers with a focus on examining student writing through assessment and instructional lenses. Teachers were familiar with how students scored on the state writing assessment, but they needed to take a closer look at how the essays were written and subsequently scored.

The workshops were therefore centered around two guiding questions:

- What does good writing look like?
- How can assessing student writing inform instructional decisions?

### ***Using Rubrics as a Guide***

Region 8 staff worked with teachers to develop a deep knowledge of expository text using the state-provided scoring guide. The coach created bulleted lists of the attributes of expository and persuasive writing and distributed them to teachers. They used these to practice scoring student essays and compare their scores to those given by the state scorers.

As the teachers put themselves in the mind of a scorer, they asked themselves what would make each paper better. And just as importantly, they then discussed what they would need to do instructionally to help the student make that improvement in their writing.

Teachers then scored benchmark essays from students in seventh grade and English II across their district, making note of strengths and weaknesses. Again they asked themselves two key questions:

- What would make this paper better?
- What would you show or discuss in a conference to help this student get there?

The learning was twofold. First, the teachers gained a deeper understanding of what quality writing looks like and how it is measured on the state assessment. Second, they gathered more detailed information about where their students needed help. "Quality writing was about depth," one coach shared. "The students would take on too many topics in one essay and not go into the depth needed on any of them." Through collaborative discussions about the students' essays, they set out to achieve the goal of helping students narrow their focus, state a clear thesis, and write in more depth.

### ***Conferencing with Students***

Knowing that feedback is essential to improving student writing, the coach worked collaboratively with the English language arts and reading teacher and special education teacher to meet with each student individually. Teachers began the conference by noting the strengths of the student's writing and then discussed ways to improve. Conferences gave the educators the opportunity to discuss individually with each student how he or she could improve, noting specific strengths and areas of growth. In alignment with their goal, the conferences emphasized focusing on developing a thesis and writing with consistency and depth about that thesis, using model papers to show what it looks like.

When scoring student essays using the state rubric scale of 1 to 4, teachers often provided a student with a more refined score of 2- or 1++ to let them know improvement is incremental and within his or her reach. This led students to develop a more flexible approach oriented toward personal improvement. Though coaches, teachers, and students all knew this was not how the scoring would occur on the state test, it showed students that they were making progress and that a higher score was within their grasp!

### ***Specific Strategies for Improving Writing***

The Region 8 coach showed the teachers how to adapt materials accessed on the Write for Texas website. For example, a brainstorming graphic organizer for narrative text was easily applied to the task of expository writing. In addition, the coach shared a simple, student-friendly strategy called the Pizza Technique to help students narrow their focus for a specific writing task.

### **Pizza Technique for Narrowing the Focus**

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- 1. Brainstorm ideas in response to an essay topic.**
- 2. Write ideas on a graphic organizer with the outline of a pizza cut into eight slices with one idea per slice.**
- 3. Select one "slice" to write about in the essay or two if they are closely related.**
- 4. How do you decide? Just like with pizza! Pick the juiciest, yummiest one—the one you know the most about and have the most details to write about.**

### ***Impact on Teachers and Students***

By examining student writing and working with the coach, teachers gained a deeper knowledge of the characteristics of effective expository and persuasive writing. This knowledge helped them to better identify strengths and weaknesses in student writing, which they could communicate to students in conferences and in instruction thereafter. The experience of scoring the papers led teachers to realize that the students' needs in writing (focusing on a thesis and writing with depth) did not align with their prior emphasis on grammar and mechanics. Because they discovered this for themselves, they were very interested in learning instructional strategies to match their new instructional focus.

At a broader level, the district came to see a need for a vertical effort on writing instruction. With support from the curriculum director at the district, fifth and sixth grade teachers participated in the essay scoring training at Region 8 and recognized the importance of teaching writing consistently at all grade levels. The coach noted that working together really brought that realization home: "You can't wait until freshman year to teach these skills!"



Region 8 staff used the state rubric (below) to create an easy-to-use list of traits for essays (right), for seventh grade and English I students. The bulleted lists allowed teachers to score many papers and internalize what is expected of students' writing.

**STAAR Grade 7 Expository**

**Score Point 3**

**The essay represents a satisfactory writing performance.**

Organization/Progression

- The organizing structure of the essay is, for the most part, appropriate to the purpose and responsive to the specific demands of the prompt. The essay is clear because the writer uses organizational strategies that are adequately suited to the expository task.
- The writer establishes a clear controlling idea. Most ideas are related to the controlling idea and are focused on the topic specified in the prompt. The essay is coherent, though it may not always be unified due to minor lapses in focus.
- The writer's progression of ideas is generally logical and controlled. For the most part, transitions are meaningful, and sentence-to-sentence connections are sufficient to support the flow of the essay and show the relationships among ideas.

Development of Ideas

- The development of ideas is sufficient because the writer uses details and examples that are specific and appropriate, adding some substance to the essay.
- The essay reflects some thoughtfulness. The writer's response to the prompt is original rather than formulaic. The writer develops the essay in a manner that demonstrates a good understanding of the expository writing task.

Use of Language/Conventions

- The writer's word choice is, for the most part, clear and specific. It reflects an awareness of the expository purpose and establishes a tone appropriate to the task. The word choice usually contributes to the quality and clarity of the essay.
- Sentences are varied and adequately controlled, for the most part contributing to the effectiveness of the essay.
- The writer demonstrates an adequate command of sentence boundaries and age-appropriate spelling, capitalization, punctuation, grammar, and usage conventions. Although some errors may be evident, they create few (if any) disruptions in the fluency of the writing, and they do not affect the clarity of the essay.

## 7<sup>th</sup> Grade Expository Writing Problems and Strengths

### Score 3: (Satisfactory)

#### Strengths:

- The controlling idea is stated.
- The writer uses two different organizational strategies to explain the idea.
- Paragraphs are developed sufficiently to add some substance to the essay.
- The writer strengthens the overall progression and development by clearly connecting two paragraphs.
- The writer's word choice throughout is generally clear and specific, and she shows a good control of sentences and conventions.
- The writer uses a compare/contrast organizational structure to develop a concept
- The writer supports big ideas with specific and appropriate details that add substance the explanation.
- The development is thoughtful, and the ideas progress logically.
- The writer's word choice and control of sentences and conventions are good.
- The controlling idea is evident and to support this controlling idea, the writer describes further. These details add some substance.
- The sentence-to-sentence connections are sufficient to support the flow of the essay.
- Although some minor errors are evident, they do not disrupt the fluency of the writing.
- The writer develops an idea by offering two examples.
- The specific explanation demonstrates that he has a good understanding of the expository writing task.
- Although the transition between the body paragraphs needs to be stronger to connect the two examples, the progression of ideas is generally logical and controlled.
- The introduction is somewhat formulaic because the writer includes statements that merely preview what he's going to write about, but his overall response to the prompt is original.
- Word choice is clear, and sentences are varied and controlled.

# Writing Camps Invigorate Teachers and Students Across Three Districts

North Star of Texas Writing Project at the University of North Texas at Denton

The North Star of Texas Writing Project (NSTWP) at the University of North Texas at Denton created a series of successful writing camps through close collaboration with district staff members and classroom teachers. The camps provided a powerful learning opportunity for teachers and students.



## **Writing Camps**

As a general practice in all their initiatives, NSTWP leaders met with teachers and district leaders to discuss the current curriculum and determine what type of writing instruction teachers would like to implement in the classroom and for how long teachers would like to run a writing camp. After that, NSTWP staff created tailored lessons using engaging texts for enhanced reading, writing, and conferring activities. The lessons focused on the reading-writing connection and included whole-class, small-group, and individual student activities. NSTWP staff members led lessons while district teachers observed and co-taught during selected portions of the lessons.

The lessons were designed in a reading-writing workshop format and featured cyclical activities. For example, students began to do a quick-write, and then proceeded to read a text or watch a YouTube video before annotating a text, and finally ending with a writing activity. Discussion and conferring activities were interspersed among the reading and writing portions of the lesson. At the end of the writing camps, each student selected a piece of writing for publication that was showcased at a camp-wide celebration.

**Writing camps were held after school and during the summer, with the summer camps ranging in length from 1 to 10 days. Writing camps were different from regular classroom activities in that they often took on a student-centered theme, such as superheroes, and were presented in an engaging, upbeat manner. Teachers and students enjoyed the sessions. “Why can’t regular school be this much fun?” one student remarked.**

**Reading-writing workshop lessons were led by the teacher who modeled specific concepts, such as annotating text to focus on author's style or developing a main idea in writing. Afterward, students worked independently while the teacher met with small groups or individual students to provide additional instruction. Students also had the opportunity to work together to confer and share their ideas in these workshop-style lessons.**

### ***Professional Development***

NSTWP leaders then used these lessons in their work with their Write for Texas partners, extending and adapting the professional development as necessary to fit local strengths and needs. Professional development sessions with teachers occurred before, during (through modeling and demonstrations), and after the writing camps. Before the writing camps, teachers examined the lesson plans and prepared for the delivery during sessions ranging from 3 hours to 2 days. During the writing camps, teachers participated through observation, co-teaching, and engagement with small groups of students. After the writing camps, NSTWP staff met with teachers to discuss the flow of the information presented in a lesson, reflect on the delivery, and plan for the following lesson. Teachers also worked on their own original writing during the professional development. NSTWP staff composed original text during the lessons to model for students and share their thinking processes. Teachers observed this activity and later practiced writing their own pieces and reflected on their development as writers and teachers of writing.

The professional development continued after the writing camps through regular meetings with NSTWP staff. These meetings focused on how teachers were embedding the tools they had developed from the camps into their regular classroom instruction. Teachers brought in lessons that they had developed and delivered based on the reading-writing workshop model. The NSTWP staff and teachers discussed the lessons and outcomes to brainstorm ways to improve future planning and implementation. NSTWP staff noticed that their most successful professional development and support was characterized by specific guidelines and structures that could still be adapted. For example, teachers received mentor texts and guidance on lesson tempo, which they could adapt in response to student learning.

### ***Impact on Teachers and Students***

The impact of the writing camps on instructional practices in the classroom has been remarkable. Teachers learned new ways of teaching reading and writing through activities focused on modeling and guiding student practice through active involvement. NSTWP staff helped teachers focus small group instruction on the thinking processes that are the foundation of expository and persuasive writing—making thinking explicit for students and teachers.

For many of the teachers, especially new ones, the opportunity to see the process of reading, writing, and conferring in a cyclical lesson laid important groundwork that will affect their instructional practices for years to come. Many teachers experienced a renewed sense of joy and accomplishment from seeing their students develop as readers, writers, and thinkers.

Students attended the writing camps voluntarily and saw great improvement in writing skills in a short amount of time. Many students attended the camps to prepare for a state-level assessment, and test scores were certainly a testament to their success. The students were excited about the writing camps and, as they encouraged their friends to sign up, the camps grew in size. Student feedback included comments such as, “Writing wasn’t as bad as I thought it would be,” and “I didn’t know I could write this much!”

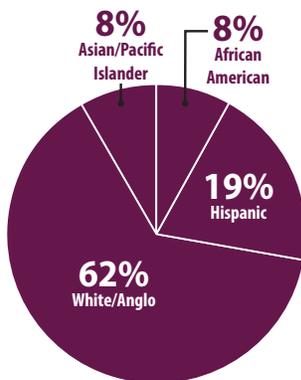


NSTWP staff attribute this success to the engaging lesson format with information organized in chunks to help students learn and develop new approaches to reading and writing. They also noted that successful instruction focused on students' strengths as a foundation for building confidence and proficiency and that building students' identities as readers and writers is central to their progress. As a result, students often developed a renewed sense of confidence and excitement about school that followed them back to their regular classrooms.

## District Profiles

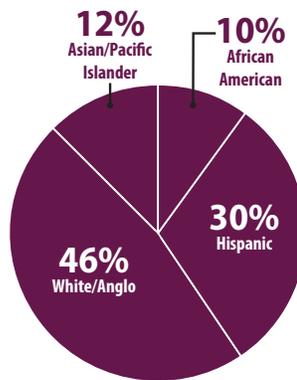
District A		District B		District C	
2,577 teachers	39 schools	3,733 teachers	65 schools	195 teachers	5 schools

**31,145**  
total student population



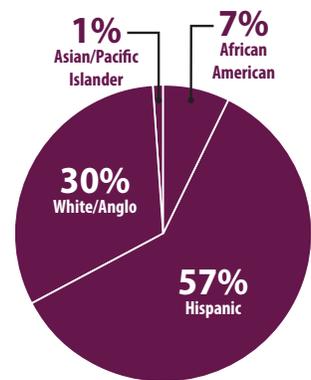
The average teacher experience was 11 years with an average of 6.5 years in the district. The teacher turnover rate was 12%.

**53,270**  
total student population



The average teacher experience was 12 years with an average of 8.4 years in the district. The teacher turnover rate was 12%.

**2,853**  
total student population



The average teacher experience was 10.5 years with an average of 6.5 years in the district. The teacher turnover rate was 24%.

# Leveraging Professional Learning Communities to Have a Positive Impact on Instruction

Working with professional learning communities was common practice of Write for Texas coaches as they established connections with as many educators as possible on a campus. Coaches from Regions 2 and 4 Education Service Centers made significant impacts on professional learning communities at multiple schools, focusing on essential elements of professional learning and strategies to maximize meeting time. Coaches, teachers, and administrators formed collaborations that produced growth in both teaching and learning.



## ***Professional Learning Communities Support New Teachers***

As coaches visited campuses to observe classrooms, model best practices, and meet with teachers to reflect and plan, they noticed that many of the teachers they supported were enthusiastic and passionate, but relatively new to the profession.

The novice teachers, mainly in their first through third years of teaching, were eager for support beyond literacy strategies. They appreciated fundamental help to learn how to navigate content standards, implement research-based instructional practices, understand state assessment systems, and master fundamentals of classroom management. Teachers routinely met in professional learning communities to address some of these challenges, but they needed support on how to conduct more effective meetings.

Coaches began meeting with the professional learning communities regularly, at least twice per week, before school. In addition to department faculty, regular participants included special education teachers, principals, the curriculum director, and sometimes the technology teacher. The Write for Texas coaches recognized that campus support would be maximized by capitalizing on the structure of professional learning communities as a means to effect positive change on instructional practices and educator communication.

The teachers, along with the coaches and administrators, established norms on how to conduct productive and purposeful professional learning communities. Coaches helped teachers to create powerful agendas by identifying priority discussion topics. Administrators contributed by reviewing data trends and participating in problem solving. Coaches led participants to identify strategies to address student learning needs and then modeled new instructional practices. Each professional learning community meeting ended with the group establishing goals for the next meeting.

# Region 2 Education Service Center, Corpus Christi

## Region 4 Education Service Center, Houston



### ***Professional Learning Communities Support The Learning Cycle***

Together, participants created a consistent format for the professional learning communities and worked to support the recursive stages of the learning cycle. Meetings were structured with similar steps to maintain the flow of the cycle from session to session.

- **Reflection** – Professional learning community meetings began with a brief discussion of the previous session and review of the strategy presented. Then teachers shared their experiences implementing the instructional strategy or activity in their classrooms. Teachers reflected on how the students responded and shared ideas for changing or adapting the strategy to be more successful.
- **Observation and Learning** – Each professional learning community meeting included defining new goals and exploring new practices (or refining existing ones). Coaches modeled new strategies and led teachers in discussions about how to implement them in the classroom.
- **Practice** – Teachers practiced new strategies in the professional learning community to become more comfortable with them before trying them in the classroom. This practice provided teachers with immediate feedback from coaches and their colleagues, and it boosted their confidence and motivated them to implement the strategies in their classrooms.

As the school year progressed, the meetings increased in specificity with teachers using the time to discuss how instructional approaches could be refined to better meet the changing needs of the students.

### ***Impact on Instruction: Teachers and Students***

Coaches and teachers noted that the professional learning communities had an immediate positive impact on teaching and student learning. Teachers delivered classroom instruction that was the result of more intentional, strategic planning. After practicing a strategy that the coach modeled at the professional learning community meeting, teachers moved more quickly to implement it, and they did so with more confidence and ease.

For example, a coach brought in student writing samples and modeled how to review them for coherency and provide feedback to students. The teachers observed the coach, asked questions, discussed with colleagues, and practiced the process. The teachers then implemented the coherency strategy and gave students multiple opportunities to practice while supporting them with immediate and corrective feedback. Coaches saw evidence of effective instruction (of the coherency strategy) through improvements in student writing samples. Assessment scores also increased for students in English I classes.

Over time, teachers became more assertive and confident in their instructional decisions, content knowledge, and problem solving skills as a result of participating in a professional learning community. Coaches observed that teachers developed more reflective practices and appeared more comfortable and confident with their knowledge and skills to meet the diverse needs of their students. They were also more willing to take instructional risks for the sake of student progress.

In the words of one coach, "It was so rewarding to see the difference. In the beginning, teachers felt overwhelmed and down, but as the year progressed, their confidence levels went up and they became shining stars. They put in hard work, were ready to have tough discussions, and in the end, student outcomes improved."

Another coach recalled, "It was so empowering for teachers to reflect on how their teaching craft had improved. To see the passion and confidence was inspiring. One teacher called me her fairy godmother because she said I would sprinkle fairy dust with the resources and modeling I would provide them."

***"It was so rewarding to see the difference. In the beginning, teachers felt overwhelmed and down, but as the year progressed, their confidence levels went up and they became shining stars. "***

# Expanding the Impact of Write for Texas with Invitational Workshops

## Region 6 Education Service Center, Huntsville

Staff at Region 6 Education Service Center in Huntsville created interactive invitation-only literacy workshops for high-need schools in the area. Region 6 successfully provided on-site coaching services to two area schools, and found a creative way to expand the resources—and the impact—of Write for Texas to many other schools and districts in need.

### ***Invitational Workshop Framework***

The workshops emphasized solid, practical strategies for high-quality writing instruction rather than specific test-prep strategies. The Region 6 coach showed teachers how to evaluate the quality of materials they found on the internet and also provided them with the research-based Write for Texas materials. Most importantly, staff members taught the participants how to implement new strategies through demonstration and guided practice. One coach remarked, “Teachers are already struggling to meet student needs, so they don’t need something that creates more work for them.”

The workshops were strategically scheduled at the beginning of each semester to give teachers the maximum amount of time to implement what they learned and to have the greatest impact on students. In the second semester session, the coach maintained the focus on quality writing instruction. Testing came up in questions like this:

“My student is doing this in his writing—how can I make sure it fits in the framework of the state writing test rubric?”

Because the coach had framed their professional learning around the principles of writing instruction, they were able to discuss how these principles applied to the testing setting without the focus shifting to ineffective test prep routines.

**Region 6 staff members reached out to more than 25 schools to have them invite teachers from all content areas to one of two series—one for grades 7 and below and the other for grades 8 and above. Each series consisted of the following:**

**Fall workshop – materials and practices for quality writing instruction and how to use them effectively in the classroom**

**Spring workshop – follow-up to clarify and answer questions about the materials and practices**

**Ongoing communication and support from the coach via phone and email throughout the year**

### ***A Safe Place to Learn Practical Strategies***

Many of the teachers attending were facing the same challenges because they were recruited from struggling schools. In the company of their peers, teachers felt safe to discuss their often-familiar challenges. With a focus on professional learning activities that were fun and informative, the coach created an atmosphere in which teachers eagerly collaborated and supported each other. Teachers who attended were eager to come back again. Comments from the attendees included the following:

"Thanks so much! I was able to use what I learned immediately in my classroom!"

"I had a great time collaborating with staff and the other participants."

"This is top-of-the-line training."

"I am excited by the strategies I learned today and definitely feel I learned things I can implement in my classroom. Thank you."

### ***Shifts in Instructional Approaches***

The workshops offered by Region 6 succeeded in expanding the impact of Write for Texas. Teachers who attended the first session found practical instructional resources, strategies, and support. The coaches continued to support teachers, making themselves available via phone and email throughout the rest of the semester. Enthusiastic participants implemented new strategies in their classrooms and returned invigorated with stories of their successes. Many teachers also began to access other professional development resources and eagerly attended the second semester session and the Write for Texas Summer Institutes and trainings. The coach was pleasantly surprised at how much more educators wanted after getting a taste of Write for Texas: "Another workshop, coaching, more resources. They ate it up!"

Schools with a high number of participating teachers saw great progress in terms of student reading and writing. "Seeing it in the data is really exciting!" a staff member said. Region 6 staff noted evidence of Write for Texas practices in student journals and portfolios. Staff members also reflected on important successes, such as changes in instructional practices, including how teachers framed their lessons based on Write for Texas materials and approaches. The teachers who saw the most improvement in student writing were those that "bought into the resources, loved them, and used them from this moment on in their teaching," a staff member said.

# Using Technology to Support Teachers

## Region 10 Education Service Center, Richardson

Staff members at Region 10 Education Service Center used technology to magnify the impact of Write for Texas support. Region 10 coaches established virtual connections with teachers on campuses that did not employ an instructional specialist to participate in professional development with ongoing support for implementation. Coaches used online workshops, online meetings, and a virtual coaching platform to increase the number of teachers they could reach across a large geographic area, delivering training in literacy instruction as well as providing follow-up support.



### ***Delivering Professional Development Online***

Coaches created online workshops for an audience of teachers, instructional specialists, and other educators. Invitations to participate in workshops, where average attendance was around 100 participants per session, were extended to all educators from Region 10 schools, not just to campuses visited by Write for Texas coaches.

The focus of the workshops was on reading and writing connections across all content areas. Coaches presenting the workshops highlighted reading and writing strategies within instruction that teachers may already be using and introduced them to new strategies for engaging students. Participants learned classroom activities that could be implemented immediately, such as effective note-taking strategies and strategies for engaging students with questions and discussion.

To make the extensive training manageable for participants, coaches divided the material into focused topics presented in a series of one-hour sessions over the course of several weeks.

For the campuses receiving face-to-face Write for Texas coach support, webinars served to extend teacher learning beyond the coach's site visit. While on campus, coaches' time is at a premium; they have to meet administrator needs and spend time in classrooms observing and giving feedback to teachers. Webinars presented teachers with focused information on a specific skill and gave them time to practice and reflect on that skill prior to the coach visit. Coaches noticed that face-to-face coaching sessions became more productive and satisfying as the teachers could generate specific questions in advance, bring in student work to discuss, and collaborate over email.

## Online Professional Development Workshops

### Topic Overview

#### **Engaging Students with Questioning and Discussion**

Explore strategies for addressing the needs of struggling readers through the use of effective questioning and discussion structures as it applies to content areas.

#### **Deepening Student Interactions with Texts**

Explore strategies for deepening student reading by understanding the structures that support adolescent literacy as it applies to content areas.

#### **Vocabulary Learning to Increase Student Comprehension Part 1**

Part 1 of a two-part exploration of the topic of vocabulary. Participants will understand the importance of vocabulary knowledge through acquisition and instructional strategies that encourage students to make connections and organize new vocabulary as it applies to content areas.

#### **Vocabulary Learning to Increase Student Comprehension Part 2**

Part 2 of a two-part exploration of the topic of vocabulary. Participants will understand the importance of vocabulary knowledge through acquisition and instructional strategies that encourage students to explore and process new vocabulary as it applies to content areas.

#### **Using Graphic Organizers to Transform Student Learning**

Explore teaching and learning with graphic organizers to grasp content and share new understandings as it applies to content areas.

#### **Effective Note-taking and Note-making Strategies**

Explore how to set students up for successful and thoughtful note-taking in order to comprehend content area information.

#### **Writing to Learn Part 1**

Part 1 of a two-part exploration of writing to learn with adolescents. Participants will learn strategies to develop writing skills using reading-writing connection as it applies to content areas.

#### **Writing to Learn Part 2**

Part 2 of a two-part exploration of writing to learn with adolescents. Participants will learn how to use the power of writing about reading through a series of writing to learn activities.

## ***Hosting Online Meetings***

Region 10 staff also worked with teachers in collaborative online meetings. This approach helped campuses that did not have a dedicated English language arts and reading specialist to focus on literacy instruction as part of their professional development. Coaches invited teachers from different campuses to attend an online meeting together, creating a virtual learning community.

During a meeting, coaches presented training in a particular literacy strategy and assigned an activity to teachers to complete before the next meeting. When teachers attended subsequent meetings, they shared their implementation experiences and reflected on the impact on learning.

As a result, teachers began to view literacy instruction as more than a list of skills to teach and began to student writing samples with the group. Teachers of sixth grade (where reading and writing is taught separately) used meeting time to examine text structure in student writing samples.



## ***Facilitating Online Courses***

On many campuses served by Region 10, teachers wanted coach support on a daily basis, but the campus did not have its own instructional specialist. To meet this need, Region 10 coaches created online course modules to support professional development and provide one-on-one coaching feedback.

Through the course modules, teachers were introduced to concepts and resources that could be adapted for instruction in any content area. In each module, they would learn a new strategy, do an assigned activity, and apply the skill in their teaching practice. Teachers then captured their experience and student learning outcomes to share with the Region 10 coach for feedback. Teachers made a short recording (6-8 minutes) of their classroom instruction and uploaded it to the online course platform. The coach then received a notification and accessed the video.

Coaches recognized the advantages of the virtual coaching platform and found it useful for providing timely and sometimes immediate feedback. They could watch the video and provide comments throughout the lesson without having to interrupt instruction or wait for a debriefing session. In this way, they ensured that teachers were implementing new practices successfully.

Coaches also reached a large number of teachers who would have been impossible to meet in person due to distance and school schedules. Their feedback became more focused on individual teacher needs and allowed for multiple coaches to work with teachers (special education or a content specialization) to provide targeted feedback.

# Planning with the End in Mind

## Region 17 Education Service Center, Lubbock

Write for Texas coaches at Region 17 Education Service Center approached professional development with a special interest in sustainability. Coaches set out to design training that would provide the tools and network to maximize the potential impact of Write for Texas across several districts. The training was designed to provide ongoing professional learning over the course of a year and to sustain the initiative on campuses for years to come.

### ***Developing a Network***

The Region 17 coaches observed that multiple districts in their region served by Write for Texas employed a large number of new teachers. Due to their small size, these districts were often unable to employ specialists to provide professional development and grow teacher learning in writing strategies. Recognizing a need for support to help the novice and experienced teachers plan for the long-term, project staff at Region 17 held a professional development session at the beginning of the school year to facilitate the planning process for educators in four districts served by Write for Texas. Middle school and high school teachers from four different districts in the Texas Panhandle engaged in the one-day session where they worked within and across grade level teams to plan for implementing writing instruction throughout the year. This introductory session allowed teachers to become familiar with the Write for Texas guiding principles and learn what to expect from the coaching relationship.

A highlight of the professional development day was regular “coaching circles,” in which project staff gathered grade-level groups and facilitated discussion among participants. Occurring about once per hour throughout the day, the coaching circles allowed teachers to reflect on and share background experience with strategies learned during the training. The coaching circles were also an opportunity for coaches to expand the conversation by giving feedback, responding to questions, and helping the teachers from different districts collaborate with each other.

### **October Focus: Organization/Rough Draft**

#### **Sample Guiding Questions**

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- **How do I show my thinking?**
- **How do I hook readers into my writing?**
- **How do I make my ideas connect smoothly?**
- **How do I bring my writing to a close?**

### ***Using a Planning Tool***

During the development session, the Write for Texas coaches introduced a year-at-a-glance tool developed by Region 17 staff. The year-at-a-glance tool integrated writing traits with teaching standards, clearly defining expectations for students and teachers. Guiding questions were included to support teachers with the instructional focus for each month of the year-long plan. Using this tool, teachers examined components of writing instruction and brainstormed how writing activities could be structured to grow students as writers over the course of a year.

As teachers used the framework to identify student learning goals and plan instructional activities, they also found opportunities for skill development for themselves. Together, coaches and teachers set goals for teacher development and noted which skills would be addressed during campus coaching visits.



### ***Building Success upon Success***

Work that Region 17 coaches previously did to vertically align academic vocabulary supported the use of the tool and built in time for teachers to plan together. Teachers appreciated the intentional and purposeful planning time, as well as collaboration opportunities across districts. Instead of just using materials created by a master teacher or instructional specialist, teachers learned to adapt strategies using their own classroom materials and practice new teaching techniques with coaching support.

Teachers also reported that Write for Texas approaches were successful with their students. The monthly focus of a year-long plan allowed students to make connections between the writing activities in class, the strategy of the month, and where they were headed in the bigger picture of developing writing skills.

Administrators also responded favorably to the year-at-a-glance tool and professional development from the project staff. A principal and curriculum coordinator from one of the campuses in attendance expressed commitment to promoting the initiative and seeing the work sustained on their campus. They sought out the Region 17 coaches for more information about how they could provide support that would grow student and teacher learning. They focused on what they should be looking for in the classroom practice and how they could promote the practices to engage students in writing. As part of their support, they also expanded the use of professional learning community time to examine teacher work as well as student work.

# Appendix

Visit [www.writefortexas.org](http://www.writefortexas.org) for additional materials.

## Authentic Writing Purposes

Purpose for Writing	Description
To inform and explain	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• State main point and purpose</li><li>• Convey information accurately and objectively in an interesting way</li><li>• Combine facts and information with writer's knowledge and experience</li></ul>
To express and reflect	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Communicate personal thoughts, ideas, feelings, and life experiences</li><li>• Think back to gain insight and contemplate what was learned</li></ul>
To persuade	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Attempt to persuade reader to accept a particular position</li><li>• Describe the problem, propose a solution, and provide justification and evidential support</li></ul>
To analyze and make inferences	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Take apart and closely examine phenomena, people, places, or things that are difficult to understand or explain</li><li>• Ask "how" and "why" questions that lead to a deeper understanding</li></ul>
To evaluate and make judgments	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Focus on the value or worth of a person, object, idea, or other phenomenon</li><li>• May specify the criteria as either "good" or "bad"</li></ul>
To question and explore	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Wrestle with a question or problem</li><li>• May lead to further in-depth research of a topic, another avenue of thinking, or a new area of inquiry</li></ul>

**Source:** Gallagher, K. (2011). *Write like this: Teaching real-world writing through modeling and mentor texts*. Portland, ME: Stenhouse.

## GUIDING PRINCIPLES OF EFFECTIVE WRITING INSTRUCTION

1. Use writing and reading to support student learning in all content areas.
2. Teach students the thinking skills, processes, and knowledge needed to write effectively.
3. Teach students skills for writing effective sentences in order to create coherent texts.
4. Provide extra assistance and instruction to students who experience difficulty learning to write.

# Content Area Informal Writing Activities

## Purpose

Brief written assignments used regularly (daily, every other day, or even multiple times during one lesson) should make up only one part of a lesson. These assignments

- teach students how to actively think about, process, and comprehend content;
- serve as a powerful learning tool that both students and teachers can use to monitor understanding of content; and
- help students understand that learning involves thinking and that writing is one way to process their learning and express their thinking.

## Instructional Protocol

- Select and vary the types of writing activities to keep students actively engaged in thinking and learning.
- Explicitly teach the activity, including note-taking, using teacher modeling and thinking aloud in front of students.
- Provide multiple opportunities with guidance and support for students to practice and apply within content area instruction.

Writing Activities	Procedures	Examples
<b>Quick Writing Rounds</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Display two words or topics. Students select one to write about in their journals or on paper.</li> <li>• Explain that students will have three 1-minute rounds of writing about their selected topic. Students write in complete sentences about their own experiences or connections to the word, or students use the word at least once in their writing.</li> <li>• When prompted, students write as much as they can for 1 minute.</li> <li>• Give students two more 1-minute rounds to continue writing on the same selected word or topic.</li> </ul>	<p><b>ELAR</b></p> <hr/> <p><b>Mathematics</b></p> <hr/> <p><b>Science</b></p> <hr/> <p><b>Social Studies</b></p>	<p>In all content areas, select the following:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Content-focused topics or key words in a lesson, current event, or unit of study</li> <li>• Words or topics that promote metacognition (thinking about one's own thoughts) or self-reflection of content</li> </ul>

Writing Activities	Procedures	Examples	
<p><b>Daily Journals</b></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Students write in their journal for 5 to 10 minutes about a teacher-given topic, question, or prompt before, during, or after a lesson.</li> <li>Teacher periodically checks student journals and provides feedback.</li> </ul>	<p><b>ELAR</b></p>	<p>Describe one type of conflict in "The Most Dangerous Game."</p>
		<p><b>Mathematics</b></p>	<p>Calculate the area of these shapes (to be determined by curriculum) and then describe the differences in size. Use the terms "less than," "greater than," and "equal to" in your sentences.</p>
		<p><b>Science</b></p>	<p>Do you think of chemicals as being negative or positive? Give reasons to support your viewpoint.</p>
		<p><b>Social Studies</b></p>	<p>If you could go back in time, what questions would you ask President Reagan about the attempt to assassinate him?</p>
<p><b>Stop and Jot</b></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Teacher stops during a lesson and gives students a prompt.</li> <li>Students quickly reflect on what they are reading, seeing, or hearing.</li> <li>Examples include the following:                             <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Evaluating understanding of a topic</li> <li>Making a connection to something previously learned or experienced</li> <li>Making a prediction</li> <li>Questioning anything not fully understood</li> </ul> </li> </ul>	<p><b>ELAR</b></p>	<p>Write two questions you have about <i>Romeo and Juliet</i>.</p>
		<p><b>Mathematics</b></p>	<p>Explain the steps involved in solving equations.</p>

Writing Activities	Procedures	Examples	
	Teacher circulates and reads what students are writing and asks a few students to share their responses.	<b>Science</b>	You just observed what happened with the balloon rocket. Write why this demonstration is a good example of Newton's Third Law of Motion. Use complete sentences.
		<b>Social Studies</b>	Based on the video we viewed, explain why you think the Constitution has been amended.
<b>Dialogue or Partner Journals</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Students write for a predetermined time (1 or 2 minutes) on a teacher-given prompt. They then pass their writing to a designated peer.</li> <li>• Students read and then respond by writing a question, an explanation of why they agree or disagree, or additional thoughts.</li> <li>• This written conversation continues back and forth two or three times.</li> <li>• Students talk for a few minutes with their partner or group about what was written.</li> <li>• As a wrap-up, teachers conduct a whole-class discussion.</li> </ul>	<b>ELAR</b>	Think about Chaucer's <i>The Pardoner's Tale</i> and tell whether you agree with this statement: "Money is the root of all evil." Give reasons to support your position.
		<b>Mathematics</b>	You have been asked to graph the line whose equation is $3x - 7y = 21$ by using the slope and y-intercept. Write a paragraph describing the steps you would take to complete the task.
		<b>Science</b>	In a paragraph, describe the characteristics of living things. Include at least six of the following in your description: cells, reproduction, universal genetic code, development, materials and energy, interaction, homeostasis, and evolution.

Writing Activities	Procedures	Examples	
<p><b>Magnet Summaries</b></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Teacher selects a “magnet” word that demonstrates the main idea of a concept, skill, or text.</li> <li>• Students work individually, in pairs, or in groups to look back through the text or their notes and find five to seven words or phrases that connect to the “magnet.”</li> <li>• Students create a main idea statement by using the magnet word and the related words and phrases.</li> </ul>	<p><b>Social Studies</b></p>	<p>What does the Civil War have in common with other wars?</p>
		<p><b>ELAR</b></p>	<p><b>Magnet Word:</b> chivalry  <b>Student-Listed Phrases:</b> strict code; King Arthur and the Knights of the Round Table; fight for just causes; being courteous, truthful, honest, and loyal  <b>Main Idea Statement:</b> King Arthur demanded that the Knights of the Round Table follow a strict code of chivalry that required them to be courteous, truthful, honest, and loyal and to fight for only just causes.</p>
		<p><b>Mathematics</b></p>	<p><b>Magnet Word:</b> estimate  <b>Student-Listed Phrases:</b> average 1 box every 10 minutes; move boxes out of basement; estimate how long to move 10 boxes  <b>Main Idea Statement:</b> John estimated that if it took about 10 minutes to move 1 box out of the basement, it would take him about 100 minutes to move 10 boxes.</p>

Writing Activities	Procedures	Examples
		<p><b>Magnet Word:</b> adaptation</p> <p><b>Student-Listed Phrases:</b> animals in desert; adjust to harsh, dry conditions; store water; hunt at night when cooler; burrow under sand</p> <p><b>Main Idea Statement:</b> To survive the harsh, dry conditions in the desert, animals have made adaptations such as storing water in their bodies, hunting only at night, or burrowing under the sand to stay cool.</p>
		<p><b>Magnet Word:</b> Homestead Act</p> <p><b>Student-Listed Phrases:</b> 160 acres of land; enabled many to go West; passed by Congress in 1862</p> <p><b>Main Idea Statement:</b> In 1862, the Homestead Act enabled many pioneers to go West and start a new life on 160 acres of land.</p>

<b>Writing Activities</b>	<b>Procedures</b>	<b>Examples</b>	
<p><b>Admit and Exit Slips</b></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Teacher purposefully selects admit and exit prompts such as a brief summary of assigned reading, an explanation of how the reading connects to their life, or an explanation of how they solved a problem.</li> <li>Teacher may assign admit slips as a warm-up activity or as homework that students turn in as they enter the classroom. Exit slips can be assigned at the end of a lesson and turned in as students leave the classroom.</li> </ul>	<p><b>ELAR</b></p>	<p><b>Admit Slip:</b> Explain how the story you read last night connects to your own life.</p>
		<p><b>Mathematics</b></p>	<p><b>Admit Slip:</b> Explain how you solved one of the problems from last night's homework.</p>
		<p><b>Science</b></p>	<p><b>Exit Slip:</b> In one sentence, describe _____ (lesson's concept or topic). In one or two sentences, give a real-life example of it.</p>
		<p><b>Social Studies</b></p>	<p><b>Exit Slip:</b> Write a short summary (6 to 10 sentences) of the article you read and discussed in your group today.</p>

## Structured Note-Taking Activities

Writing Activities	Procedures
<p><b>Reading Like a Writer: Charting</b></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Provide students with copies of the Charting Graphic Organizer.</li> <li>• After students finish a first reading of a text, they number each paragraph.</li> <li>• Students reread the text one paragraph at a time.</li> <li>• Students fill in the graphic organizer, listing key ideas and writing a summary of what the author is saying in each paragraph.</li> <li>• Then, students reread the paragraphs one more time and tell what they notice about the author's style or craft (how the text is written).</li> </ul>
<p><b>Recall Note-Taking</b></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Students divide a page into two columns and label the columns "Clues" and "Key Points" or use the Recall Note-Taking template.</li> <li>• In the right column, students jot down key ideas that summarize what they are learning. (Teacher may provide key points as a scaffold of support.)</li> <li>• In the left column, students write clues or questions that will help them remember and recall the key points.</li> </ul>
<p><b>Cornell Notes</b></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Students divide a page into three sections or use the Cornell Notes template.</li> <li>• On the left, students note main ideas and key concepts. (Teacher may provide this part as a scaffold of support.)</li> <li>• On the right, students write details and/or questions that connect to the main ideas.</li> <li>• At the bottom, students write a summary of what they have learned.</li> </ul>
<p><b>Multiple Entry Journals</b></p>	<p>Students record the following in a notebook or content area journal or use the Multiple-Entry Journal template.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Main concepts and ideas</li> <li>• Connections and questions</li> </ul>

Writing Activities	Procedures
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Key vocabulary and definitions</li><li>• Summary of notes</li><li>• Pictures to help them remember key information</li></ul>

**Sources:**

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