

Mnemonic Device

Teach the student strategies to write lengthier stories with organized content. Use a mnemonic device such as “WWW, What = 2, How = 2” which translates into a story grammar checklist: WHO is the main character; WHERE the story takes place; WHEN the story occurs; WHAT the main character(s) do or plan to do; WHAT happens next; HOW the Story concludes; and How the character(s) feel about their experiences.

Journaling

Encourage the student to write every day to increase written expression skills. Short daily writing assignments can build students’ writing fluency and make writing a more motivating activity. Have the student self-monitor and graph his/her progress, which will increase his/her motivation and writing fluency as well. For example, have the student count up the number of words he/she has written in the daily journal entry (whether spelled correctly or not) and have him/her record.

Outline

Teach the student how to build an outline for his/her writing. There are several methods for doing this that may help him/her organize and plan what to write. He/She can build an outline by talking through the topic with another student first. After the conversation, the student can jot down an outline from memory to capture and record main ideas of the discussion.

Proofreading

Teach the student to proofread by using a memory strategy such as SCOPE proofreading elements. (1) Spelling: Are my words spelled correctly; (2) CAPITALIZATION: Have I capitalized all appropriate words, including first words of sentences, proper nouns and proper names?; (3) ORDER or words: Is my word order (syntax) correct?; (4) PUNCTUATION: Did I use end punctuation and other punctuation marks appropriately?; (5) EXPRESSION of complete thoughts: Do all of my sentences contain a noun and verb to convey a complete thought? The student can pair off with another student and be encouraged to evaluate their own writing samples using SCOPE.

Memorize a Story Grammar Checklist

Students write lengthier stories that include greater detail when they use a memorized strategy to judge their writing-in-progress. These young writers are taught a simple mnemonic device with 7 elements: 'WWW, What=2, How=2'. This mnemonic translates into a story grammar checklist: WHO the main character is; WHERE the story takes place; WHEN the story occurs; WHAT the main character(s) do or plan to do; WHAT happens next; HOW the story concludes; and HOW the character(s) feel about their experiences.

Students are taught this strategy through teacher demonstration, discussion, teacher modeling and student use of the strategy with gradually fading teacher support. When students use the 'WWW, What=2, How = 2' tactic independently, they may still need occasional prompting to use it in their writing. NOTE: Teachers can apply this intervention idea to any genre of writing (e.g., persuasive essay), distilling its essential elements into a similar short, easily memorized checklist to teach to students.

Fluency: Have Students Write Every Day

Short daily writing assignments can build student writing fluency and make writing a more motivating activity. For struggling writers, formal writing can feel much like a foreign language, with its own set of obscure grammatical rules and intimidating vocabulary. Just as people learn another language more quickly and gain confidence when they use it frequently, however, poor writers gradually develop into better writers when they are prompted to write daily and receive rapid feedback and encouragement about that writing. The teacher can encourage daily writing by giving short writing assignments, allowing time for students to journal about their learning activities, requiring that they correspond daily with pen pals via email or even posting a question on the board as a bell-ringer activity that students can respond to in writing for extra credit. Short daily writing tasks have the potential to lower students' aversion to writing and boost their confidence in using the written word.

Fluency: Self-Monitor and Graph Results to Increase Writing Fluency

Students gain motivation to write through daily monitoring and charting of their own and classwide rates of writing fluency. At least several times per week, assign your students timed periods of 'freewriting' when they write in their personal journals. Freewriting periods should include the same amount of time each day. After each freewriting period, direct each student to count up the number of words he or she has written in the daily journal entry (whether spelled correctly or not). Next, tell students to record their personal writing-fluency score in their journal and also chart the score on their own time-series graph for visual feedback. Then collect the day's writing-fluency scores of all students in the class, sum those scores and chart the results on a large timeseries graph posted at the front of

the room. At the start of each week, calculate that week's goal of increasing total class words written by taking last week's score and increasing by five percent. At the end of each week, review the class score and praise students if they have shown good effort.

Motivation: Stimulate Interest With an Autobiography Assignment

Assigning the class to write their own autobiographies can motivate hard-to-reach students who seem uninterested in most writing assignments. Have students read a series of autobiographies of people who interest them. Discuss these biographies with the class.

Then assign students to write their own autobiographies. (With the class, create a short questionnaire that students can use to interview their parents and other family members to collect information about their past.) Allow students to read their finished autobiographies for the class.

Organization: Build an Outline by Talking Through the Topic

Students who struggle to organize their notes into a coherent outline can tell others what they know about the topic – and then capture the informal logical structure of that conversation to create a working outline. The student studies notes from the topic and describes what he or she knows about the topic and its significance to a listener. (The student may want to audio-record this conversation for later playback.) After the conversation, the student jots down an outline from memory to capture the structure and main ideas of the discussion. This outline 'kernel' can then be expanded and refined into the framework for a paper.

Organization: 'Reverse Outline' the Draft

Students can improve the internal flow of their compositions through 'reverse outlining.' The student writes a draft of the composition. Next, the student reads through the draft, jotting notes in the margins that signify the main idea of each paragraph or section. Then the student organizes the margin notes into an outline to reveal the organizational structure of the paper. This 'reverse outline' allows the student to note whether sections of the draft are repetitious, are out of order or do not logically connect with one another.

Planning: Brainstorm to Break the 'Idea' Logjam

Brainstorming is a time-tested method that can help students to generate motivating topics for writing assignments and uncover new ideas to expand and improve their compositions. Here are four brainstorming strategies to teach to students: FREEWRITING: The student sets a time limit (e.g., 15 minutes) or length limit (e.g., one hand-written page) and spontaneously writes until the limit is reached. The writer does not judge the writing but

simply writes as rapidly as possible, capturing any thought that comes to mind on the topic. Later, the student reviews the freewriting to pick out any ideas, terms or phrasing that might be incorporated into the writing assignment. LISTING: The student selects a topic based on an idea or key term related to the writing assignment. The writer then rapidly brainstorms a list of any items that might possibly relate to the topic. Finally, the writer reviews the list to select items that might be useful in the assigned composition or trigger additional writing ideas. SIMILES: The student selects a series of key terms or concepts linked to the writing assignment. The student brainstorms, using the framework of a simile: " _1_ is like _2_." The student plugs a key term into the first blank and then generates as many similes as possible (e.g., "A SHIP is like a CITY ON THE SEA."). REFERENCES: The student jots down key ideas or terms from the writing assignment. He or she then browses through various reference works (dictionaries, encyclopedias, specialized reference works on specific subjects) looking randomly for entries that trigger useful ideas. (Writers might try a variation of this strategy by typing assignment-related search terms into GOOGLE or another online search engine.)

Proofreading: Teach A Memory Strategy

When students regularly use a simple, portable, easily memorized plan for proofreading, the quality of their writing can improve significantly. Create a poster to be put up in the classroom summarizing the SCOPE proofreading elements: (1) SPELLING: Are my words spelled correctly; (2) CAPITALIZATION: Have I capitalized all appropriate words, including first words of sentences, proper nouns, and proper names?; (3) ORDER of words: Is my word order (syntax) correct?; (4) PUNCTUATION: Did I use end punctuation and other punctuation marks appropriately? (5) EXPRESSION of complete thoughts: Do all of my sentences contain a noun and verb to convey a complete thought? Review the SCOPE proofreading steps by copying a first-draft writing sample onto an overhead and evaluating the sample with the class using each item from the SCOPE poster. Then direct students to pair off and together evaluate their own writing samples using SCOPE. When students appear to understand the use of the SCOPE plan, require that they use this strategy to proofread all written assignments before turning them in.

Proofreading: Use Selective Proofreading With Highlighting of Errors

To prevent struggling writers from becoming overwhelmed by teacher proofreading corrections, focus on only one or two proofreading areas when correcting a writing assignment. Create a student 'writing skills checklist' that inventories key writing competencies (e.g., grammar/syntax, spelling, vocabulary, etc.). For each writing assignment, announce to students that you will grade the assignment for overall content but will make proofreading corrections on only 1-2 areas chosen from the writing skills

checklist. (Select different proofreading targets for each assignment matched to common writing weaknesses in your classroom.) Also, to prevent cluttering the student's paper with potentially discouraging teacher comments and editing marks, underline problems in the student's text with a highlighter and number the highlighted errors sequentially at the left margin of the student paper. Then (if necessary) write teacher comments on a separate feedback sheet to explain the writing errors. (Identify each comment with the matching error-number from the left margin of the student's worksheet.) With fewer proofreading comments, the student can better attend to the teacher feedback. Also, even a heavily edited student assignment looks neat and tidy when teachers use the highlighting/numbering technique, preventing students from becoming disheartened at the site of an assignment scribbled over with corrective comments.

Spelling: Leverage the Power of Memory Through Cover-Copy-Compare

Students increase their spelling knowledge by copying a spelling word from a correct model and then recopying the same word from memory. Give students a list of 10-20 spelling words, an index card and a blank sheet of paper. For each word on the spelling list, the student (1) copies the spelling list item onto a sheet of paper, (2) covers the newly copied word with the index card, (3) writes the spelling word again on the sheet (spelling it from memory), and (4) uncovers the copied word and checks to ensure that the word copied from memory is spelled correctly. If that word is spelled incorrectly, the student repeats the sequence above until the word copied from memory is spelled correctly and then the student moves to the next word on the spelling list.

Peer Teaching

Assign a tutor to the struggling writer who will help listen and generate ideas. They will also help with organization, spelling, and editing. Teacher will monitor throughout and help as needed.

Technology

Writer uses personal computer to complete writing projects. It will allow it to be easier to read, faster, and access spell check.

Pre-writing Activities

Give the writer the opportunity to experience something that they could then write about. This could be a physical activity, sensory experiments, or interactions with others in the school. This may give them real world content that they become excited to write about.

Audience

Provide the writer with an audience for their specific writing. This could be a piece that is sent to the paper, school board, president, celebrity, etc... This gives the student a real purpose for their writing.