A final copy must be free of errors, and should be completed in the student’s best handwriting or typed. If the writing is to be displayed, consider giving extra help with editing categories such as grammar, capitalization, punctuation, and spelling to be sure work is free of errors. Throughout the process, be sure to write constructive comments on student’s writing assignments. Feedback should be most plentiful and explicit during the drafting and the revising-and-editing stages. Write only a brief positive comment on
Introduction

*Teaching Basic Writing Skills* is a guide for teachers who want to help students of all grades and abilities develop expository-writing skills. The goals and activities in this manual were developed to provide systematic instruction in fundamental writing and can be adapted successfully for large classes, small groups, and tutorials. Moreover, since the activities in *Teaching Basic Writing Skills* represent a range of levels of difficulty, teachers can provide differentiation for individual students within a class. The program can be used across all grades, in every content area, and with mainstream as well as remedial students.

As students move through the grades, most of their assignments require expository writing, writing that explains or informs. In life, as in school, most writing is expository. Therefore, students must learn to summarize, justify, persuade, enumerate, discuss, and so on. Older students have to analyze and synthesize information from articles, lectures, textbooks, and literature. *Template A*, in the appendix, illustrates the wide array of types of expository writing that students must master.

**The Challenge of Learning to Write**

Many people with excellent reading and speaking skills struggle with writing. The problems typical learners may experience are magnified for less-proficient learners. These students’ difficulties with decoding, spelling, word retrieval, and syntax are often exacerbated by a deficient vocabulary and limited knowledge of the subject matter. These obstacles significantly compromise their capacity for comprehension and clear, accurate communication.

Writing is the most challenging skill to teach and to learn. Its demands on students’ grapho-motor skills, cognitive and linguistic abilities, and awareness of text and social conventions pose problems for many. When we write, we have to clarify our thoughts and express ourselves with far more precision, accuracy, and clarity than when we are speaking. Facial expressions, gestures, and prior knowledge provide a speaker with information about his or her audience, but a writer lacks these cues. As a result,
writing requires a high level of abstraction, elaboration, and reflection. In literate societies, writing is considered to be the highest-level cognitive and intellectual achievement.

Unfortunately, assigning lots of writing activities and providing exposure to good writing do not necessarily produce capable writers. Direct, explicit instruction is the key to developing good writing skills.

Creative writing activities, which center on self-expression rather than communication, often dominate elementary school writing programs. With minimal guidance, students receive writing assignments such as imaginative stories, poems, journal entries, and subjective impressions. Activities of this kind depart from direct instruction on how to write. Students must learn to write effective sentences and paragraphs before they can competently experiment with creative writing forms and styles.

Writing can take many forms. It can serve simply as a means of transcription, or it can demonstrate knowledge, communicate, and facilitate learning (Scott, 1999, 2005). Ultimately, most writing serves two primary functions: It is either knowledge-telling or knowledge-transforming (Bereiter & Scardamalia, 1987).

Writing that is knowledge-telling is often, but not exclusively, a narrative recounting. Many students function at this level. To them, writing consists of nothing more than listing what they hope is relevant information. As these students grow older, the amount of information available to them renders them unable to plan, prioritize, classify, organize, or efficiently and effectively set goals for their writing.

Writing that is knowledge-transforming requires a much higher-level thought process, but it empowers students to communicate clearly throughout—and beyond—their educational career. It enables the writer to formulate ideas, synthesize and analyze information, persuade, and solve problems. Knowledge-transforming writing interprets data and uses it to achieve a purpose. At its best, this is the high-level writing employed by graduate students, editorial writers, essayists, and contributors to professional journals. However, it is not the exclusive domain of these practitioners. Every student should have the opportunity to become a writer who can transform knowledge.

The Role of Executive Functions

Executive functions are cognitive processes that have a great impact on writing because they affect all aspects of memory, attention, and language. These functions enable a person to analyze situations, plan and take action, focus and monitor attention, and adjust actions as needed to complete a task. A person must have an understanding of how to access his or her knowledge and skills and stay motivated to accomplish goals (Horowitz, 2007). The executive functions play an enormous role in writing, especially when completing academic, professional, or business-related assignments. These functions affect a writer's ability to plan, organize, monitor, and revise text (Singer & Bashir, 2004). The writer must:

• strategize;
• initiate a series of actions;
• plan approaches;
• organize approaches;
• inhibit and monitor diversions;
• sustain task and effort;
• monitor and assess outcomes against plans; and
• institute needed changes.

Each of these steps requires selective attention, sustained and divided attention, span of attention, and the ability to shift attention (Singer & Bashir 2004).

In addition, the demands of the writing process on working memory, a manipulative function that allows the management of multiple features and simultaneous processing, are enormous. Writers must think about meaning, purpose, audience, syntax, and semantics. They have to plan ahead, as well as sequence and organize information.

Many students have weak organizational skills. They lack the ability to distinguish essential from nonessential information and to set forth ideas in logical order. As they try to formulate outlines or generate coherent paragraphs and compositions, frustrating problems arise.

Competent writers focus on their topic, purpose, and audience as they plan a composition and organize the information it will present. These complex tasks call for processing at higher cognitive levels than other instructional areas require. In addition, older students are often called upon to demonstrate comprehension by paraphrasing or summarizing linguistically complex texts or passages that contain a great deal of factual information.

**Effective Writing Instruction**

Some educators believe that the teaching of written-language skills should be delayed until students master decoding, spelling, and handwriting. Other evidence points to the value of early writing instruction (Wong & Berninger, 2004). Students in the primary grades benefit when their teachers combine the instruction of writing with reading, spelling, and handwriting lessons. For example, students can write original sentences using their spelling words or to develop their own questions about reading materials. Those who are not taught specific writing strategies early in their education may develop communication problems, which can persist and hamper them as adults, personally, vocationally, and academically (Scott, 1989a, p. 261). Nevertheless, many young students receive little, if any, explicit instruction in written communication. Reading disabilities receive far more attention than writing problems (Scott, 1989b, p. 303). Too often, teachers incorrectly assume that good readers will naturally become good writers.

A sound writing curriculum stresses narrative- and expository-writing skills, with an emphasis on the latter. Because teachers have limited time for such instruction, *Teaching Basic Writing Skills* focuses on forming a solid foundation in the skills most needed for school assignments. Its approach assumes that writing and thinking are tightly linked, and so writing instruction should, above all, help students enhance clarity and precision in the structuring of their ideas. Writing is the final, common pathway of cognition and
language (Scott, 1999, 2005). A good writer must bring to bear a command of linguistic knowledge, world knowledge, and social cognition (an understanding of, and an empathy for, the audience). Thought and organization are the characteristics that separate strong expository writing from weak. That is why Teaching Basic Writing Skills is as much about the organization of a writer's thinking as it is about writing itself.

The two primary goals of this program are to raise the linguistic complexity of students' sentences and to improve the organization of their compositions. Students who have been exposed to Teaching Basic Writing Skills strategies are likely to display greater clarity in their written and oral language. Their communication often exhibits enhanced complexity and coherence, and their reading comprehension can show improvement. In addition, the organizational skills introduced in Teaching Basic Writing Skills can translate into better study skills, as students apply the paraphrasing, note-taking, outlining, and summarizing strategies they have learned.

**How to Use This Manual**

Teaching Basic Writing Skills is built upon instructional guidelines that emphasize expository writing for all content areas. The program presents goals, strategies, and activities for writing sentences, paragraphs, and compositions. You can apply these strategies systematically, during structured writing instruction time, or you can integrate the strategies into instruction of other content areas. Expository writing is an essential skill in every school subject. Even math students are expected to write clearly and in an organized way about the processes they use to solve problems.

Teaching Basic Writing Skills provides many opportunities for individual differentiation within classrooms and grade levels to accommodate students' unique abilities. You can use the book's many examples to demonstrate different aspects of writing in the classroom and to develop independent assignments for students. Reinforcement is built into the book's strategies.

Two sections make up the bulk of the book: **Section 1: Sentences** and **Section 2: Paragraphs and Compositions**. Each begins with a goals checklist, followed by instruction and activities designed to help you teach what students need to know to achieve the listed goals. You can use the goals to set instructional priorities and to assess students' progress.

**Sentences**

Section 1: Sentences is designed to help students fully understand the purpose and structure of a sentence and develop the ability to compose complex sentences that reflect extended thinking. The section addresses some basic principles of grammar and encourages students to elaborate on short sentences and to summarize longer works. Teachers should introduce these sentence strategies as oral activities in the primary grades. The section's activities teach students to:

- distinguish between sentences and sentence fragments;
- straighten out scrambled sentences;
• identify a sentence’s type;
• develop questions;
• use coordinating and subordinating conjunctions;
• combine multiple sentences into one;
• expand sentences;
• summarize;
• understand the parts of speech and use them correctly in writing activities; and
• add and move phrases and clauses within a sentence.

This section provides examples that can be adapted for all grade levels and content areas. For example, in learning to use conjunctions, young students could be asked to complete the following sentences, orally or in writing:

- Our teacher was happy because . . .
- Our teacher was happy, but . . .
- Our teacher was happy, so . . .

The same strategy could work with older students, using a more advanced topic for the sentences:

- Fractions are like decimals because . . .
- Fractions are like decimals, but . . .
- Fractions are like decimals, so . . .

Each activity in Section 1: Sentences strengthens students’ ability to express complex thoughts through sentences that take a variety of forms and include an appropriate level of detail. But the sentence lessons do not need to be taught in any particular sequence. In fact, they should be taught concurrently with each other and with the lessons in Section 2: Paragraphs and Compositions.

Paragraphs and Compositions

Section 2: Paragraphs and Compositions starts with the development of an individual paragraph. It teaches students to write a topic sentence, then organize several additional sentences into a cohesive paragraph. Only after students have mastered the writing of a single paragraph do they move on to longer compositions. For an individual paragraph, and then for longer compositions, this section teaches students to plan and outline, write a first draft, revise and edit their draft, and write a final draft for a variety of expository forms.

Unlike sentence activities, paragraph and composition activities should be carefully sequenced. First, students should learn to develop Quick Outlines on a variety of subjects and in a range of genres as a class activity, following the sequence in 2.4—The Quick Outline. Next, students should write drafts based on Quick Outlines developed in class. For younger students, the draft can be developed as a class activity.

After they learn to write drafts of single paragraphs, students are ready to learn to revise and edit. Communicating with the reader with precision and clarity, as well as keeping the reader interested, are the goals of revising and editing. Initially, students should improve and
correct work that you provide, instead of their own writing. Assignments should be brief, and instructions and feedback should be specific and explicit. Have students begin by revising simple, unelaborated paragraphs as a class; then in pairs; and, last, independently.

Stress that students should expand sentences for the purpose of giving the reader more information, and provide opportunities to improve boring topic sentences (e.g., to transform *Here are some ways to use computers into Computers, necessary tools for business, are now found in most homes*). Teach students to use transition words, as described in 2.10—Revising and Editing, and explain how and when to use subordinating conjunctions and appositives in sentences. Demonstrate how to enhance a draft by adding examples.

When students are ready to tackle longer compositions, be sure to start with topics that are familiar to the students, or assign carefully directed and structured research activities. Demonstrate and develop Transitional Outlines and Multiple Paragraph Outlines as class activities. Practice outlining topics for assignments in various genres. Do not assign drafts of multiparagraph compositions until students are secure in developing all elements of the outlines (e.g., key words and phrases, appropriate categories, organization). Have them practice writing introductions and conclusions. Then assign students to write a separate draft of each paragraph in a composition. Have them revise and edit one paragraph at a time before moving ahead.

Some students are ready to move independently through the writing process sooner than are other students. This section's activities provide many opportunities for individual differentiation within classes in any content area. For example, some students may need more help developing topic sentences or categorizing and clustering details. Others may be able to construct an outline independently after participating in practice with the class. The Revise and Edit Checklist (Template N in the appendix) is great for focusing both teacher and students on the key features of a composition. In addition, using the Listening Evaluation Checklist (Template P in the appendix) to evaluate others’ work as it is read aloud is an integral part of the program.

Although the strategies in Section 2: Paragraphs and Compositions should be taught in a specific order, the program is most effective if students work on the sentence and paragraph activities concurrently. Sentence activities form the basis for revising and editing skills, which underpin competent writing.

**Instructional Guidelines**

Teaching students how to write does not follow a single, simple recipe. Your judgment as a teacher, together with an assessment of each student's writing ability, plays an important role in determining which strategies you should emphasize. The strategies in *Teaching Basic Writing Skills* were developed to be taught either individually or in conjunction with one another. For example, you might first ask students to summarize a news article in one sentence, then use that sentence as a topic sentence for a Quick Outline (Template H). They could subsequently convert the outline into a paragraph, which they would use to
practice revising and editing. You could adapt each of these activities to the abilities and content area of your students.

Students should be exposed to writing lessons from *Teaching Basic Writing Skills* daily, but activities need not always involve paper and pencil. On the contrary, many of the activities should be practiced orally, as a class. This is particularly important for students in the primary grades but can benefit students at all levels.

Because of the tight link between reading and writing, many teachers find that structured practice in writing linguistically complex sentences enhances reading comprehension (Gillon & Dodd, 1995). For the same reason, this program’s activities for writing paragraphs and compositions help students develop better critical-thinking and study skills. At each step in *Teaching Basic Writing Skills*, be sure to provide explicit explanations and demonstrations of what is expected. Avoid independent assignments until students have had ample demonstrations and group activities.

Although *Teaching Basic Writing Skills* does not address writing assessment until the third and final section, you should collect writing samples early in the school year in order to set goals both for individual students and for the class. Review the entire manual before your first writing assessment because familiarity with all of the program’s terms and strategies is essential in goal-setting.

Since many students have difficulty applying the writing skills they learn in one class to the subject matter of another class, reinforcement is important. Writing instruction is most effective when integrated into every content area and all grade levels. Students of varying abilities then have the opportunity to become better writers across the curriculum. Note, however, that it is crucial for teachers across the various subject areas and grade levels to use the same terminology when teaching writing, and to use terms in exactly the same way. All teachers using the *Teaching Basic Writing Skills* program should familiarize themselves with this book’s Glossary and refer to the definitions therein whenever in doubt.

Students should have many opportunities to practice written communication with a specific audience other than their teacher. Interview questions, summaries, critical reviews, and business and personal letters can all be important vehicles for instruction. *Resource 2.9* provides an extensive list of possible assignments.

Although spelling, handwriting, and related skills are important, students should be encouraged to focus on developing the higher-level skills they need to write. It also helps maximize the success of grammar lessons, which are most effective when embedded in writing instruction (Graham & Perin, 2007).

The strategies in *Teaching Basic Writing Skills* provide students with skills they can build on as they progress through school. Each activity reinforces the others, and students can be introduced to the fundamentals of writing in any grade or subject.
Teaching Basic Writing Skills is a flexible, affordable, and easy-to-use program for providing direct, explicit instruction in expository writing. The program is appropriate for grades 3-8 in every content area, and its activities can be adjusted to varying difficulty levels and adapted for large classes, small groups, and tutorials.

The two primary goals of Teaching Basic Writing Skills are to raise the linguistic complexity of students’ sentences and to improve the organization of their compositions. Two sections address these goals directly:

Section 1, “Sentences,” uses activities such as scrambled sentences, sentence combining, and summarizing to increase students’ understanding of sentence structure while developing their ability to compose complex sentences that reflect extended thinking. Practice in revising and editing are key to these exercises.

Section 2, “Paragraphs and Compositions,” teaches students to develop paragraphs by beginning with a topic sentence, then writing/organizing additional sentences to create a cohesive paragraph. Outlining, drafting, and—again—revising and editing are important components in the lessons.

Teaching Basic Writing Skills is non-sequential, allowing teachers to mix and match activities in both sections according to student needs.

The results? Students who have been exposed to the strategies display improved reading comprehension, stronger organizational skills, better study habits, and overall higher achievement, to name just a few. Add growth in students’ confidence that comes from an ability to translate well-formed thoughts into well-communicated writing, and you have writers.