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WRITING



SCRATCH

LESSON PLANS to Boost Your
Classroom Writing Instruction

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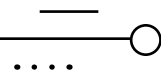
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Author's Note

A cookbook for writing? Yes!

Of course, this isn't the kitchen variety. My goal is to provide you with easy-to-prepare recipes for your elementary classroom with heaping cups of confidence and a dash of fun.

What kind of "cookie baker" writing-lesson-maker are you? What I mean is, when teaching writing, much like baking cookies, there are different types of culinary comfort levels.

Baking Cookies	Teaching Writing
Prepackaged, Refrigerated Dough Just preheat the oven and bake the dough. Voilà! Not much room to make mistakes and no worries about not having all of the ingredients.	Prerecorded, Video Lesson Just pull up the video and show it. Voilà! No room for mistakes and the presenter demonstrates everything.
Cookie Box Mix Add a few of your own ingredients, as directed, but mostly follow the instructions given.	Scripted Writing Program Add a few of your own elements, as directed, but mostly follow the instructions given.
Pinterest Recipe Take some time to search for lessons with good ratings and pictured results. Use the recipe with your own students and resources.	Pinterest or TPT Lesson Take some time to search for lessons with good ratings and pictured results. Use the lesson with your own students and resources.
Made-from-Scratch Cookies Use your prior experience and knowledge of recipes and ingredients to create your own recipe. These are custom-made to fit the tastes and dietary needs of your personal cookie monsters who will be eating them.	Made-from-Scratch Lesson Use your prior experience and knowledge of lessons and resources to create your own lesson. These lessons are custom-made to fit the interests and needs of your personal classroom students who will be writing.

Do you feel comfortable with your "culinary" skills? I will admit that my confidence in the kitchen isn't at the Rachael Ray level. I'm more apt to use the refrigerated, premade dough or a box mix. In my training to be a "grown-up," I did not have cooking or baking lessons. And, since it wasn't a passion of mine, I never took the time to really learn.

Maybe you feel that way about writing. When I went through school as a student, the focus for writing lessons was more on the conventions. My teachers checked for correct grammar, punctuation, and capitalization more than for craft and creativity.

The other parameter to determine if we nailed a writing assignment was all about the length. Was it the required full page? A five-paragraph essay? A 10-page term paper?

I honestly do not recall receiving instruction on the craft of writing—how to use transitions, how to create a captivating hook, or techniques for adding a stronger voice.

In my research for this book, I looked at a study that scanned thousands of college course syllabi for education majors. There were all kinds of teaching methods classes for science, math, social studies, and literature. There were even methods of teaching art, music, and physical education classes for teachers. But, at the elementary teaching level, there were *very few* instances of designated methods of teaching a writing class. Is it any wonder why many elementary teachers do not feel equipped or confident about teaching writing in their elementary classrooms?

While this book is not going to replace a “Methods for Teaching Writing” class, I hope to give you some tools and ideas for growing your young writers. My philosophy for teaching writing is that we need to equip kids with specific skill-based lessons that can be applied in authentic writing experiences. **Our ultimate goal should not be just to develop the writing, but rather to develop our *students* as writers.** This goal was emphasized as a need in the NCTE (National Council of Teachers of English) “Position Statement on Writing Instruction in School,” released in August 2022.

If we can deliver skill-based lessons in ways that are meaningful and fun, your writing block can be a time of day that both you and your students look forward to. When students see the purpose in the skills being taught and start to see it improving how they think as writers, they will be more engaged and start flexing their creative muscles.

This “cookbook” is formatted to offer a you-can-do-it approach. Just like a food cookbook, it isn’t meant to be read front to back. You can search for a lesson that meets a current need or that you are just in the mood for.

You will find a list of your ingredients (resources, materials, and mentor texts), appetizers (attention grabbers to whet your students’ appetites for the lesson), a cooking demonstration (what you will model), directions (what the students will do), and dessert options (ideas for sharing or celebrating the work). I stir in some additional comments, notes, and best practice tips along the way.

This is not a stand-alone writing program, but rather a hearty supplement focused on boosting creativity and improving how your kids think about writing. These lessons will help you serve up lessons with confidence. Once you start to use these recipes, they may just inspire you to create some made-from-scratch recipes of your own!

Bon appétit!

Cooking Success Tips

- **Have kids write daily.** “As students write, they learn by doing. They try out different forms of writing, apply different strategies and approaches for producing text, and gain fluency with basic writing skills such as handwriting, spelling, and sentence construction.” –International Literacy Association (2020), “Teaching Writing to Improve Reading Skills.”
- **Learn, reflect, and brainstorm writing techniques with other teachers.** Sharing mentor text and prop ideas can multiply your resources. And “collective teacher efficacy” has an effect size of 1.39 on student achievement, according to John Hattie’s *Influences on Student Achievement* in 2019.
- **Model writing in front of your students.** Share your thoughts out loud as you are working in front of them. Let them see your mistakes and aha moments. Professor Cassandra O’Sullivan Sachar, an associate English professor at Bloomsburg University, explains, “By showing our own missteps and then using strategies to improve what we’ve written, we teach valuable lessons about how the writing process works.” This also allows students to understand expectations for an assignment and may inspire them with ideas to help them begin. It truly is a game changer when you model your lessons.
- **Provide authentic audiences and purposes for your students’ writing.** According to Jennifer Jump, in *What the Science of Reading Says about Writing*, “decisions are driven by their [students’] awareness of task, audience, and purpose, which also informs their language choices and tone.”

Any type of writing can be more palatable when we provide opportunities for students to affect others with a message or story. It’s important to remember that we can provide choices for them to share their stories and information too. They can use digital presentations, sound, images, or the written word. It’s all communication and these are all using forms of writing. Providing authentic audiences for their work is a way to allow writers to see the impact of their words. It may be fun to write a fractured fairy tale, but to get kids to believe that writing is important, they have to have faith that their words and thoughts matter to someone.

- **Help kids see themselves as writers.** We need to be sure our students understand that they *are* writers. Sometimes they say, “I’m not a good writer,” “I don’t like writing,” or “I don’t know how to write.” This fixed mindset can hamper their confidence and future success communicating with others. Students are all readers, but not because they read whole books and can talk about them. They are readers because they read the directions on a page, they understand the meaning in an illustration, and they read the lunch menu. Students don’t avoid looking at a phone to read a text message because they don’t like reading or claim not to be a reader.

We need to erase this mode of thinking that writing is only reports and essays about a given topic. Just like reading, writing is something we do all day long. We write to-do lists, we sketch pictures to help us remember things, we write notes and texts. Yes, we also write stories, poems, and reports, but that isn't the only kind of writing and that isn't what defines us as writers.

Once kids understand that we are all readers and writers, we can help them realize that maybe they just need to grow in a certain type of writing. Maybe a topic was assigned that they didn't know much about or enjoy. This shouldn't ruin a particular genre forever, and it shouldn't cause them to feel like they can't write because the words weren't coming to them easily or joyfully on a few occasions.

Just as most people are not good at *all* sports, that doesn't mean that we are not good at *any* sports. You may be a great basketball player but have a lot of room to improve when playing tennis. That being said, there are some people who are not inclined toward any sports and there will be some people who are not inclined to enjoy most kinds of writing. Keep the focus on the fact that there are many kinds of writing and that some types may not come as naturally as others.

- **Become a writer.** This may sound extreme, but you'll notice a difference in how you approach writing in your classroom if *you* are a writer, and not just someone who sends a text message or is a writer during writing block at school. Really be a writer. It will change the way you teach it and the way you feel about it.

When you start to do this, you'll find yourself sharing things with the kids about your discoveries. It could be about your process, your word choices, your struggles, or how you finally finished something. *This matters*. The kids will see you as a real writer for real reasons and they will start to write for real too.

You can start with a small step. Get a writer's notebook or journal. *Record* thoughts in it each day. Reflect on what you're grateful for, jot down teaching ideas, or take notes in it when you watch a webinar. If you write a sticky note about something you want to do for a lesson, put that note in your notebook. If you write an idea on a napkin at a restaurant, stick it in your notebook when you get home. Show this notebook to your students. Let them see the messy, fun ways we collect ideas. Let them know that ideas are important. They are scraps of knowledge that can be used as compost for our stories!

How to Use This Book

Like most recipe books, this one assumes a certain level of competency in order to use the lessons. For example, you wouldn't use a cookbook to learn how to work your stove, measure ingredients, or sift flour. **This is not a “How to Write” book. It's more of a “How to Grow Your Writers” book.** It is best suited for students who are already able to write sentences. (I could write an entire book on how to get kids from writing a string of letters to writing sentences, but this is not that book.)

As an elementary teacher, I planned based on an overall view of what I needed to cover for the year, but fine-tuned what to teach each day based on needs. There was *never* a lack of needs. With endless possibilities to include in this book, I tried to choose lesson ideas and exercises for improving writing techniques that may happen in different stages of your writers' development. I've organized the lessons into writing goals. They are not in a particular order, though some of the “Generating Ideas” lessons are great for starting a new school year.

01

Preheating the Oven



At the beginning of the year, it's recommended to set your table with some items and procedures that will prepare students for success during writing time.

Author Chair

You'd be surprised how easy it is to score an inexpensive chair to use for your author chair.

1. Go to garage sales, consignment shops, flea markets, or online sale sites, or ask friends and family for a wooden stool, bench, or chair.
2. Sand it down. Buy craft paints in various colors and some paintbrushes.
3. Spread out garbage bags or plastic under the chair in your classroom.
4. Put students in groups of three or four to take turns painting parts of the chair.
5. Allow the chair to dry overnight.
6. Once dry, write "Author's Chair" somewhere. Then allow students to put their names on the chair with a permanent marker all over the chair surface.
7. Voilà, you have an author chair! A place of honor to sit that shows anyone who comes into your room that writing is valued there.
8. During writing block, allow kids to share their writing from the author chair. Other students gather on the floor around the author chair to listen.
9. When someone is doing an amazing job on their writing, making great progress, using a creative spin, sharing a writing they did at home for fun, or any other thing worth celebrating, allow them to put their name in a drawing.
10. At the end of the year, draw out a name. That child gets to take the chair home to keep. Start all over the next summer with a different chair.

NOTE You can use other types of chairs besides wooden ones, of course. For example, you could get a director's-style chair and have kids sign their names on the canvas seat and back.

Writers' Notebooks

Having a writer's notebook can build anticipation for the writing that will happen in your room. It is a place where students can brainstorm, have sections for favorite words and phrases, take notes for various lessons, or practice techniques.

Kick off the year by bringing in a writing notebook of your own. Show the kids what you have in yours. If you don't have one, you can create one as a model or find examples online to show kids how authors use them.

On the day that you have kids painting the author chair, the other kids could be taking time to decorate their writing notebooks. You can provide magazines to cut pictures and words from, stickers, and other embellishments. Let them create a notebook that inspires them.

Writing Folders

Throughout this book, you will find lessons focused on specific skills. These are meant to continue to be built upon. When a student has practiced a skill, have them keep that page in their folder. There will be times they refer back to lessons in the folder. There will also be times that a lesson will be built upon and students can add onto a work in progress.

At times, you may have anchor papers, reference sheets, or tools that can be kept in their folders. For example, in the Generating Ideas section, students will have a ME Page and an Expert List to keep in their folders.

Procedures

Ideally, you want to make time for writing opportunities every day. One way to reduce wasted time is to create procedures. What have you noticed takes time away from the instruction and practice during your writing time? How will you handle access to writing folders and notebooks? Will kids have paper at their space or need to get some? How will you handle questions and spelling during practice time?

All of these items need to be considered and taught to allow for maximum productivity and minimal distraction. You'd be surprised how many minutes you gain daily by teaching procedures for all of the transition times, supply procurement, and expectations.

Spelling

I noticed students often got hung up on spelling their words correctly during writing. Although I never put an emphasis on having to spell everything correctly, some kids aren't happy with just "sounding out" a word. They want to know how to spell it. I found ways to help them spell words, with minimal fuss. For the lower grades, I created a "My Try" page. This saved lots of time and stress.

My Try	Correct Spelling

Students could get this out from their writing folders when they want help spelling a word. They simply try to spell it in the left column and when I see this, I come by and write in the correct spelling across from it. It's quick and painless.

For the older elementary grades, I allowed my students to look up spellings on their devices. (This is what real writers do, after all.)

Making the Most of Your Time

You have a lot of control over the transitions between hooking your students, modeling the focus skill, and releasing kids to practice because you are the one leading. When it comes to the time between practicing and sharing, though, if kids are engaged, it can be hard to get them to stop writing. (Really, I promise!)

I teach a procedure that seamlessly gets kids to stop writing and head back to the author chair for sharing time.

1. During the practice time, I am scouting out good examples of the skill we are practicing. I let a few students know that I'd like them to bring their work with them when we share that day.
2. Use a signal of your choosing for kids to stop writing. This signal means they need to put down their pencils and head back to the author chair.
3. The students who have been chosen for sharing are lined up by the author chair.

The way I practice this procedure is by letting kids know my signal. It can be a bell sound, a phrase, or a clapping sequence. Use whatever works for you. I simply say, "Okay, pencils down." To practice, I have kids start writing their first, middle, and last name. After a few seconds, I say, "Okay, pencils down." No matter how far they've gotten, they must stop writing and put down their pencils and head back to the author chair. I do this again by having them start writing the alphabet. Again, I say, "Okay, pencils down," and they stop on whatever letter they were on.

These may seem silly, but it gets them to understand and remember the signal. They get that it doesn't mean to stop writing after your last thought or sentence. It means stop writing on the letter in the middle of the word they are on. You'll be amazed at how quickly they are ready to share.

02

Purposeful Planning



Some teachers have writing programs that their schools use. If this is the case, you could use some of these ideas and lessons as a supplement to lessons you already teach. You may particularly find the creative writing exercises or poetry lessons engaging. Other teachers do not have a specific writing curriculum and may be creating their own lessons for writing. For my first 23 years of teaching, I had no program or curriculum to use and I actually loved that! I enjoyed coming up with authentic writing experiences and I based my lessons on needs I noticed throughout the year. I saved my lessons to use again and again, tweaking and improving them each year.

Many schools use writing prompts at certain times of the year as benchmark writing assessments for each grade level. The entire grade level uses the same prompt and you are able to discuss how students are doing as a grade level. Depending on your state standards, you will have different genres to focus on for these prompts. When I taught third grade, for example, our standards required us to teach personal narratives, opinion writing, and informational writing. We would set dates for when each one needed to be completed. As a grade level, we would get together to discuss how our students did on their prompts and share lesson ideas to help each other in areas of noted need.

I should note that I don't recommend taking your three to four prompts and teaching only those genres. I've seen some schools do a different genre per quarter. They may do letter-writing for a whole nine-week period! Of course, you want to focus on the specific ingredients needed for a genre you are getting ready to assess. If you are teaching personal narratives, you would want to teach kids how to write a beginning and ending for that type of writing. You would want to teach them how to narrow the focus of their topic and provide interesting details. You wouldn't want them only writing personal narratives for a quarter of the year, though. Be sure to vary the skills and genres you cover throughout the year.

Recipe: Apples to Apples



Notes from the Chef

One way that you can gain even more information from prompts is to use the same prompts for all of your elementary grade levels. Year after year, kindergarten, first grade, second grade, third grade, fourth grade, and fifth grade all would do the same prompt. After assessing these with students, you can save them in a writing folder that gets passed to the next year's teacher.

Besides being able to compare apples to apples each year, seeing each student's writing progress on the same prompt, students get to see their own progress as well. I love that before the school year even started, I had a peek at the writing strengths and needs of my students. It was like having a pre-assessment that they already completed in my hands.

Ingredients

Last year's writing for each student

Resources for the genre you are working on (mentor texts, video clips, articles, etc.)

Writing prompt

Appetizer

Share the prompt you will be working on. For example, maybe you're working on opinion writing and the prompt is "Which is a better pet, a cat or a dog?" This should be the same prompt that your students had last year in the previous grade. Pass out their papers from the year before. If you are teaching third or fourth grade, students will have several examples to see. They normally marvel over how far they have come since kindergarten, when they were just drawing the animal and using a few words!

The point of this exercise is for students and teachers to see the growth of individual students on the same prompts. Sometimes it's harder to see growth when we're using different prompts each year. The writing of the student could be affected by a lack of background knowledge or experience. In this case, we don't know if they're struggling to write or struggling because they just don't know enough about the topic.

Cooking Demonstration and Practice

1. On the first day, the students will just be gathering information about the prompt, planning, and taking notes. You can provide books, articles, and show video clips. When I was working on the dog/cat opinion writing, I was sharing information about things we know about cats and dogs. I had pet care books and articles, videos about dogs and cats, resources from veterinary websites, and we all shared from personal experience, too.
2. During this phase, students are deciding which animal they think makes a better pet. They can choose the same animal they picked last year, or change their mind and pick the other one. The point is that they are writing to the same prompt.
3. On the next day, allow students to write their piece. They can use all of their notes and they are welcome to use the resources in the room. This is what real writers do when they're writing.