

Chapter One

Program Overview

Teaching elementary students to write has always been a challenge. Over the last forty years the education pendulum has swung from teaching basic grammar and sentence structure on one side to not giving them any instruction at all on the other side. Of course, there has also been every method of instruction or non-instruction in between. This pendulum has been back and forth several times, with no one being able to agree on the best approach for writing instruction in not only elementary school, but also middle and high school.

If you have experienced frustration with this daunting task, you are not alone. Many teachers give a writing assignment; the student completes the task and turns in the paper. The teacher grades the paper and then gives it back to the student. Mission accomplished. But actually what has been accomplished? Did the student learn how to write? Will the student remember not to make the same mistakes on the next assignment? Did the student even know what was wrong with the paper? The answer to all these questions is probably *No*.

English teacher, Dawn Burnette, was searching for the “perfect” way to teach writing to her high school students. She researched, experimented, talked with her students, and completely changed the way she thought about writing instruction. As Ms. Burnette states in Chapter One of *Burnette Writing Process*, she developed “a systematic user-friendly program that removed the ceilings for the top students and removed the barriers for the lower ones thanks to two key components: focus and reflection.”

Burnette Writing Process is designed for use in grades six through twelve. Middle and high school teachers and students using the process have had unbelievable success. Elementary teachers have been asking us what they could do to reach this level of success with their students. *Focused Writing: An Elementary Writing Process* is up to the challenge.

The program is divided into three levels; A, B, and C. The “A” writers are basically beginners to the process of writing. The “B” writers have some skills, but have mastered very few and need lots of practice. The “C” writers have mastered more skills, but need to broaden their abilities. Each assignment in the program has been presented at the three levels with increasing difficulty and substance from A to B to C. Each writing assignment consists of the overview, the author and audience, the form of the writing, the procedure, and the suggested focus skills. You and the student can pick from the suggested focus skills and/or add others. The final step in the process is the self-assessment rubrics. You select appropriate focus skills from the list, the student reflects on his/her writing, and then you and the student each score the assignment. The reflection component requires the student to think about what he/she wrote and gives you a chance to understand his/her thought process. The process can be as individualized as necessary.

There are thirty-six different writing assignments included in *Focused Writing: An Elementary Writing Process*. Each assignment contains an A, B, and C level. The assignments cover a wide range of writing genres and are organized with the simpler assignments at the beginning and the more complex towards the end. The first two assignments are for evaluation purposes and should be used first. These assignments will give you an idea into which level you should place each student at the beginning of the year. Assignment one is a timed writing to give you a quick picture of the student’s abilities. Assignment two is also meant to help you get an overall picture of the student’s abilities plus introduce the students to the focus skills. No student reflection is necessary in either assignment one or two. The rest of the writing assignments do not necessarily

have to be used in order. As students progress in their writing through the year, they may be moved into a more advanced level at your discretion. The following chapters will describe the assignments, identify the focus skills, explain the skills, and provide mini-lessons to teach and review each of the focus skills.

Chapter Two

The Writing Assignments

Good writing instruction begins with good writing assignments. Students need to write often; they need to write for a variety of audiences and purposes; and they need to write different types of pieces. The writing assignments for *Focused Writing: An Elementary Writing Process* can be found in Appendix A beginning on page 29. You can give each of the students a copy of their particular writing assignment to keep in a writing folder along with their writing in progress. Each of the writing assignments is reproducible for the students in your classroom.

Each assignment in this program consists of five parts:

- **Assignment Overview:** This part is a basic explanation of the assignment and its purpose. This is titled **Why are you writing?** in level A.
- **Author and Audience:** This section explains the role that the writer will take and who will be reading the writing. This is titled **Who are you? Who will read your writing?** in level A.
- **Form:** This section provides the student with information about the requirements for the writing. This is titled **What are you writing?** in level A.
- **Procedure:** The six steps of writing, prewriting, writing the first draft, revising, editing/proofreading, assessing, and publishing are contained in this section. These steps give the student a map to follow when working on the assignment.
- **Suggested Focus Skills:** This box at the bottom of each assignment page lists suggested skills for the student to work on in the assignment. You and the student can choose one, two, or all of the skills by placing a check next to the chosen ones. There is also a blank line provided in which to add a skill needed by this particular student.

The writing assignments vary in the length of time needed for completion. Some of the assignments in the program may take several days to complete while some require weeks. Allow the students ample time to work on and finish each assignment. Good writing should not be rushed. The first writing assignment is set up so that you can evaluate the writing ability of your students. Assignment two is designed so that you can introduce your students to the Focus Skills and do some further evaluation on your part. Beginning with assignment three, the students will use the six steps writing process and the focus skills. It is up to you to decide if your students should work in level A, B, or C. Do not begin too high. You can always move up to a higher level if their progress warrants it.

Students should follow all the steps in the procedure to ensure that they understand the writing process and can complete the assignment successfully.

- **Prewriting:** This is the thinking and planning step. There are many approaches to this step. This program gives the students opportunities to experience different approaches such as drawing a picture, making a web, creating a list, doing freewriting, or doing various other things. Appendix B contains examples of the graphic organizers used in the prewriting step.

- **Writing the first draft:** Early on you need to get your students into the habit of double spacing their first draft. This gives them space in between each line to make any changes without wearing out an eraser to do the job. This empty line allows the student to cross out, add a caret ^, or make any other needed changes, and still be able to read the words. *Hint: When they are first getting used to the double spacing, have the students put a dot at the beginning of every line they should write on. This is a good reminder for them.*
- **Revising:** Allow students to work on their revisions by themselves. One of the problems that upper level teachers come across is that the students want to be told how to revise and fix their papers. With enough practice and mini-lessons on the various skills, they can learn to pick out their own mistakes, make their own writing better, and become independent writers.
- **Editing/proofreading:** Some students do not think they need to copy over their writing in the editing/proofreading step. “Why do I have to copy it over? Why can’t I just erase and fix the mistakes?” If you expect students to follow through on all of the steps, then copying over their final draft is one of the steps. The final copy should be their best work. Be sure to have them take a final look after copying over the paper. This is a time when careful erasing can be done.
- **Assessing:** This scoring and reflecting step is important. Each student should be able to evaluate his/her own finished work. In the real world, there will be no teacher telling them what is good or bad about the memo they sent out. They need to learn to become accountable for their efforts. This step is difficult for the younger students. At first, most students don’t want to go beyond saying, “I worked really hard” or “I did my best.” But as with anything a person learns to do, the first attempts are difficult and take some practice. As students see their writing improve, they realize that reflecting is a valuable learning tool. The rubric is also a good stepping stone for teacher-student or teacher-parent conferencing about the writing.
- **Publishing:** Student writing can be published in many different ways. Each writing assignment gives a suggestion for publication, but feel free to change or add something to this step. You might want to hang up their writing instead of putting it in a book. You might want to submit it to a children’s magazine. Be flexible with this step, but be sure to do something. All students should know that their writing has value.

Chapter Five

Skill Lessons

We suggest that each of your students have a pocket folder for their writing in progress. This way they can keep up with their draft, assignment page, rubric, and any reference pages that you give them. When you begin a new writing assignment, give them a copy of the assignment page and go over the expectations with your students. Answer any questions they might have about the assignment. Give them a copy of the rubric they will be using. Decide on the focus skills they will be working on for this particular assignment. Have them complete the box at the bottom of the assignment page and then fill in the skills on the rubric. (You might want to do this for the very young writers.) Use one or more of the following skill lessons to teach or review the focus skills.

Lesson B1

Content: Uses content appropriate for type of writing

*Review with the students the four types of paragraphs: expository, narrative, descriptive, and persuasive. Give each student four index cards. Have them write the name of one kind of paragraph on each card. Using Descriptor B1, call out the names of examples of each type of paragraph. Ex: *travel journal, autobiography, editorial, factual report*. Have students hold up the card that tells the type of writing that that example names. Note: Some examples might be more than one type of writing.

Lesson B2

Content: Writes clear and focused sentences

*Put a sentence about a specific topic on the board. Add one word or phrase that does not belong in the sentence. Have students cross out the words or phrases that do not belong. Ex: *Some flying fish can glide as far as three football fields and swim.*

Lesson B3

Content: Writes clear and focused paragraphs

*Give each student a paragraph about a specific topic. Add one sentence to the paragraph that does not fit with that topic. Have students cross out the sentence that does not belong.

*Give one student a paragraph to read aloud to the group. Have the others listen and be able to tell the following about the paragraph: the topic, the topic sentence, any details about the topic, and the concluding sentence.

Lesson B4

Content: Keeps to the subject of the topic

*Put a list of words on the board. Each list should contain words that fit in a particular category plus one that does not fit. Students should first figure out the category to which the words belong and then cross out the word that does not belong with the others. Let them explain why the one word does not belong.

Example: *bird, giraffe, pig, dog, tree, cat* (tree)
glass, cup, bottle, bowl, napkin, jug (napkin)
Florida, Oregon, Montana, Ohio, Canada (Canada)

Writing Assignment #4A

Narrative

Why are you writing? You have met some new friends. You want to tell them about yourself.

Who is the author? Who is the audience? You are writing as yourself. Your audience will be your new friends.

What are you writing? You are to write three sentences that tell about yourself.

Procedure:

Prewriting: Make a character web about yourself. You can tell about your family, hobbies, or pets.

Writing the first draft: Use your web to write three sentences.

Revising: Read over what you have written. Do you need to change anything? Can you make your sentences better? Do you need to rewrite something that is not clear?

Editing/Proofreading: Check over your first draft. Look for any mistakes and fix them now. Did you use correct spelling? Use your best handwriting to copy over your sentences. Check them again to see if you copied everything correctly.

Assessing: Complete the rubric. Think and write about how you completed your writing.

Publishing: Draw a picture of yourself. Tape or staple it to your sentences. Share your sentences with your new friends.

Suggested Focus Skills:

√ your skills

Content: Keeps to the subject of the topic

Conventions: Uses end punctuation correctly

Conventions: Uses capital letters correctly

Format: Double spaces writing

Writing Assignment #4B

Narrative

Assignment Overview: You have just moved into a new school, church, or neighborhood. Your school, church, or neighborhood newspaper has asked you to write between four and six sentences (that's all there is room for in the newspaper) giving information about yourself. This will be a way of introducing yourself to new friends.

Author and Audience: You will be writing as yourself. Your audience will be your new friends and neighbors.

Form: You are to write four sentences telling about yourself. Put as much information as you can in your four sentences.

Procedure:

- Prewriting: Begin by making a character web about yourself.
- Writing the first draft: Use your web to write your four sentences.
- Revising: Read over what you have written. Do you need to change anything? Can you make your sentences better? Do you need to rewrite something that is not clear?
- Editing/Proofreading: Check over your first draft. Look for any mistakes and fix them now. Did you use correct spelling? Use your best handwriting to copy over your sentences. Check them again to see if you copied everything correctly.
- Assessing: Complete the rubric. Reflect and write about how you completed this assignment.
- Publishing: Attach your picture to your final draft. Share your sentences with your classmates and then display your writing in the classroom.

Suggested Focus Skills:

√ your skills

Content: Keeps to the subject of the topic

Style: Uses interesting words

Conventions: Uses capital letters correctly

Conventions: Uses end punctuation correctly

Format: Double spaces writing

Writing Assignment #4C

Narrative

Assignment Overview: You have just moved into a new school, church, or neighborhood. Your school, church, or neighborhood newspaper has asked you to write between four and six sentences (that's all there is room for in the newspaper) giving information about yourself. This will be a way of introducing yourself to new friends.

Author and Audience: You will be writing as a reporter who is writing about you. You should use third person pronouns. Your audience includes your new friends and neighbors.

Form: Your autobiographical sentences should be informative, yet interesting enough to make someone want to get to know you. Please include a photo or drawing of yourself with your final draft.

Procedure:

- Prewriting: Begin by making a character web about yourself.
- Writing the first draft: Use your web to write your sentences.
- Revising: Read over what you have written. Do you need to change anything? Can you make your sentences better? Do you need to rewrite something that is not clear? Look at your focus skills.
- Editing/Proofreading: Check over your first draft. Look for any mistakes and fix them now. Did you use correct spelling? Use your best handwriting to copy over your sentences. Check them again to see if you copied everything correctly.
- Assessing: Complete the rubric. Reflect and write about how you completed this assignment.
- Publishing: Share your sentences with your classmates and then display your writing in the classroom.

Suggested Focus Skills:

- Content: Keeps to the subject of the topic
- Style: Uses personal pronouns correctly
- Style: Uses interesting words
- Conventions: Uses capital letters correctly
- Conventions: Uses end punctuation correctly
- _____

√ your skills

Focused Writing: An Elementary Writing Process Scoring Rubric

Name	Assignment	A	B	C

Skill Levels: 0 = no evidence of skill
 1 = beginning to use skill correctly
 2 = uses skill correctly most of the time
 3 = uses skill correctly all of the time
 4 = uses skill correctly and can explain how to use it

1. Skill: Meets the guidelines for the assignment

Self-assessment: 0 1 2 3 4 Teacher's assessment: 0 1 2 3 4

Reflection: _____

2. Skill:

Self-assessment: 0 1 2 3 4 Teacher's assessment: 0 1 2 3 4

Reflection: _____

3. Skill:

Self-assessment: 0 1 2 3 4 Teacher's assessment: 0 1 2 3 4

Reflection: _____

4. Skill:

Self-assessment: 0 1 2 3 4 Teacher's assessment: 0 1 2 3 4

Reflection: _____

5. Skill:

Self-assessment: 0 1 2 3 4 Teacher's assessment: 0 1 2 3 4

Reflection: _____

Total for Self-assessment: _____ Total for Teacher's Assessment: _____

Comments: