

# [ Changing Lives Sentence by Sentence ]

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Great teachers have the power to change lives. They teach students to navigate the myriad of text types they will encounter, they teach them to clearly articulate their ideas when speaking, and they teach them to write effectively for a variety of contexts. The Common Core State Standards offer unprecedented support for developing an integrated approach to teaching literacy. While the standards are a wonderful resource for offering what students should know and be able to do, literacy teachers play a powerful role in the successful implementation of these standards. The ability to write well is central to lifelong success and the goal of this article is to provide support for how to plan for teaching writing.

When focusing on the Writing Strand standards, it is important to note that the Common Core State Standards (CCSS) specify not only the kinds of writing students will be creating, but also the ways in which students produce their written work. There are also key standards calling for the integration of reading and writing, and a strong intention to use technology for both research and production of writing. In order to effectively implement the content and key instructional shifts, teachers might consider the following ideas as they plan their instructional sequences.

**Use Reading to Teach Writing:** Once a type of writing (Argument, Informative/Explanatory or Narrative) is selected, choose a text to serve as an exemplar for the type of writing students will develop. For example, if students are to write an autobiographical narrative, have them study a published memoir. Use the CCSS Reading Standards to analyze the text by first developing an initial understanding of the text. Then choose an area of reading to focus on with more depth. This same area (e.g. character analysis) can provide focus when developing the autobiographical narrative.

**Use Text Type Features to Focus:** Analyze the text type standard (Argument, Informative/Explanatory or Narrative) to identify features to specifically teach. Once the specific areas of focus are identified, write a prompt and a scoring guide that emphasize those features. These same features then provide the focus for prewriting, writing and revision activities. By repeating the same writing features in the prompt, scoring guide, and throughout the instructional sequence, students are provided with coherence and clarity for what they are expected to write.

**Use Learning Maps to Provide Coherence:** Use a Learning Map (Graphic Organizer) to collect evidence while reading and then use the same Learning Maps a prewriting organizer for writing. For example, have students use Story Map to record evidence about a narrative text and then use the same Story Map to outline the characters, setting, and events that will take place in the student-developed narrative writing.

**Use a Series of Learning Maps to Scaffold Writing:** A series of Learning Maps can be used to narrow and focus the writing. When developing an argument essay, students must identify a claim, develop reasons to support the claim and develop evidence to “prove” the reasons. For example, use “Argument Identifier” to brainstorm several claims and reasons to support them. Use “Argument Developer” to choose only the most viable claim with associated reasons, and to develop evidence to support the reasons.

**Provide Support for Developing the First Draft:** Once the prewriting activities have been successfully developed, the first draft of the essay should essentially write itself. In the example above, the “Argument Developer” drives students to develop a claim and provide three reasons with evidence to support the claim. With these details at their disposal, students can take the completed Learning Map and develop an introduction and conclusion around the claim, and use each reason with its evidence as body paragraphs. The prompt and scoring guide can also be used to support students when developing the first draft.

When students can successfully argue a position, thoughtfully explain an idea, or provide an articulate narrative of an event, they have a powerful ability at their disposal. Teaching students to be successful writers, sentence by sentence, requires careful planning. The time it takes to do this planning is well worth the investment, for it can truly change lives.