



What is Raising Literacy?

Raising Literacy, a newsletter produced by the Florida Department of Education's State Regional Literacy Directors, provides resources and information on a variety of topics, such as the science of reading, evidence-based pedagogy, literacy leadership, the Benchmarks for Excellent Student Thinking (B.E.S.T.) English Language Arts (ELA) Standards and more.

STRATEGY SPOTLIGHT

Producing Mature Readers and Writers by Developing Syntactical Awareness

Understanding both individual words and the relationships between words is key to reading comprehension and writing fluency. Readers and writers must understand how word order and relationships between words produce and/or create meaning. As young readers and writers mature, they must develop an awareness of how words function together for a particular purpose; in other words, develop **syntactical awareness** or familiarity "with the rules of grammar" (Sedita, p. 60).

Writing in response to reading provides students with opportunities to develop syntactical awareness and, ultimately, craft more mature, varied sentences (C.3.1). In turn, writing in response to reading can also improve reading comprehension of increasingly complex text (EE.2.1). **Sentence combining**, which Joan Sedita describes as an "alternative approach to more traditional grammar instruction" (p. 66), allows students to manipulate and rearrange words in order to combine two or more sentences. "Playing" with the building blocks of sentences in this way promotes opportunities to explore how words function in relation to each other.

Sentence combining encourages students to experiment with language, restructure ideas and develop more mature sentences. When designing sentence combining tasks, consider the following:

- **Select** compound and complex sentences from texts students are reading, breaking them into simple sentences for students to combine.
- **Model** sentence combining explicitly for students.
- **Provide** a list of conjunctions and punctuation marks as a scaffold for students as needed.
- **Ask** students the following questions:
 - What did you think about when combining sentences?
 - Which combination sounded best? Why?
 - Which combination seemed the clearest? Why?

Example of Simple and Complex Sentence Combining Tasks

Simple Sentence Combining: Students combine two simple sentences with a conjunction.

- Antarctica is the coldest of the seven continents.
- Antarctica receives very little precipitation.

Combined Sentence: *Antarctica is the coldest of the seven continents **and** receives very little precipitation.*

Complex Sentence Combining: Students combine multiple sentences through a variety of methods.

- Antarctica is the coldest of the seven continents.
- Antarctica receives very little precipitation.
- Antarctica is technically a desert!

Combined Sentence: *Antarctica, the coldest of the seven continents, receives so little precipitation that it is technically a desert!*

To learn more about sentence combining, please see Chapter 6, "Syntax and Sentence Skills," of *The Writing Rope*.

Sedita, J. (2019). *The Writing Rope: A Framework for Explicit Writing Instruction in All Subjects*. Brooks Publishing Company.

DID YOU KNOW



Often, students struggle to expand or elaborate on their thoughts when writing. **Sentence expansion** is a strategy in which students add to a **kernel sentence** – a simple sentence, word or phrase – by responding to one or more question words (who, where, when, what, how, why). This offers students an opportunity to improve their writing (C.1.5). The example below aligns to the poem "Tula ['Books are door-shaped']" from the grade 3 B.E.S.T. ELA booklist.

Kernel Sentence: The girl imagined.

what	stories about heroes
how	gazing at her father's cabinet of books
why	she wasn't allowed to read them



Expanded Sentence: The girl imagined stories about heroes while gazing at her father's cabinet of books because she wasn't allowed to read them.

Adapted from Hochman, Judith C. *Multisensory Teaching of Basic Language Skills*, 3rd Ed.

LITERACY LEADERSHIP TIPS

Tier 1

Core

Explicit

Systematic

Scaffolded

Differentiated

Corrective Feedback

Content-rich

Write in response to reading

Florida's Formula for Reading Success

Daily writing in response to reading is included in Florida's Formula for Reading Success and aligns with the B.E.S.T. ELA Standards. Effective Tier 1 instruction should integrate reading and listening (receptive language) and writing and speaking (expressive language) with corrective feedback to refine students' abilities to both comprehend and produce grade-level text. Literacy Leadership Teams (LLTs) can support environments in which writing in response to reading is integrated meaningfully into literacy instruction.

How Can LLTs Support Meaningful Writing Instruction?

- **Monitor writing frequency:** Check student work samples during walkthroughs to ensure daily writing is occurring. Review student work samples with teachers during collaborative planning and data analysis sessions.
- **Encourage consistency:** Support teacher collaboration to establish common expectations and rubrics for response-to-reading tasks, defining and ensuring quality work (EE.5.1).
- **Writing as engagement:** Embedding daily writing in response to reading with corrective feedback into Tier 1 instruction ensures students actively engage with texts, strengthens comprehension and refines writing skills. Within a lesson or series of lessons, LLTs can monitor how frequently students intentionally engage with content, concepts or skills through short and extended writing tasks.

Adapted from Sedita, J. (2019). *The Writing Rope: A Framework for Explicit Writing Instruction in All Subjects*. Brooks Publishing Company.

FEATURED RESOURCE

[Teaching Elementary Students to Be Effective Writers](#), a practice guide from What Works Clearinghouse, provides four recommendations for improving elementary students' writing. Recommendation 2 highlights the importance of students learning to write for a variety of purposes. These purposes may include "conveying information, making an argument, providing a means for self-reflection, sharing an experience, enhancing understanding of reading, or providing entertainment" (p.12). Below are ways to integrate writing across the instructional day.

PRIMARY GRADES

Teachers can use **quick writes** to integrate writing into content area instruction. **Quick writes** are short, informal writing tasks that can help students remember, organize and process content. Students can communicate their thoughts, make connections and reflect on what they are learning.

This opportunity to write also allows teachers to informally assess students' content-area knowledge and helps students understand that they can write to learn. **Quick writes** provide teachers the opportunity to determine if students are able to apply knowledge of conventions (C.3.1), apply phonics spelling patterns (F.1.3) and integrate academic vocabulary (V.1.1). **Quick writes** not only offer opportunities for students to demonstrate understanding, they also provide valuable data on student literacy performance.

INTERMEDIATE GRADES

Teachers can maximize instructional time by **integrating written responses into the content areas**, such as math. Students can write to explain how they solved a problem or describe the meaning of a chart or graph. A model response would incorporate the appropriate academic vocabulary (V.1.1) for the content.

Writing in response to instruction consolidates students' understanding of content knowledge while providing meaningful, formative insights into student mastery. This integrates writing practice across the entire day, increasing the number of opportunities that students have to compose their own texts while also elevating student thinking processes.