

# Pattern Based Writing: **Beginner's Guide** to Teaching Writing

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The advertisement features a blue background with a white border. At the top, a dark blue banner contains the text 'THE FASTEST, MOST EFFECTIVE WAY TO TEACH WRITING... GUARANTEED!' in white. Below this, the title 'Pattern Based Writing: Quick & Easy Essay' is written in red and black, followed by '- Elementary and Middle School -' in green. The website 'www.PatternBasedWriting.com' is listed in white, with 'Elementary, Middle, Homeschool, Remedial' in smaller white text below it. A central image shows two children writing at a desk, framed by four yellow stars. To the right of the image is a large yellow starburst containing the text 'Simplicity System Symetry Success!' in red. At the bottom, the website 'www.PatternBasedWriting.com' is repeated in white on a red background.

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## Welcome to the *Beginner's Guide to Teaching Writing*

This guide focuses on teaching writing in grades 2-6 and what should be considered remedial writing in grades 7-9. To add some perspective to this, the California Fifth Grade Writing Strategies Standard 1.0 is, "Students write clear, coherent, and focused essays." In other words, fifth graders are supposed to be able to take a position and defend it in a coherent and organized manner.

While it is true that some students meet this standard, it is also true that many don't. I have taught writing across quite a few grades and I have rarely come across a class in any grade that did not need a firm re-teaching of correct paragraph form, along with how to write natural introductions and conclusions.

In case you didn't know, I have a writing curriculum called *Pattern Based Writing: Quick & Easy Essay*. It's a curriculum I developed almost by accident when little time was available and the students' writing was in a state of total chaos. It became extremely clear that the techniques worked – because the students *told me* they worked. They said, "I can't even read what I was writing before!"

Please note that even with my writing program, teachers still need to bring something to the table. Put simply, teachers have to read student writing and give feedback; and unfortunately, there is no simple answer key for a piece of writing. In order to be effective, writing teachers need a foundation to build upon, a framework to work within, and a methodology that gets results. This guide will provide insights to all of these.

After reading this, please go to [www.PatternBasedWriting.com](http://www.PatternBasedWriting.com) and explore what *Pattern Based Writing: Quick & Easy Essay* has to offer. Let's begin!

## Section 1: Seeing the Big Picture

## The Underinflated Balloon

Teaching writing is a bit like squeezing an underinflated balloon. When you squeeze one part of the balloon, it pops out somewhere else. Teaching writing can seem a lot like that. Let's say you teach commas or dialogue, the next thing you know you have commas and dialogue everywhere. You teach students to combine sentences, and soon you have sentences that go on for half a page.

Now you are telling students not to use so many commas. Now you are telling them to use dialogue sparingly. You explain to them that their *long sentences* are in fact run-on sentences. Students are confused. Your students thought commas, dialogue, and long sentences were good. They thought you liked them. They were just trying to make you happy.

There are always two sides to the equation in teaching writing. We must keep both sides in balance. For every ying there is a yang; for every rule there is an exception. Express yourself and be creative, but please don't make any errors.

It can seem that there are opposing and contradicting forces at work when teaching writing. When you affect one side positively, you almost always affect the other side negatively. When that happens, you switch sides and address the other side. In short, you seesaw your way to writing success. Here are just a few aspects of writing instruction that seem at odds with each other:

- ➡ Content vs. Mechanics
- ➡ Product vs. Process
- ➡ Structure vs. Style
- ➡ Creative writing vs. Academic writing
- ➡ Writing knowledge vs. Writing skill
- ➡ Taking risks and growing vs. Writing correctly

In teaching writing, there are many more of these seemingly opposing forces. Actually, it's not that these concepts work against each other; it's just that they seem to work against each other. We have all heard the old proverb, "There is a time and a place for everything." In writing, this is very true. Different techniques work in different situations... and too much of a good thing... is bad.

Context is so important in writing. Providing context is an ongoing process when teaching writing.

## Meeting Your Goals and Objectives

Teachers usually know what they want to achieve with their writing instruction. In short, teachers want their students to love writing and to be fantastic writers! In order to accomplish this they teach many rules and many techniques. This question eventually arises: What have all of these rules and techniques added up to?

Usually, all of that hard work has added up to something. Unfortunately, it usually has not added up to what everyone expected given all of the class time that was used. Instead of all of the rules and techniques adding up to more than the sum of their parts, they have added up to substantially less. When this happens, teachers come to see that *writing is a skill*, and *not just information*. In other words, simply teaching the information connected with good writing, does not add up to good writing.

## What I Hope My Writing Instruction Adds Up To

My main goal in teaching writing is not to create brilliant writers, but to create successful students. It's hard to be a successful student without being a skilled writer. Skilled writers have it easy. Skilled writers get more quality work done faster.

When it comes to teaching writing, what I have just described is not everyone's goal. Without a doubt, I have been shaped and influenced by teaching at-risk students in Title 1 schools. Turning these students into skilled writers, writers who can get their work finished on time, definitely gives them confidence that they can be successful in school.

In short, I want what students learn about writing to add up to more than the sum of their parts. I don't want students to have a bunch of writing *information* or *techniques*; I want students to have *writing skill*. Here is what I hope it adds up to:

- ➔ **Daily writing** – I want there to be pride of authorship in every single piece of writing.
- ➔ **Writing across the curriculum** – A science whiz should be able to communicate that they are a science whiz. They should be able to demonstrate their superior understanding of the content to an *objective grader* who does not know about their aptitude for science. Ideas don't need to be expressed beautifully for this to be achieved, but they do need to be expressed clearly and in an organized manner.
- ➔ **Creativity and style** – Students' writing should look like they enjoy writing. This comes from having confidence in what they are able to do, along with a

willingness to experiment and take risks. Students should be willing to take risks in their writing because writing is fun.

- ➔ **Standardized tests** – Students need to know how to answer the question they have been asked, not the question they *believe* they have been asked. Even though testing can be a stressful time, the basic rules should not fly out the window. There should be a mastery of the basics and an understanding of what is experimental for them. **Students will write clearly and effectively!**

What I describe here is a *foundation* of sorts. Later, you will hear more about this *writing foundation*. You will also hear more about the “*layering on of skills*.” Once students have a solid foundation, you can layer on more writing skills and more writing techniques than you ever dreamed possible. Additionally, they will stick! That’s the point of a foundation!

Frustrated writing teachers think that information is going to create skill. The truth is a lot of writing curriculum spirals information – taking students nowhere. *Pattern Based Writing: Quick & Easy Essay* goes somewhere. It has a purpose.

Here is a quick recipe for student writing success:

1. Stop spiraling writing information that goes nowhere.
2. Build a foundation of skill.
3. Layer more skills on top of that foundation.

*Pattern Based Writing: Quick & Easy Essay* does the first two steps of this recipe. After that, every writing lesson you teach will go somewhere. Every lesson will add to your students’ writing success because your lessons will be layered on top of something that makes sense to both you and your students.

In case you are wondering, layering on means about the same thing as spiraling. The difference is that layering on is built on top of something. The difference is subtle, but it is the difference between a successful application of Piaget’s constructivist learning theory and ending up with high school students who can’t write.

## Bringing Something to the Table

It’s easy to “teach lessons” in writing. However, if you want to improve student writing, you must understand how to tie those lessons into something meaningful.

Teaching math is different from teaching writing. While it’s true that only a skilled, dedicated, and enthusiastic teacher can truly bring math to life for children; it’s also true that almost any teacher can do a very good job of teaching math by simply by following

what is in the math book. If the teacher understands what is in the book and can communicate it clearly – mission accomplished! In other words, math is relatively easy to teach lesson by lesson.

What makes teaching writing different is that a large part of teaching writing involves the interaction between teacher and student. Teachers must provide feedback (and hopefully find ways for their students to get feedback from peers). There is no answer key. Writing can't be taught in a vacuum.

The reality is that writing is taught by human beings. Human beings have opinions and biases. Human beings are fallible. It is quite possible to say exactly the wrong thing to a student about his or her writing and bring about the exact opposite of the desired result.

In one sense, writing teachers are the writing curriculum. They must bring something to the table. In fact, they can't help but to bring something to the table, that is, unless they plan on not reading any student writing.

### Big Picture – Small Picture

🌱 *Habit #2: Start with the end in mind.*

Stephen R. Covey – The Seven Habits of Highly Effective People

Teachers must think on two levels when teaching writing. Teachers must be able to see the big picture and the small picture.

- ▶ **Big picture** – The skill with which our students need to be able to write. Our goals, hopes, and dreams for our students' writing. (Be sure to check out the grade-by-grade anchor papers and scoring guides discussed later.)
- ▶ **Small picture** – The techniques, skills, knowledge, strategies, and writing tools that our students need in order to be able to write effectively and at grade level.

In most subjects, the big picture and small picture are clearly laid out. Teachers simply need to follow the curriculum and supplement as needed. Facts are facts and numbers don't lie; students for the most part are either right or wrong.

Writing is different. Writing is a skill. There is no correct answer key. Put simply, the teacher is the captain, the leader, the judge, and the beacon on the hill. The teacher must see the big picture and lead the way. The teacher must be clear.

Teaching writing is active and interactive. Teachers must have a big picture vision for where they wish to take students, and they will need some writing curriculum to help them along the way. Here are three kinds of writing curriculum:

1. **Information-based, spiraling writing curriculum** – Gives a mish-mash of information, but goes nowhere. The instruction doesn't build to anything. As such, students are left with a mish-mash of strategies that may not fit in with what is required of students in their daily schoolwork or on standardized tests.
2. **Goals based writing curriculum** – Your goal must match what the curriculum promises.
3. **Supplemental** – You mix and match. Each supplemental has a focus, and you are a chef on a mission. Let's face it – every writing teacher *who is looking for results* is a chef of sorts. We all need a few of these supplementals to meet our students' unique needs.

*Pattern Based Writing: Quick & Easy Essay* is a goals-based writing curriculum. I'm a teacher and I want my writing instruction to add up to something. If you teach elementary school or struggling middle school writers, it is quite likely your goals match what *Pattern Based Writing: Quick & Easy Essay* promises.

Note: The end of *Pattern Based Writing* does begin to spiral information and skills. I do this for several reasons. First off, the information is needed in order to provide a complete model for teachers. Secondly, it shows teachers how to continue layering on skills and strategies. *Pattern Based Writing* transitions into being a *foundation* to build upon and a *framework* to work within. When this happens, teaching writing becomes very easy!

So, once again:

- ▶ **Small picture** – Lessons, skills, and information you want your students to learn.
- ▶ **Big picture** – How you want your students to write. What would amazing growth look like?

Have you begun to think about what sort of writing results you are looking for? I hope so. Teachers are often surprised and confused as to why all their little lessons did not add up to more. The lack of a big picture goal often becomes evident when it is most important (*i.e.*, right around testing time).

Now let's look at some popular models for teaching writing.

## **Section 2: Models and Insights for Teaching Writing**

## Teaching Grammar vs. Teaching Writing

The first thing a writing teacher must understand is that teaching writing is different from teaching spelling, punctuation, and grammar (conventions/mechanics). Don't get me wrong, making sure students apply these skills in daily writing **is** a part of teaching writing. (Note: I'm going to use the word "grammar" in what follows. When I do, you can assume I'm also talking about spelling and punctuation.)

I will never forget the year I thought I had found the teaching-writing solution. I spent an inordinate amount of time on all the little (and never-ending) rules of spelling, punctuation, and grammar. It didn't add up to what I thought it would. Not even close!

Many people think the problem with student writing is grammar. That's what I thought it was. These days when I tell people I have a writing program, they almost always respond, "Ohh, can you do something about their grammar?" I tell them, "Well, grammar is probably less of a problem than you think it is. It's probably a writing problem."

What kind of a writing problem? Here are the top two writing problems that cause half of the grammar and mechanics problems:

1. Students don't take any pride in their writing.
2. Students see writing as one long thought.

If grammar were the problem, the problem would be solved, as grammar is what most teachers teach. Basically, "[Grammar Instruction Does Not Improve Student Writing.](#)"

The National Commission on Writing quoted the research below in their important report on teaching writing called, *The Neglected "R": The Need for a Writing Revolution*.

### The research shows:

- "Experiments over the last **50 years** have shown negligible improvements in the quality of student writing as a result of grammar instruction." (Becoming a Nation of Readers, National Institute of Education, 1985.)
- "**Decades of research** (Elly, 1979, Hillocks, 1986, Freedman, 1993, Freedman and Daiute, 2001) have shown that instructional strategies such as isolated skill drills fail to improve student writing."

So, grammar instruction and isolated skill drills don't improve student writing. Decades of research proves this. This is not surprising to me, as the research confirms my

experience. Grammar doesn't stick until you have a place for it to stick and a reason for it to stick.

In short, students need lots of opportunities to apply these **small picture** skills in authentic writing across the curriculum. I had come to this conclusion long before I came across this research. As well, this was also my experience when I learned Spanish as a second language. I did immersion programs in foreign countries; I studied grammar extensively; I immersed myself in the language. However, the grammar really took hold when I began to write authentically and daily in Spanish.

The research shows, workbooks don't work. You can't have students learn to WRITE on a workbook page. Workbook pages work for teaching skills and for reinforcing skills. However, they don't make the skills stick. There is no context; there is no real purpose.

### The Six Traits of Writing

The Six Traits of Writing is an important assessment model designed to guide instruction. Any, and all, pieces of writing can be evaluated using the six traits found in the Six Traits model. The quality of a piece of poetry can be evaluated, as can the quality of a biography. Although, the qualities that make poetry effective are different from the qualities that make a biography effective, both can be evaluated using the Six Traits model. This is big picture thinking.

The Six Traits of Writing model was developed in the 1980s by groups of researchers and teachers in the hopes of improving both writing instruction and the evaluation of student writing. The Six Traits of Writing model describes what good writers do. Like many breakthrough methods of instruction, this model was created by working backwards. The starting point was examining samples of excellent writing and then determining what made them excellent. The outcome of this project was these six common traits that produce good writing.

In one sense, these traits bring balance to teaching writing. You will notice that Conventions are just one of many traits.

### Overview of the Six Traits of Writing

- **Trait 1: Ideas** – The message along with the main theme and details.
- **Trait 2: Organization** – The internal connecting structure.
- **Trait 3: Voice** – The unique expression of common words and ideas.

- ➔ **Trait 4: Word Choice** – Finding the right words to express ideas clearly, concisely, and creatively.
- ➔ **Trait 5: Sentence Fluency** – Connecting strings of sentences with rhythm, flow, and logic.
- ➔ **Trait 6: Conventions** – Grammar, spelling, punctuation, and everything else us nitpickers love to pick over.

Understanding the Six Traits model can be very valuable for teachers. This model is an excellent guide and reference for planning instruction and for evaluating student writing. Everything we teach in writing will fall under at least one of these six traits. In other words, this model puts a name and structure to what we are already teaching.

### The Writing Process and Writer's Workshop

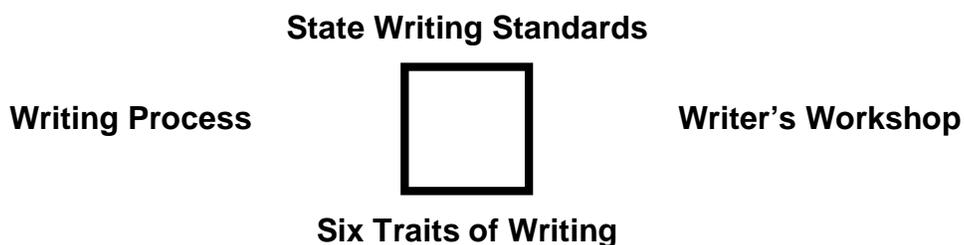
When it comes to teaching writing, it's hard to avoid the Writing Process and Writer's Workshop. Teachers will probably incorporate aspects of both whether they intend to or not.

#### Product vs. Process

The focus of Writer's Workshop is on the writing process. At its heart, Writer's Workshop *is the writing process*. However, don't be fooled into thinking that Writer's Workshop and the writing process are not interested in *product*. The truth is they are both focused on bringing about a better final product. Their goal is to help students understand what good writers do, and to make them good writers. Let's face it, good writers produce good product.

Theories on how one must teach writing can cause great frustration and make teachers feel guilty that they are not teaching writing correctly. One should remember, in the end, students are graded on product. Writer's Workshop and the writing process are designed to lead to good product.

It will help the writing teacher to understand and draw from all of these:



## Overview of Writer's Workshop

Here are the parts of Writer's Workshop:

1. **Mini-lesson** – This is direct instruction and lasts about 5-15 minutes.
2. **Status of the Class** – As students begin work on their individual writing projects, the teacher quickly determines *the status* of each student. How will each student be spending their writing time? What are students working on and at what stage of the writing process are they? This takes about 2-3 minutes.
3. **Writing and Conferencing** – Students write and teachers either write or conference. Teachers can conference with individual students or small groups. Teachers are encourage to spend at least some workshop time actually writing themselves in order to model what authors do. (25- 40 minutes)
4. **Sharing** – There are a variety of ways to share. Author's chair, peer editing, and reading to at least one other student are just a few methods. (5-10 minutes)

So, in Writer's Workshop we give lessons, we have students write, we monitor their writing, we conference with students about their writing, and we have students share their writing. The truth is, it's pretty hard to teach writing and not do these. Another truth is that there is a lot of confusing rhetoric surrounding Writer's Workshop.

When thinking about Writer's Workshop, keep in mind that the word "results" is not a bad word. In short, if something works, it improves student writing. Don't forget that. We don't want to end up with students who can't write, but for "all the right reasons."

## Using the Writing Process in Writer's Workshop

It is important to note that the entire Writer's Workshop process incorporates the entire writing process. Here is a simple version of the writing process outlined for you:

1. Prewriting
2. Drafting
3. Revising
4. Proofreading
5. Publishing

In truth, the writing process is not a straight line. Other models of the writing process exist that more accurately reflect the TRUE writing process. This five-step model is the classic version. It's easy for students to grasp.

## Lessons, Strategies, Tricks, Tips, Tools, and Techniques (The Small Picture)

One thing I like about the Six Traits of Writing model is that it focuses on what all the different kinds, forms, modes, and genres of writing have in common. There are just six traits for all the different types of writing. This helps create a connective approach to teaching writing, as opposed to teaching everything as separate and different.

Students are often taught “*this kind of writing*” and then they are taught “*that kind of writing*.” Students end up believing that all the different kinds of writing live in different worlds, as opposed to simply living in different rooms inside the same house.

The point is that a business letter has a lot in common with a friendly letter. If you start with what they have in common, you can easily layer on what makes them different. What they have in common is a foundation that can be built upon.

## Endless Lists of Skills, Strategies, Techniques, and Rules

Teach writing as a skill, not as a giant list of strategies, rules, and information.

When teaching a new strategy, I like to pull out a giant list of strategies and circle the one we are working on. It adds perspective. “Just because we are working on dialogue does not mean that I want to see dialogue in everything you write. It’s just one piece of a very large puzzle.”

Here is a giant list of writing concepts we teach students. The trick to teaching writing is to teach these concepts in a connected way. We want all these concepts to lead down a path to writing skill.

Poetry, report writing, writing a friendly letter, writing with a purpose, leads, hooks, brainstorming, writing to inform, paragraphs, quick writes, sentence openers, introductions, conclusions, narrative writing, show-don't tell, supporting details, first person narrative, formal language, prewriting, topic sentences, expository writing, transitions, compare and contrast writing, creative writing, journal writing, descriptive writing, outlining, revising, prewriting, writing a summary, staying on topic, writing to explain, research papers, storytelling, citing sources, writing to persuade, editing, rubrics, checklists, peer-editing, proofreading, fantasy writing, essay writing, genres of writing, writing lists, writing short answers, writing a newspaper article, writing a business letter, literary response, writing a critique or review, strong verbs, similes, metaphors, figurative language, using rich and varied vocabulary, sentence variety, titles, dialogue, point of view, thesis statements, evidence, audience, narrowing a topic...

This list could go on and on. Furthermore, we could also create similar lists for:

- **Conventions / Mechanics** – Spelling, punctuation, capitalization, and grammar.
- **Sentences** – The world of sentences is quite large and complex. In fact, some colleges offer entire classes devoted just to the sentence.

Once again, teach writing as a skill, not as a giant list.

### Start with the End in Mind: How to Use State Writing Assessment Resources

Teachers should become familiar with what is expected on state and district writing tests. See if you can grab hold of any rubrics and anchor papers that may be available. Be sure to look up the dates of all the important district and state writing assessments throughout the year. Mark them on your calendar.

Also, grab hold of a variety of student writing samples that have been evaluated using a rubric. When looking at student writing samples, make sure you understand the complete process that went into creating the piece of writing. You may discover that students worked on it for a month and that the teacher was an active participant in the editing process. With enough time and help, anything can be made perfect.

Student writing samples from district and state writing assessments are a great resource for helping to establish goals. It's easy to understand the context in which the pieces of writing were written. Additionally, they show what students are capable of when left to their own devices. In short, they are objective.

### Student Writing Samples and Scoring Commentary

Listed below is a great collection of "Student Writing Samples and Scoring Commentary." The state of Oregon has released these writing samples and commentaries from their standardized tests. They are available for third grade through high school. It's a fantastic collection of student writing and a valuable resource for establishing goals and for determining the current status of your students' writing.

You can read more about how to download them here: [Elementary Writing Samples](#), [Middle School Writing Examples](#).

*Note:* I found out about this collection of student writing samples from a teacher up in Oregon who was having great success with *Pattern Based Writing: Quick & Easy Essay*. This writing curriculum has a purpose and a focus. Happily, its purpose and focus line up with state writing expectations!

## **Section 3: The Status of Student Writing**

## Are You Happy with Your Students' Writing and Writing Progress?

Here's a simple system for getting an objective look at your students' writing. It asks, *what will students do when left to their own devices?* The system is simply called the [Timed Writing System](#). The system serves several purposes; however, a main purpose is as an objective self-monitoring and self-evaluation system for students.

Years back, lost in theory, I determined I needed an objective apples-to-apples method for monitoring growth. I wanted to know if the techniques and strategies I had been taught to use got results. Read the blog post to learn more about the system, and then implement a 25-minute timed writing.

Did you do the 25-minute timed writing with your students? Do you like what you see? If you don't, I urge you to check out the [Pattern Based Writing: Quick & Easy Essay homepage](#). You will save yourself and your students a mountain of frustration. I guarantee it! But whether you do check out the home page or whether you don't, two months from now, do another 25-minute timed writing. Do you like the progress you see? **That's an even more important question than the question above!**

### Let's Face It

I began teaching during a teacher shortage when class sizes were being reduced to 20 students to 1 teacher. I had no teaching experience and no knowledge about teaching. However, the only thing that really confused me was why students could not write a paragraph and would not write in paragraph form. Why didn't anything work when it came to getting my students to write thoughtfully and clearly in their daily class work across the curriculum? It was illogical.

As the years passed, I could see that it had not been my imagination. In general, student writing is illogically bad. How can students do the advanced math that is required of them and then turn around and write like that? It doesn't make sense.

Students' poor writing doesn't make sense to the *College Board* either. In case you are wondering, the College Board is the organization that creates the College Board tests. These tests include the SAT Test and the AP Exams, just to name a few. The College Board became so concerned about student writing that they put together a commission to figure out what was going on: *The National Commission on Writing*. Here is what the *National Commission on Writing* discovered.

## The Writing Crisis

According to the *National Commission on Writing*, there is little to be happy about when it comes to student writing in America. Business leaders are not happy; government employers are not happy; no one is happy with writing in America. In short, writing is The Neglected R! The commission goes as far as to call for a **writing revolution!**

The National Commission on Writing was founded by the College Board in order to, "...focus national attention on the teaching and learning of writing, and respond to the growing concern within the education, business and policymaking communities that, despite much good work taking place in our classrooms, the level of writing in the United States is not what it should be."

The National Commission on Writing has published three reports on the writing crisis:

1. [The Neglected "R": The Need for a Writing Revolution](#)
2. [Writing: A Ticket to Work . . . Or a Ticket Out: A Survey of Business Leaders](#)
3. [Writing: A Powerful Message from State Government](#)

All these reports may be downloaded in PDF format. (Note: it does work to right-click, copy the link from this PDF, and paste it in your browser.)

## Witnessing the Writing Crisis First Hand

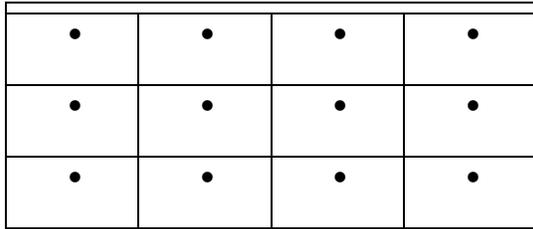
By teaching in my regular position, teaching in my off-track time, and substitute teaching, I have experienced hundreds of classrooms. Far too many students across far too many grades struggle with writing.

Imagine walking into a sixth grade classroom and seeing the students struggling with the exact same math that the third graders just down the street in the same neighborhood have already mastered. Once again, these students would be from the same neighborhood with the same socio-economic background. Wouldn't that be shocking to see – sixth graders who can't do math that third graders can do?

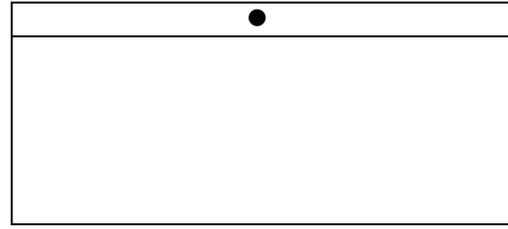
The fact is, I've never seen a classroom full of third graders who could do math better than a classroom full of sixth graders. **However**, I have seen classrooms full of third graders who could write MUCH better than entire classrooms full of sixth graders. The third graders I am talking about had been taught to write using *Pattern Based Writing: Quick & Easy Essay*. While it is true that the situation disappeared after the sixth graders had been taught to write using the *Pattern Based Writing* program, the fact remains, the situation should not be able to exist in the first place.

## What is the Problem? Dressers vs. Chests

If you want children to keep their clothes organized, which do you get them, a dresser or a chest?



*Dresser*



*Chest*

The sixth graders who struggled with writing had a chest for their ideas; the third graders who could write better than the sixth graders had a dresser for their ideas.

Much school time is spent explaining how the things we study are organized. We show students the dresser, but we don't teach them how to create the dresser. We teach students how other people organized information, but not how to organize their own thoughts. This is truly putting the horse before the cart. Teaching students **“how they did it”** is never as effective as teaching students **“how to do it.”**

Put simply, teaching students how to get lots of ideas and how to organize those ideas is not a priority.

It's a near fact that teaching students how others organized information does not transfer over to student writing; however, the reverse does transfer over. In other words, when you teach students to organize their own thoughts, they will have a paradigm shift across the curriculum.

What would the school day be like if the learning was not divided into subjects? What would it be like if the textbooks were not broken down into sections and chapters? What would science be like without organization and classification? What would it be like if students OWNED the skills that made organizing all that information easy?

Unfortunately, most students don't own those skills. But fortunately, it's not that difficult to teach those skills. The key is not to teach students how someone else did it; teach them how to do it. We all want to learn “how to.”

## Previewing Chapters: Seeing the Dresser

I mentioned putting the horse before the cart. Here is a consequence of that. It involves an important learning strategy that delivers just a fraction of its potential benefit.

Previewing chapters before reading is just one way we attempt to help students “see the dresser.” Previewing a chapter before reading is an essential and time-tested strategy for improving reading comprehension. Do students want to preview the chapter? No! Why not? To them... it's a waste of time. They would rather just start reading.

Why does it seem like a waste of time to students? Answer: They don't get it. They don't see what we want them to see. The purpose of previewing a chapter is to understand the organization of the chapter. It creates a “dresser” in which to store the information.

After *Pattern Based Writing: Quick & Easy Essay*, previewing a chapter is a very different experience. We all know there is a reading/writing connection; however, there is also a writing/reading connection.

## Multi-Paragraph Writing

Being skilled at multi-paragraph writing is at the heart of being able to see “the dresser.” Being skilled at multi-paragraph writing involves understanding how all the little parts add up to the big picture main message.

When students understand the big picture in their writing, there is a trickledown effect. This is why many of the grammar problems simply disappear with *Pattern Based Writing*. Thinking in an organized manner trickles down. For example, when a student is writing a sentence that has gone on for what seems like a small paragraph, the student knows something is wrong. “This can't be right.” It's like overfilling a drawer.

A main reason why the writing problem persists year after year is that there is no single teacher, grade level, or writing program that takes the sole responsibility for ensuring the mastery of multi-paragraph essay and report writing.

The usual way that multi-paragraph writing is taught is that a little bit is added here and a little bit is added there. We add a piece of multi-paragraph writing here and we add another part there. It's never put together in a way that students understand. There is an old saying, “**When you try to build a thoroughbred racehorse by committee, you end up with a camel.**”

*Pattern Based Writing: Quick & Easy Essay* takes sole responsibility for ensuring mastery of multi-paragraph writing. It puts all the pieces of the puzzle together in a systematic and simple way. The teacher who takes on the commitment of using the program will end up with students who are far ahead of the pack in both skill and in understanding.

In California, essay writing is a fifth grade skill; it is a fifth grade standard. However, I rarely come across a class in any grade that does not need a firm re-teaching of correct paragraph form along with how to write natural introductions and conclusions.

### The Neglected “R”

The commission is right: writing is The Neglected “R.” What is the reason for this neglect? I have a feeling it has to do with the proliferation of workbooks. Students don't write; they fill in the blanks. As useful as I find workbooks, I still see them as a problem. I like to get the workbook work done FAST. To be clear, workbooks do have their place:

- They keep everyone on track.
- They make sure a variety of skills are taught.
- They keep everyone moving forward.

Workbooks do have their benefits, but they also cause problems. The main problem is that students quickly learn all the tricks that help them to turn the workbook pages into brainless “fill-in-the-blank” work. Students learn how to do the work without thinking. It's not the workbooks fault. Part of human ingenuity is the everlasting quest to find a shortcut. And with workbooks, the system can be beat.

Parkinson's Law states, “Work expands so as to fill the time available for its completion.” The reality is that when writing resumes its proper place in the curriculum, teachers will discover that students were spending way to long on those workbook pages. They will discover that students can complete them faster than they had ever dreamed possible. In short, students need to finish the workbook pages FAST, and then apply the skills they learned in the workbook pages to REAL WRITING.

But wait! Teachers don't want students to write more! Why not? Answer: Have you seen their students' writing?! In the next section, we are going to look at a writing foundation that will have teachers and students alike wanting writing to become a bigger part of the curriculum. It's a foundation built around developing these three skills:

1. Getting ideas.
2. Organizing those ideas.
3. Expressing those ideas quickly and effectively.

## **Section 4: Creating a Writing Foundation — A Foundation That Can Be Built Upon —**

## A Skill-Based Writing Foundation

What is a writing foundation? Well, a foundation of a house is something that is designed to be built upon. In fact, the foundation is what the house is built upon.

A writing foundation is quite similar. Here is a great foundation:

### California Fourth Grade Writing Strategies Standard: Organization and Focus

1.1 Select a focus, an organizational structure, and a point of view based upon purpose, audience, length, and format requirements.

1.2 Create multiple-paragraph compositions:

- a) Provide an introductory paragraph.
- b) Establish and support a central idea with a topic sentence at or near the beginning of the first paragraph.
- c) Include supporting paragraphs with simple facts, details, and explanations.
- d) Conclude with a paragraph that summarizes the points.
- e) Use correct indentation.

1.3 Use traditional structures for conveying information (e.g., chronological order, cause and effect, similarity and difference, posing and answering a question).

If your students were able to accomplish all that, wouldn't teaching writing be easy? Of course, all that must be second nature for them. The skill must be *internalized*.

## The Martial Arts and Writing

The martial arts is one of the few activities in life where the entire system is built upon demanding that students master the lower skills before they are able to move ahead.

Think about that and then ask yourself this question: Have you ever felt that half of your writing instruction was being wasted? Has it seemed that just a fraction of what you teach has been getting through and sticking? If you have felt that way, you are probably correct. It sure seemed that way to me, and I have since found out that I wasn't building upon anything.

Now everything I teach about writing is layered on top of the *Pattern Based Writing: Quick & Easy Essay foundation*. Another way to think of this is that all new material fits inside the *Pattern Based Writing framework*. In short, *Pattern Based Writing* is both a foundation and a framework that makes everything else stick.

## Multiplication and Division Tables – A Foundation

To better clarify what I mean by a foundation, as well as the importance of having a foundation in place, let's look at multiplication and division tables.

Have you ever taught math to students who should have mastered their multiplication and division tables many years before, but hadn't? It's very frustrating and sad to see. One knows the students are going to senselessly struggle with math until they master these basic math facts. There is no way around it. Everything in math is built upon being able to instantly recall these facts, along with being able to see the hidden math connections based on these facts.

(Parents, if your child is in fifth grade or above and doesn't have instant recall of these basic math facts... no TV or video games until they are mastered. You and your child won't regret it!)

Unfortunately, some middle school students still struggle with these basic math facts. In fact, a high school teacher once told me that he had students who struggled with them. Life is unnecessarily hard for these students. These tables are a necessary foundational skill for success in math.

There is a similar necessary foundation in writing. Unfortunately, people believe that foundation is grammar. It's not! And the research makes that clear. The real foundation is largely expressed in that fourth-grade writing standard outlined on the previous page. One could say that this foundation centers on *Ideas* and *Organization*.

## A Writing Foundation – Ideas, Organization, and Two Levels of Beginning, Middle, and Ending

Every year in math we layer on skills and complexity. Each year we add on a few more skills and a little more complexity. It's built into the system.

By layer on, I mean that we add a little new information, while making sure that the old skills below stay solid. This is very much in line with Piaget's constructivist learning theory. In other words, we add on a certain percentage of "new" to what students already "knew." The reason we do this in math is that we all know it's difficult to layer on skills when the foundation is missing.

So, what is **a foundation** when it comes to student writing? I'll can tell you... because my students told me. They told me when they began saying, "I get it! I can't even read what I was writing before!"

☀️ *If you have built castles in the air, your work need not be lost; that is where they should be. Now put the foundations under them.*

Henry David Thoreau - Author (1817 - 1862)

### The "I Get It" Foundation

This foundation is built around two of the Six Traits of Writing:

- ① Ideas and
- ② Organization.

The foundation is about getting ideas, organizing those ideas, and then expressing those ideas in an organized manner. Once students are able to do this quickly and easily, and in a way that makes sense to them, teaching writing gets a whole lot easier.

The National Commission on Teaching Writing states that students need to write more in order to learn to write better. The commission states that while more writing instruction time is necessary, it's equally important that students spend more time **ACTUALLY WRITING**.

Let's face it, students would be happy to write more if teachers would simply let them write those super-long sentences that never end. As well, teachers would have students write more if they could stop those super-long sentences that never end.

*Pattern Based Writing: Quick & Easy Essay* does many different things, but here is one very important outcome. Students internalize two levels of beginning, middle, and ending. They internalize beginning, middle, and ending in their paragraphs, and also for the whole composition (*i.e.*, essays, reports, and stories). Student must internalize how these two levels interact creating a single, complete message.

### Why This Foundation and Framework Works: Time

**TIME**. In *The Neglected "R": The Need for a Writing Revolution*, the commission outlined recommendations to improve writing. Time was a major issue. Everything involved with teaching writing takes time. It takes class time and it takes teacher time. The only way we are going to improve student writing in a time-efficient manner is to

have students write more across the curriculum. Teachers need to learn how to kill two birds with one stone.

Once again, why aren't students writing more across the curriculum? Answer: Have you seen their students' writing?

The fact is, poor writing creates a vicious circle. Students can't write well, so teachers assign grammar instruction and have students do isolated skill drills (workbooks). Both of these are what decades of research have shown do not work.

The commission's recommendations regarding **TIME** were:

- ☞ The amount of time students spend writing should be at least doubled. (They recommend 60-90 minutes per day.)
- ☞ Writing should be assigned across the curriculum.

The commission also made a distinction between the different kinds of time involved in writing instruction. The commission made a distinction between:

- ☞ Instructional time
- ☞ Actual time spent writing

The difference between these two aspects of time is important. Effective writing instruction must balance these two types of time. Most writing programs don't and/or can't achieve this balance. **Highly structured writing programs** and **spiraling writing programs** devote the majority of time to instruction. **Writer's Workshop** devotes the majority of time to writing.

The reality is that it must be the teachers who bring the proper balance to their own writing instruction. Why? Because the proper balance can only be achieved by having students write across the curriculum. *Pattern Based Writing: Quick & Easy Essay* can help. It gets everyone on the same page, and at a bare minimum, it delivers to the teacher writing that he or she can work with and build upon. It creates the foundation under those castles in the air. And it does it fast!

The commission's concern about time in teaching writing is only matched by my own. Notice the title of the writing curriculum and of my teaching-writing blog:

1. Pattern Based Writing: Quick & Easy Essay
2. Teaching Writing Fast and Effectively! (blog)

Over the years, I had come to see time as a main roadblock to student writing success. The National Commission on Teaching Writing agrees. What the commission says, and what I came to believe long ago, is that the majority of writing and writing instruction should come from within the curriculum, and across the curriculum.

That simply cannot be accomplished without a foundation that makes it possible; not just a foundation for students to build upon, but also a foundation that teachers can build upon. That's what *Pattern Based Writing: Quick & Easy Essay* does. It creates the foundation where students can write thoughtfully and with meaning across the curriculum. When students can do that, teaching writing becomes easy.

### Making Grammar Instruction and Isolated Skill Drills Work

We try to make school *authentic*; however, I don't know that school is ever really *authentic*. Additionally, teachers can get pretty far off track attempting to make everything *authentic*. As such, workbooks and isolated skill drills are useful.

Here is a three-step plan for making workbooks and isolated skill drills **work**:

1. Accomplish the workbook work fast. Understand that you will be working with the skills more across the curriculum.
2. Connect the skills to the curriculum. Find examples of what was taught in the curriculum. Have students find examples of what they learned in the curriculum.
3. Across the curriculum, hold students responsible for the writing skills they have been taught. Use checklists and rubrics. Occasionally, modify these checklists and rubrics to reflect the new learning and to match individual assignments.

These three steps may simply sound like good teaching to you. They are. However, they have a heightened effectiveness when used to layer on skills to a writing foundation of *ideas* and *organization*.

Let's take a closer look at the foundation of *ideas* and *organization* in writing.

### A Foundation and Framework: Ideas and Organization

Paul B. Diederich was a pioneer of Six Traits writing. His traits were a bit different from the current Six Traits of Writing; however, his traits did include both Organization and Ideas. In fact, for Diederich Organization and Ideas were the most important traits and they received greater weight.

## Organization: The Hardest and Most Important Trait

Middle school success comes easier and is more likely if students arrive with a *firm mastery* of the organizational structure of good writing. Middle school students are expected to write across the curriculum. They show their teachers what they have learned through their writing. Poor middle-school writers discover that it's difficult to receive fair grades when their good ideas are lost in a rambling mess.

Few would disagree with the fact that reading beautiful prose is more enjoyable than reading bland, uninspired prose. However, in the content areas across the curriculum, students get credit for showing what they know, not for writing beautifully. In other words, good ideas presented in an organized format get high marks.

John Truby, a fantastic screenwriting teacher goes to great lengths explaining how important organization (structure) is in the real world:

👉 *...90% of scripts are turned down because of structure. Also, 80% of novels are turned down because of structure. Structure is not just the important problem, it is the key problem.*

John Truby – Screenwriter, screenwriting teacher, director

Not only is organization one of the most important traits, but it is also one of the hardest traits for students to master. I have come across the Six Traits quote below many times over the years. Even though I am not quite sure who the “K-12 Student Writers Across America” are, my experience teaching writing has me agreeing with them. I should say that I did agree with them, but then I discovered a number of breakthrough patterns that are now found in *Pattern Based Writing: Quick & Easy Essay*.

👉 **Organization is the hardest trait.**  
K-12 Student Writers Across America

## Organizational Skills are Important in Writing, as Well as Across the Curriculum!

I'm not obsessed with organization. I'm not. I'm interested in organization only as far as its usefulness; however, organization is very useful. In fact, in most endeavors in life it is difficult to be successful and disorganized. A certain minimum level of organization

seems to go hand in hand with success in almost everything. With the majority of students, if you improve their organizational skills, you will improve their likelihood of success in school.

I keep students pretty organized across the board; however, I have not found any form of organization to be as effective in bringing about overall student success as bringing organization to their writing.

The reality is that many, many students don't really understand what they have written when they read it back to themselves. That's one reason so many students don't like to proofread. They can read the *words*, but compared to the books they read, their own writing is confusing. Change this and it becomes a major paradigm shift for them. This becomes the first step towards students taking real pride in their work!

### Disorganized Boys

The *New York Times* published an article by Alan Finder in January 2008 entitled, "Giving Disorganized Boys the Tools for Success." The article addressed the educational achievement gap that is growing between boys and girls. These days it's girls who are having more success in school. The major premise of the article is that the lack of organizational skills may be holding boys back.

The article quotes Judith Kleinfeld, a psychology professor at the University of Alaska, as saying, "The guys just don't seem to develop the skills that involve organization as early." The article then goes on to explain how certain \$100 per hour tutors are getting these boys organized.

But before you go out and spend \$100 per hour on an organization tutor, be sure to implement "The Student Notebook Organizational System" that I have included in the bonus section. Also, be sure to check out the [Pattern Based Writing homepage](#). While it's true that the writing program improves the organization of student writing, it accomplishes much more than this. *Pattern Based Writing: Quick & Easy Essay* teaches *thinking* in an organized way. It adds a visual component to language.

Do you happen to teach any boys who are a bit disorganized and don't like to write?

### Mass Idea Generation: Another Important Trait from the Six Traits of Writing

Along with organization, Ideas are the other trait that Paul B. Diederich felt deserved greater weight.

## IDEAS

💡 *The way to get good ideas is to get lots of ideas, and throw the bad ones away.*  
Dr. Linus Pauling – Scientist (1901-1994)

💡 *Ideas are like rabbits. You get a couple and learn how to handle them, and pretty soon you have a dozen.*  
John Steinbeck - Author (1902 - 1968)

Good prewriting skills lead to good ideas. If students believe that the first idea that pops into their head is a good idea, it's unlikely they will become effective writers or take great pride in their writing. Students need to discover how the first ideas that pop into their heads are just the tip of the idea iceberg.

The truth of the matter is that *no prewriting equals freewriting*; and freewriting is actually a form of prewriting. Freewriting is not an acceptable first draft!

Mass idea generation through prewriting makes this "tip of the idea iceberg" thinking a habit. Students must come to see that they are always choosing from an unlimited number of ideas. With so many ideas to choose from, some will be good ideas and others will not. Just because an idea pops into the mind does not mean that it is good enough to end up on a final paper.

The prewriting system used in *Pattern Based Writing* gets students get in the habit of generating at least 80 unique ideas over a range of different main ideas. They are able to create all of these ideas in just 5-10 minutes.

### Here are Eight Qualities of an Excellent Prewriting System:

1. Quick, useful, repeatable, and practical.
2. Improves students' writing. (I've seen prewriting systems that actually make children write worse!)
3. A skill students can use and will use in order to get started writing; as well as when they are stuck in their writing. (If the prewriting system is too complicated, students won't use it. The prewriting system needs to be easily accessible so that students will naturally use it when they are stuck.)
4. Will not distract children or prevent children from starting the **real writing**. The real writing is the part that people will read and on which students will be graded.

## Pattern Based Writing: Beginner's Guide to Teaching Writing

(Some prewriting systems can be like an art project and prevent students from getting started on the real writing. They are fun and interesting, but not useful for everyday assignments.)

5. Provides an opportunity for mass idea generation. (Having more ideas to choose from means better ideas are written down on the finished paper.)
6. There is a natural and logical way for students to connect their prewriting to the actual writing. (There is an art to connecting prewriting to the actual writing. This art needs to be built into the prewriting system.)
7. Helps students learn how to see **both** the “big picture” and the “fine details” of their subject or story.
8. Student created. If the teacher has to *pass it out*, it is not practical, and not likely to be allowed in most testing situations. Furthermore, students will not develop the self-reliance and independence for organizing their own writing.

The *Pattern Based Writing: Quick & Easy Essay* writing program does all this and more! Students grumble about prewriting because their prewriting does not improve their writing. The *Pattern Based Writing* prewriting system will.

## **Section 5: Elementary and Middle School Writing: Standardized Tests, Essays, and More**

## What Kind of Writing Do Elementary and Middle School Students Do in School?

### Here Are Five Common Types of Writing that Students do in School:

1. **Essay** – From the author's personal point of view.
2. **Report** – Based on research.
3. **Fiction story** – A story from the imagination.
4. **Short answer** – Usually gives an answer to a specific question; a short answer can be anywhere from one word to possibly a couple of paragraphs.
5. **Poetry** – Artistic use of language.

Most every piece of student writing can be classified as one of these five types of writing. That being said, there are also many more types of writing, kinds of writing, and modes of writing. In fact, writing can be looked at through many different lenses, with many different purposes.

### Writing Assessments

Writing assessments require a deeper understanding of the types of writing. When there is a rubric attached to a writing assignment, students can do excellent writing and still miss the mark.

Many new teachers are caught off guard when they discover that their district has periodic writing assessments or that their state has a writing assessment. These are not highly advertised; they just sort of pop up. After all, if students were going to be tested on something, you would think there would be some form of curriculum in the classroom related to that assessment. This often is not the case when it comes to writing.

What kind of writing will be on the test? Later, I will provide resources for teachers to find out. Sometimes teachers know exactly what type of writing will be on the test; other times they don't. I assure you, it's no fun being caught off guard.

### Two Kinds of Writing Assessments

Your state may have a writing assessment and your district may have a writing assessment. Here is a brief overview:

1. **State writing assessment** – States can't afford to assess writing at every single grade level. Writing assessments are expensive to grade. As such, most states have assessments for 4<sup>th</sup> and 7<sup>th</sup> grade or 5<sup>th</sup> and 8<sup>th</sup> grade. They also have either an 11<sup>th</sup> grade writing assessment or an exit/graduation writing assessment.

2. **District periodic writing assessment** – Since states don't assess writing at every grade level, your district may have periodic writing assessments in order to fill in the gaps. These assessments are often 2-4 times per year. The prompts are quite similar to state writing assessment prompts. These writing assessments are often given in every grade level and they will likely be teacher graded.

**Released writing prompts** – Most states have released writing prompts available on the internet. Everyone should get familiar with their state's released writing prompts from the standardized testing. You may want to check out released writing prompts from other states as well. Here are some of the [Best Collections of Released Writing Prompts](#) I have come across.

### **Modes of Writing – Descriptions, Definitions, and Sample Writing Prompts**

Most state writing prompts fall into one of these modes of writing. I include a sample writing prompt for each mode to illustrate what can be expected at test time. I use a comparison of Oregon and California to illustrate several points. You may want to check how your state classifies these modes of writing.

- **Narrative** – Narratives ask students to tell a realistic story (narrative) or an imaginative story (narrative). Oregon's narrative prompts are all realistic. California uses both realistic and imaginative narrative prompts. **Realistic Narrative Prompt:** Everyone needs help sometimes. Tell about a time when you helped someone or someone helped you.
- **Imaginative** (Also a narrative) – Oregon's imaginative prompts are really what California (and most other states) consider a narrative. Remember, students may be asked to write a realistic story (narrative) or an imaginative story (narrative). An imaginative narrative prompt looks something like this. **Imaginative Narrative Prompt:** Imagine you are walking down the hall at your school and you hear a strange sound coming from the teachers' lounge. You peak in and see a strange animal wearing the same exact clothes your teacher was wearing. The animal is sitting down and drinking a cup of coffee. Write about what happens that day.
- **Expository** – A key word found in expository is "expose." *Expose* means to make visible, to make known, or to reveal. Many describe expository writing simply as writing to explain. However, it is more than just explaining. Here is my equation for expository writing: "Explain + Inform = Expository." Nearly all of the released expository writing prompts from state testing have aspects of both explain and inform. **Expository Prompt:** People own many different kinds of interesting pets. Tell about a pet you would like to own and explain why.

- **Persuasive** – I consider persuasive writing to be expository writing with an agenda. All of the explanations and information, all of the evidence, is designed to persuade. In other words, the equation would be “Explain + Inform + Motive/Agenda = Persuasive.” As a rule, students are taught expository writing before they are taught persuasive writing, and I like to build upon what students already know. Here is one of Oregon’s sixth grade released writing prompts. Can you see how we explain and inform in order to persuade? (At least, this is what I build upon.) **Persuasive Prompt:** People tell us that we need exercise to stay healthy. Write a paper to convince your reader to join you in an activity that will be fun as well as healthy.
- **Response to Literature** – Students are often required to read a passage and respond to what they have read. The prompts for this form of writing almost always have a persuasive nature about them. **Response to Literature Prompt:** Based on the story *A Boy in the Wild*, how can the reader tell that the main character has changed over the course of the story? Use details from the story to support your answer.
- **Summarize** – Students are often required to read a passage and summarize it. Students must read the passage and determine what the essential main ideas are, what the relevant and important details are, and what the unimportant, yet interesting, filler details are. Students include only the big picture ideas and leave out the filler details. **Summarize Prompt:** Read the article “How Turkeys Learned to Gobble.” Write a summary of what you have read.

Important Note: Most state writing assessments fall under the category of essay. You may be asking, *but what’s an essay?*

### What Exactly is an Essay?

Teachers often use the term “stories” when talking about children’s writing. This is especially true in the lower grades. Many, and possibly most, of these stories are in reality *personal narratives*. And many, and possibly most, of these personal narratives should be considered essays.

The term essay can be confusing for both teachers and students. What exactly is an essay? By what grade should students be expected to write an essay? And how exactly does one go about teaching essay writing? The truth is that most of what students write in both elementary and middle school should be considered an essay.

Aldous Huxley, a famous essayist, said, "The essay is a literary device for saying almost everything about almost anything." That's quite a vague, yet accurate description. It seems that anytime a person expresses an opinion in writing, and then defends (or supports) that opinion in writing, they have written an essay.

Essay writing is a little easier to understand when you see what it has in common with other types of student writing, in particular **reports** and **stories**.

- ▶ **Essay** – I went to the museum this weekend. Going to the museum is quite interesting and a great deal of fun.
- ▶ **Report** – I went to the museum this weekend and had a great time. I saw statues.
- ▶ **Story** – The giant monster had quite an adventure over the weekend. He went to the museum.

The first one would be considered an essay because it expresses an opinion. The second one seems like the author is simply going to report the facts. That makes it an informational report. The third one would be a fiction story... obviously.

All three of these should be considered *narratives*, with the essay and report being *personal narratives*. In short, a narrative is almost always an essay or story; however, the example of the "Report" above shows that writing (and the classification of writing) is a creative endeavor full of blending of styles and genres.

### There are MANY Different Kinds of Essays

**Here are just a few:** Narrative essay, personal narrative essay, cause and effect essay, descriptive essay, compare and contrast essay, argumentative essay, definition essay, five-paragraph essay, expository essay, evaluation essay, persuasive essay.

**A general guideline for the term essay is this:**

- ❖ **An essay** is written from the author's personal point of view.
- ❖ **An essay** discusses, explores, describes, or analyzes one subject or topic.
- ❖ **An essay** is a multi-paragraph piece of writing.
- ❖ **An essay** expresses an opinion and then defends and/or supports that opinion.

### Is an Essay a Story And Is a Story an Essay?

There are many confusing areas in the classification of different types of writing. Let's take a quick look at this perplexing question. After you have read this section, you may

wish to review the earlier section, where the narrative and imaginative modes of writing were discussed.

- ❖ **Personal Narrative Essay** – A narrative story from the author's point of view based on the author's personal experience.
- ❖ **Fiction Story** – A narrative story that comes from the author's imagination.

These are both *stories*. One is a true story, and one comes from the imagination. Though these are both stories, they are not both essays. Notice that the "Fiction Story" is not an essay.

It's quite clear that ***Pattern Based Writing: Quick & Easy Essay*** does teach essay writing. However, when looking at the Aldous Huxley definition of what an essay is, I think most teachers find that the program **greatly improves** all elementary and middle school writing, including both stories and reports.

### **Writing Expectations: When Should Essay Writing be Taught and by What Grade Should it Be Mastered?**

The California Fourth Grade Writing Strategies Standard 1.2: Organization and Focus is to, "Create multiple-paragraph compositions."

The California Fifth Grade Writing Strategies Standard 1.0 is, "Students write clear, coherent, and focused essays." It's important to note that fifth grade is the first time the term "essay" is used. In a sense, it is a shift from children's writing to academic writing.

Are these standards being met? Check out the video in the box below. The box below has a link to a blog post that contains a video on writing a five-paragraph essay.

#### **[Mastering Essay Writing in Elementary School](#)**

(Note: It does work to right-click and copy the link from this PDF and put it in your browser.)

What's interesting about this video is that it is from Ashworth University and is designed for high school students. It's an excellent video on the five-paragraph essay; the teacher is very clear and concise.

As you watch it, imagine an entire class of third graders watching this video and saying, "Yes, we know all that and can do all that. We learned that last month. We can organize and write one of those five-paragraph essays in less than 30-minutes."

The third graders I am talking about are from the inner city and their teacher had become ill early in the year. This began a long string of substitute teachers. I came in at the end of their school year and took them from unorganized sentences to excellent five-paragraph essays in just 37 days.

As the video shows, five-paragraph essays are easy to explain. In fact, so are paragraphs and paragraph form. Explaining how to write well is easy! The hard part is making organized, well-thought-out writing a part of students' natural writing process. Students need to internalize multi-paragraph writing. It needs to become natural for them. The natural writers I taught in 3<sup>rd</sup> grade had; the struggling writers I encountered in 6<sup>th</sup> grade hadn't. Most students are going to be confused about writing until they master this aspect of writing.

*Pattern Based Writing: Quick & Easy Essay* solves the multi-paragraph essay problem! Whether your students are in elementary school or middle school, you can revolutionize their writing quickly and easily. This should not be an issue in high school.

### **Here Are Eleven Common Signs that Students Have Not Mastered Multi-Paragraph Essay Writing:**

- Students fail to answer the essay question or don't follow the directions. They are off topic.
- Students' writing demonstrates that they don't understand what proper introductions or conclusions are.
- Students believe *paragraph form* means you simply start a new paragraph every 3-5 sentences.
- Students repeat ideas or paragraphs. The more they write, the more they repeat.
- Students' prewriting turns into an *art project*. Their prewriting *prevents* them from finishing the assignment, and sometimes from even starting the assignment.
- Students write whatever pops into their minds. The more they write, the more they ramble.
- Students focus on many, many tiny details that go on and on whenever they are writing more than a paragraph or two.
- Students find it difficult to connect their prewriting to their writing.

## Pattern Based Writing: Beginner's Guide to Teaching Writing

- Students use inconsistent form within an essay. (Sometimes a paragraph is about one main idea; sometimes it is about many.)
- Students use inconsistent structure from essay to essay. (Sometimes they write correctly; sometimes they don't.)
- Students don't have a system for getting their work started or for getting their work finished.

In the next section, we will look at what confuses these students. What don't they understand?

## **Section 6: Why Teaching Writing is Hard AND What Students Don't Get About Writing**

## Why is Writing Hard to Teach? Answer: Students Just Don't Get It.

Why do students continue to make the same mistakes after they have been reminded a thousand times?

An *easy out* for teachers is thinking that their students are just being lazy or that their students are not natural writers. I have come to realize that this is not the case. I realized this when I first started coming up with the patterns in *Pattern Based Writing* and all of a sudden my entire class started saying, "I can't even read what I was writing before."

It's true that students had said those wonderful words from time to time over the years, but I never had an entire class saying the same thing all at the same time. Additionally, students had never said anything even close to that within a month or two of beginning to teach them to write.

When this happened, I realized that students simply didn't "get it." In this section, we are going to look at why years and years of rules and exercises don't always add up to real understanding or skill. As I have talked about before, teachers need to make the writing instruction "add up to something." Here are a few tricky areas that make the adding up part a bit difficult.

## Why Students Don't Get It: The Art of Writing

Writing is an art. Students only need to open up a book to find plenty that contradicts what you are teaching them. Here is just one example. This example comes from the famous author E.B. White. You probably know E.B. White as the author of the wonderful children's book *Charlotte's Web*.

However, you may not know that he is also the co-author of a very adult book, *The Elements of Style*. *The Elements of Style* is an extremely famous book on writing and grammar. Wikipedia says, "It is one of the best-known and most influential prescriptive treatments of English grammar and usage, and often is required reading in U.S. high school and university composition classes."

So, here is an example sentence from a famous children's author and a famous grammarian. Please tell me... how do you explain this sentence to students?

A bird doesn't have to go to a supermarket and buy a dozen eggs and a pound of butter and two rolls of paper towels and a TV dinner and a can of Ajax and a can

of tomato juice and a pound and a half of ground round steak and a can of sliced peaches and two quarts of fat-free milk and a bottle of stuffed olives.

This sentence is from *The Trumpet of the Swan*, and I found it on the very first page I opened up to. In other words, I am sure Mr. E. B. White has plenty more of these fine examples which send a very mixed message to young students.

Hold on, I am not saying that Mr. White's sentence is wrong. I am saying I have witnessed students who put Mr. White *to shame* and have kept up such a sentence for nearly half a page. Unfortunately, no one thought it was grammatically correct or artistic.

William Shakespeare was no better. Mr. Shakespeare is a well-known and nearly infamous writing rebel. It is rumored he wrote however he wished to write, breaking writing conventions and inventing words at will; surely no model for our aspiring authors.

In short, writing is an art, and this confuses students. Additionally, teaching students to write correctly without squashing the art confuses teachers. In case you are wondering, Mr. E. B. White's sentence is an example of polysyndeton. It seems to me that many, many "grammar errors" can be explained away as figures of speech or rhetorical devices when you are "in the know." Reading history's best writers confuses students!

### Why Students Don't Get It: The Skill of Writing

Writing is a skill. Even though most teachers understand this, the skill of writing is often taught as information. Actually, most teachers do understand that writing is supposed to be taught as a skill. In fact, that is one reason why writing is so neglected. Many teachers simply don't know how to teach writing as *a skill*.

The reality is that teaching children to write actually has a lot in common with teaching children to play a sport. We all know that in order to become good at a sport, one must develop the skills. Developing skill is a combination of getting information and then practicing with a purpose.

So how do teachers develop writing skill in students? Let's take a lesson from a physical education professor. While getting my teaching credential, the professor of the "How to Teach Physical Education" course drilled this maxim into the brains of future teachers: **You teach P.E. with maximum activity for maximum students.**

It seems to me that this is the exact same maxim behind Writer's Workshop. In fact, the one thing that Writer's Workshop theory really gets right is that students learn to write by

writing. Writer's Workshop requires the teacher to be organized and have excellent student-proof systems in place. These systems are needed because the workload and the responsibility for producing work is placed on students. Students spend the majority of Writer's Workshop involved in writing: **maximum writing for maximum students**.

### Maximum Activity for Maximum Students in Teaching Basketball

If you have a class of 32 students, you will not be able to teach them to play basketball if you only have one or two basketballs.

What's odd is that I was taught to teach basketball without ANY basketballs. Yes, you teach students to play basketball without any basketballs. Whenever you teach a basketball skill, students should have multiple "dry-runs" before they ever touch the ball. Every single student practices the skill at the same time – without a ball. Maximum activity for maximum students.

After practicing with zero basketballs, then you need 6-8 basketballs, and a bunch of those orange cones.

The instruction time (teacher talk) nearly evaporates when teaching basketball correctly. Every student is active almost all the time. When you see students practicing without a ball, you know someone is either very serious or just plain nuts. I assure you, it is serious instruction based on maximum activity for maximum students.

I've taught numerous classes to play basketball – FAST. People see the class and say, "Wow! They're really playing the game!" (Yes, I had a great P.E. professor!)

### Maximum Activity for Maximum Students in Teaching Writing

It's true that teaching writing is different from teaching basketball; however, the mindset of maximum activity for maximum students works. Once again, that's the part of Writer's Workshop that really works.

At the opposite end of the spectrum is another common way to teach writing. It's called "maximum activity for the teacher." The teacher reads the paper, gives the feedback, and gives the grade. That's a hard row to hoe. Remember, the National Commission on Writing makes a distinction between instruction time and actual time spent writing. Students need to write a lot and it's difficult for teachers to keep up with the amount of writing students need to do.

Teachers need to find ways to place the responsibility and the accountability back on students. Rubrics and checklists are a great way to do this. Unfortunately, the reality of rubrics and checklists is that they are easier to use and more effective once students have had a lot of instruction and are already writing well. Basically, they are a great way to hold students accountable for what they have been taught, but not for what they don't understand. To be honest, rubrics and checklists do come with their own sets of problems, and teachers must learn to plug all the loopholes.

This next common sense idea is not rocket science: Students must read more of their writing aloud to more people. Teachers don't even need to explain to students what they hope this will accomplish. Human nature takes over. When students know they are going to read what they are writing to at least one other person, there is a paradigm shift. Pride sets in. Additionally, there are many more benefits to reading what one has written aloud. In short, we want more students reading more writing aloud to more people. This includes daily work and short answer. All writing is important.

*Author's Chair* is not maximum activity for maximum students. It has many other benefits and it does have its place; however, the primary activity is focused on just one student. One can create more action and interaction by having many small groups where every student gets their chance at the "Authors' Chairs." (Notice the plural possessive.) Once you get the hang of it, it's easy to move in and out of these "Authors' Forums" fast. Students get to experience multiple papers up close, touch them, interact with them, and make specific comments and corrections.

There are many more ways to make writing more active for more students. It's a state of mind and it can take on a life of its own. Many students don't like the "flowery talk" associated with writing, so don't talk about it. Do it. I'm sure some will disagree, but I say that most people feel that the greatest reward for writing well is personal satisfaction. I try not to get in the way of that. It's nice when students care about their writing as much or more than you do.

In both sports and in writing, ***maximum activity for maximum students*** creates skill. However, there is also a hidden side to skill that we are also working on. That hidden side of skill is called *intuition*. Writing is an art, and students need to develop a certain amount of this *artistic intuition* – or good judgment.

### Why Students Don't Get It: Intuition in Writing

Writing is a combination of skill and art. In order to develop this artistic skill students must take risks in their writing. There is no single correct answer.

When students struggle in math, one can usually see the lack of lower level skills. One can determine what is missing. However, with writing, it is possible for students to have many wonderful *worksheet skills*, yet not be able to put it all together. They can't "see the forest through the trees."

Developing this skill of putting it all together takes study, practice, and risk-taking. When students combine these, they will develop an *intuition* for what works.

As students practice writing, they begin to see the patterns of success and failure within their practice. Since there is no one right answer, we can only call that *intuition*. At least that's my take on it. It's that thing that "natural writers" know, yet can't explain. It's why the Beatles became "The Beatles!"

I'm going to leave it at that; however, bestselling author Malcolm Gladwell wrote a wonderful book that covers all of this in great depth: *Blink: The Power of Thinking Without Thinking*. It's a very interesting read!

### Art, Skill, and Intuition: What This Means for Teaching Writing

I can't say that I thought much about art, skill, and intuition on my journey to creating *Pattern Based Writing: Quick & Easy Essay*. However, on the journey I discovered this:

- Simply having students write a lot didn't work.
- Having students do tons of workbook pages didn't work.
- Telling students what they had done wrong didn't work.

It's true they worked better than nothing at all, but they did not work as well as one would hope. Natural writers progressed slowly and struggling writers never made the shift to "I get it!"

Once again, I will use the analogy of sports and athletes. Athletes have always received fair credit for their *athletic skill*. However, in recent years athletes have begun to receive credit for their *athletic intelligence*. People have come to accept that good athletes are smart at what they do. Athletes are beginning to get credit for their ability to see what others can't. Athletes who have played a particular sport for a long time simply *get it*. They see how it all fits together; as such, they are able to react before events have even taken place.

This is quite similar to what effective writers do. They see how it all fits together. While it is true that writers don't react to events, they do anticipate the effect their words will

have on their readers. Writers develop an intuition as to what works and what does not work. All students develop a certain amount of this intuition through reading; however, most students, like most athletes, need to actively and repeatedly participate in the activity in order to develop it. In other words, if you want to get to Carnegie Hall, you must practice, practice, practice!

It comes down to this: In order to develop the skill of writing, students need to spend time writing across the curriculum and teachers need to find ways to take the workload off themselves, while placing accountability and responsibility on students. This creates the right environment for ~~teaching writing~~ students learning to write.

### Boundaries: A Safe Area to Play Within

Unfortunately, letting students write any which way they want across the curriculum does not help much. Students need boundaries and expectations that help create a framework to work within; however, that framework must also allow for freedom.

Additionally, teachers need to let students “own their writing.” When teachers take responsibility for student writing, it’s taking ownership of student writing. Worse yet, it can be a lot of work for the teacher with moderate payoff.

*Pattern Based Writing: Quick & Easy Essay IS* this proper foundation and framework within which to work. It is the fence around the playground that allows freedom to explore. It creates the opportunity for **maximum activity for maximum students**. It creates the environment of, “I know what good writing looks like. You know what good writing looks like. You know I know... and I know you know. Now let’s write!”

### Giving Feedback: Black, White, and Gray Areas

This falls under the heading of “Why Teaching Writing is Hard.” Giving feedback and evaluating writing is tricky. Do your students agree with your feedback? Do they thank you? I’m sure some do, but struggling, frustrated, reluctant writers rarely do. They don’t seem to get what you are saying. Your feedback just points out all the gray areas. The truth is that most struggling writers like how they write. That’s how they want to write. If it wasn’t for all the negative feedback they receive on their writing, they might like writing.

Here is a partial solution. I have a blog post called “[Teaching Children to Write FAST Using the Timed Writing System](#).” (I mentioned this earlier and you may have already read the post and had your students do the timed writing.) It outlines a timed writing

system I use. However, the real intent of the “Timed Writing System” will be discussed in a future blog post. That post will be called “**Self-Evaluation and Self-Monitoring of Student Writing Using the Timed Writing System.**”

### The Timed Writing System – Removing the Gray

The Timed Writing System came about because I needed an objective way to look at student writing. Additionally, I needed an objective way to monitor growth. Basically, I needed to bring some objectivity to teaching writing. When it came to students' writing, it always seemed as if they were not convinced that I was being consistent with them. I assure you I was; the problem was that there was not enough concreteness for students to grab hold of. It was all conceptual. Teaching writing always reminded me of the Dale Carnegie quote, “A person convinced against their will is of the same opinion still.” Students were not convinced.

The Timed Writing System was a very successful step forward in placing the responsibility of learning to write well squarely on students. Students who made great progress in their writing were happy. Students who did not make progress in their writing were forced to accept responsibility for their lack of progress. This nearly always inspired great motivation. When everyone else is making objective progress, it's embarrassing not to. Deep in our heart, we all know... everyone can make **progress**.

Before *Pattern Based Writing* my students' progress was always **steady** and **consistent**. Over the course of a year, the progress was substantial and admirable. It was a very accurate representation of the gradual, consistent progress that can be achieved with good writing instruction **and a lot of hard work!**

I usually keep the Timed Writing System displayed on the bulletin board. The system was so successful that my principal once suggested (or requested) that I put it back up when I had taken it down and was maintaining the timed writings in a portfolio, as opposed to being displayed.

As mentioned, the progress was steady and consistent, and substantial and admirable. That sounds pretty good. But I would not have put pen to paper to build a writing program centered on those results. These were the results I was determined to get rid of. I wanted more. I wanted students to jump for joy saying, “I get it! I finally get it! You were right, Mr. Barger. My writing was a mess. I don't even know what I was doing. Thank you for setting me straight!”

## **Section 7: Breaking Through to Writing Success**

## Breakthrough: I Finally Get It

The quest, yes, the quest, that led up to creating *Pattern Based Writing: Quick & Easy Essay* began out of confusion. Why didn't anything work when it came to getting students to write thoughtfully and clearly in their daily work across the curriculum?

Have you ever found yourself making something unnecessarily complex and then wondered why you hadn't kept things simple? I know I have. Good teaching is making something simple instead of making it complex.

I was given an opportunity to make things very simple. I entered a situation with young writers and we had very little time. One more thing – their writing was a mess! OUT-OF-CONTROL! What could be done? This was a situation where one thinks, "I don't even know where to begin."

What happened was I took over a third grade class for the final 37 days of their school year. It was my off-track vacation time and this class was without a teacher. Their teacher had become sick early in the year, which began a long string of substitute teachers (at least fifty). By the time I arrived, chaos ruled. It looked to me like the whole school year had been lost.

Because I had just 37 days to get them up to speed, I committed to focusing only on pattern and practice. I stopped the explanations. What could be simpler? We brainstormed and wrote many paragraphs – across the curriculum. Maximum writing (and reading what they had written aloud) for maximum students!

I kept it simple. We would read a chapter in the science or social studies book and then together we would quickly brainstorm ideas for a paragraph. After that, each student would write a paragraph. As such, within a week or two most students could easily brainstorm and write a paragraph. After another week or two, most students could brainstorm and write three separate paragraphs.

Unfortunately, good paragraphs alone never solve a writing problem. Paragraphs by themselves have little value in real writing. Students need to internalize how paragraphs fit together within the context of multi-paragraph writing, along with how they are all connected to the introduction and conclusion.

## Stringing Paragraphs Together

Putting the focus on pattern and practice had worked so well, I was beginning to wonder if we could string the paragraphs together. Making the jump to multi-paragraph writing had always been a point where minds would start to spin – uncontrollably.

In the past, this stage had always involved tons of conceptual teacher talk and a lot of “No. Not like that. Like this.” We didn’t have the time for that. Additionally, I had never been fully satisfied with the results. In short, I knew I had to get creative if we were going to make the jump to multi-paragraph writing.

## New Ideas

Innovations in one field almost always come from another field. Innovations come from combining things that don’t belong together. Likewise, many breakthroughs are simply stumbled upon quite by accident.

I was please and surprised, and then just pleased, when I found this posted on a popular homeschool forum:

“A kind lady on this board put me on the trail of a writing program that I downloaded last night and I think it is revolutionary - I finally 'get' it.”

The only thing revolutionary about the ideas are the way the concepts are explained – or should I say, not explained. Don’t forget – time was not on my side. As such, the ideas did not come from longwinded English composition books. In fact, the ideas were designed to cut out the longwinded, conceptual, abstract explanations found in those books. So, how was I able to avoid those explanations? It all came down to pattern and connection.

Without going into detail, in my spare time, for fun, I have studied about patterns in the stock market and advanced language patterns found in NLP. In that class, when time was against me, and with young students, it had me thinking different. “No explanations! I don’t have the time and they don’t work!”

Well, in the stock market there is a pattern called the “The A, B, C Pattern.” It occurred to me that if we had three paragraphs, so it made sense to call the paragraphs A, B, and C. There’s nothing revolutionary in that. But that was just the starting point. I built on that. We did an “A, B, C Brainstorm” and after that we used an “A, B, C Sentence” to tie them all together.

The first time I demonstrated how it all fit together, half the class said, “Huh?” and the other half said, “Ohh, yeah, I get it.” **Imagine explaining how to write a five-paragraph essay to third graders and having half the class immediately say, “Ohh, yeah, I get it.”**

Actually, there was no reason for the students not to get it. It was all connected. We do more complicated things during math time every single day, even in third grade.

On the very next timed writing students began proclaiming, “I can’t even read what I was writing before!” To put it mildly, I was shocked to hear students happily expressing those sentiments. Before it seemed the best I could get would be a few students *begrudgingly* admitting that their writing had improved so much that they couldn’t read what they had written before.

In those final 37 days of the school year, I was able to get this class of third graders writing better than any class I had ever taught before. The results literally brought tears to the principal’s eyes when she saw the before and after writing samples (from the objective Timed Writing System).

When I discovered the patterns in *Pattern Based Writing: Quick & Easy Essay*, I realized that many students simply just had not *got it*. They were not being stubborn or lazy. *They just didn’t get it!*

### Do Teachers Get It?

As I said, I was please and surprised, and then just pleased, when I found this posted on a popular homeschool forum:

“A kind lady on this board put me on the trail of a writing program that I downloaded last night and I think it is revolutionary - I finally 'get' it.”

The surprise diminished because I remembered how I used to teach writing. The instruction spiraled nowhere and was guided by too much esoteric Writer’s Workshop rhetoric. I would look at writing curriculum and grammar books and could not see where it was all headed. That’s all changed. Now I can look at any writing curriculum, writing strategy, writing lesson, or writing technique and immediately know how it fits in with my students’ current understanding of writing. ***We are building on top of a foundation and working within a framework.***

Now there is a growing list of these "I get it" comments on the *Pattern Based Writing* website. There is no other way to explain it other than "I get it." And if you have students who struggle with writing, they don't get it.

**Here are two more "I Get It!" comments from the *Pattern Based Writing* website:**

I am a homeschooling mother of five. I have been at this for 15 years and the process of teaching writing has eluded me for all of these years. I have used just about every curriculum known to the homeschooling community, (\_\_\_\_, \_\_\_\_\_, \_\_\_\_\_, ect. [names omitted]), but I just didn't get it. I was so frustrated. I didn't understand how to teach these materials.

Finding *Pattern Based Writing* was like finding the one piece of the puzzle that makes all these others work. I just wish I had found your program first. It would have saved many dollars and many more tears.

***Denise W. – Homeschool mom - Colorado Springs, Colorado***

I totally "get" (as my students would say) this program. I was describing it to a colleague a little while ago as, "the basics made clearer." I have taught many of these ideas, but not as an organized structure. Five-paragraph essays just make sense, but I had no formal way of getting that idea to be part of their natural writing process. I love this.

***Mary Vallejo - 7th grade teacher - Rosamond, CA***

Does *Pattern Based Writing: Quick & Easy Essay* solve all problems related to writing? No. It's a single program designed to get specific results – FAST. What's important here is that all students and all teachers will be able to build on those results – easily. That's a great feeling! I think what most teachers really want most is to know how to teach writing. The *Pattern Based Writing* foundation and framework makes that happen.

What *Pattern Based Writing* focuses on is important in all writing across the curriculum. It's important on state writing assessments and it's important in state writing standards.

**Important State Writing Standards Explained in Easy English:**

It is impossible to escape multi-paragraph writing in state standards. Here is a list of elementary and middle school writing standards explained in easy English.

What grade do you teach? If you teach grades 3-6 or struggling middle school writers, your students need to internalize what's inside *Pattern Based Writing*. Someday soon they will need to be producing these results:

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- Write stories that have a beginning, middle, and ending, and which contain details creating and supporting the setting, character development, and plot.
- Write an interpretation or explanation of an informational text using evidence from the text that supports the interpretation or explanation.
- Write formal business letters to professional audiences such as businesses, newspapers, or government leaders.
- Write multi-paragraph essays and reports that contain easy to follow organization, topic development, effective use of detail, and a variety of sentence structures.
- Student writing develops a central idea. Their writing demonstrates knowledge of their audience and their purpose.
- Students successfully utilize all the stages of the writing process: prewriting, drafting, revising, and editing successive versions.
- Students successfully write multi-paragraph compositions that have an introductory paragraph, establish and support a main idea, contain supporting paragraphs that develop the main idea, and conclude with a paragraph that summarizes what was written.
- Use appropriate structures for communicating information such as compare and contrast, cause and effect, asking and answering a question, and chronological order.
- Students write expository, narrative, persuasive, and descriptive compositions of between 500 and 1000 words.
- Students create narrative compositions that establish and develop a plot or situation. They describe the setting and present an ending.
- Students create multiple-paragraph expository compositions that establish a topic and develop it with important ideas and events. They provide details and transitions linking paragraphs and ideas. The composition contains a concluding paragraph that summarizes important ideas and details.
- Students write narratives that include sensory details and concrete language which develop the plot and characters.

No matter how it is expressed, organized and focused writing is always important!  
*Pattern Based Writing: Quick & Easy Essay* will help students meet every one of these state writing standards.

## **Section 8: Special Bonus Section – The Student Notebook Organizational System**

## Special Bonus Section: The Student Notebook Organizational System

You have read quite a bit about how important organization in writing is. I thought I would share a system I use to get students organized. It's called "The Student Notebook Organizational System." It's quite simple, but it's very effective. I have seen MANY students using this system YEARS after I taught them! This kind of organization may last a lifetime.

The most important aspect of the system is that it takes into account the assortment of notes home and returning slips. As well, it makes the distinction between work in progress and work that has been completed (and which should be removed from the notebook).

Improving a student's organizational skills is one of the surest ways of having a lasting effect on a student's life. This is especially true with students who are struggling. Here is a system that has impressed administrators and helped change the lives of students.

### The Student Notebook Organizational System: Supplies Needed

- ❖ **1 Three-ring notebook**
- ❖ **6 Pee-chee style folders** (The kind that has a *pocket* on each side. Google "Pee-chee" if you are not sure.)
- ❖ **1 pencil bag** that can fit on the rings of the notebook. (Some notebooks have them built-in; that also works.)
- ❖ **Pencil sharpener** (Covered and that won't leak. Place it in a plastic baggie if needed.)
- ❖ **3 Pencils** (Minimum)
- ❖ **1 Eraser** (Minimum)

### The Student Notebook Organizational System: How to Label the Folders

Use white labels as opposed to writing directly on the folders. This creates consistency and makes it easier to read. For an entire class, you can create and print these labels on your computer. (It's a little work figuring out how to print labels on your computer, but it's well worth it if you plan on using the system for at least a few years.)

The labels below are grouped into *PAIRS* as each folder has two pockets. Be sure to include the *NUMBERS* on the label, but do not include the notes located in parentheses.

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These days many folders have the holes already punched in them. If not, the holes need to be punched. Once you have labeled the folders and you have holes, place them on the rings along with the pencil bag.

### Label Them:

**1. Writing paper** (This is their paper supply. Either the teacher keeps it filled or students do. This solves the problem of having to pass out paper during class time, as well as dealing with messy edges from paper being ripped out of notebooks.)

**2. Homework, Returned Slips, Notes Home** (All those important papers? You know exactly where they are!)

**3. Reading Program**

**4. Reading Program**

**5. Writer's Workshop** (including *Pattern Based Writing: Quick & Easy Essay!*)

**6. Writer's Workshop** (including *Pattern Based Writing: Quick & Easy Essay!*)

**7. Math**

**8. Math**

**9. Science**

**10. Social Studies**

**11. Other** (Includes all subjects and papers which don't fit in the other folders.)

**12. It's Mine** (Includes corrected papers, completed work, and stuff that is "theirs." At home, students remove all these papers daily or weekly. When I tell students "It's yours," they put a little "X" up in the corner of the paper.)

Note: You may want to name your folders differently in order to meet your own needs. Also, if you like the system, you may want to stock up on the folders when they have them on sale for \$.10. (It will be handy to have some in the class for replacements etc.)

Please visit [www.PatternBasedWriting.com](http://www.PatternBasedWriting.com) and find out how *Pattern Based Writing: Quick & Easy Essay* can create a foundation and a framework for bringing about true writing success.

**Teach writing THEIR way!**

Sincerely,

*Paul Barger*

[www.PatternBasedWriting.com](http://www.PatternBasedWriting.com)

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**Wishing you Total Writing Success!**