

Guiding K-3 Writers to Independence: The New Essentials

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A Study Guide

The purpose of this study guide is to support learning across time about the teaching of writing in elementary classrooms. It builds on the Suggestions for Professional Development, a short section that appears at the end of every chapter in the book. Each session is planned for about 1 ½ to 2 hours professional development and is designed for the use of staff developers, literacy coaches, or peer study groups. In all, 15 sessions are presented in a logical order, with each session building on the other. Depending on the needs of your group, however, you may want to change the sequence and select those that meet your needs.

For example, you can vary the use of this guide based on the experience and knowledge level of your group. The content of the first chapters describing writing workshop may already be very familiar to members of your learning group and you can either skim them or read them outside your sessions. On the other hand, teachers who have less experience in implementing writing workshop may want to spend some time on them in connection with setting up support systems and routines in their classrooms.

Another consideration is the grade levels in which your group is interested. This guide includes all chapters and assumes a cross-grade level group. We believe that while thinking about the writing process, it is helpful to look across a longer period of development. For example, children in grade four who have had very little experience in writing may produce the kinds of drafts that we would expect of younger children and will need teacher support to move forward. But you may have different grade level configurations: primary teachers (K-2); intermediate teachers (3-6); grade level groups (preschool to grade 6 or 7); literacy coaches for primary or intermediate grades. In this case, you will want to select chapters and sessions from the guide that will best fit your group.

A key element of this sequence of professional development sessions is the systematic examination of student writing over time. Teachers will be asked to identify 5 or 6 “typical” students that reflect the range of learners in their classrooms and sample their writing periodically. You may want to provide a special folder for each participant to keep their student writing samples so they have them handy for particular sessions. Looking at student growth over time provides the opportunity to see the impact of instructional changes and link the theory of the chapters to the practice of each classroom.

With the overarching purpose of increasing the quality of student writing, this professional development sequence has the following objectives—*participants will*:

1. Become familiar with the routines and management of a writing program and learn how to get started.
2. Understand a writing program has many paths to writing progress.
3. Understand how oral language is a foundation for writing and a support for the expansion of children’s language abilities.
4. Understand and learn how to use the powerful connections between reading and writing: how writing can extend reading comprehension and how reading can help children learn about the writer’s craft.
5. Learn how to overcome barriers to better writing such as assessing student problems and working with struggling or reluctant writers.

6. Learn practical ways to help students with the conventions (including handwriting) and craft of writing.
7. Learn about the important process of helping children live as writers by observing the world and becoming part of a community of writers.
8. Try out some specific suggestions for building bridges between school and home.
9. Use Appendix materials as tools to support their work.

SESSION 1: INTRODUCTION TO WRITING WORKSHOP

Materials:

- *Guiding Writers to Independence (GWI)*

Activities:

- Have participants “jig-saw” read Chapters 1 and 2. (If you are working with grade level groups, select the chapter of greatest interest.) Divide the chapter into segments that can be read within about 15 minutes. Participants read silently for 15 minutes and then take turns sharing the information they gained.
- Working in grade level groups or pairs, ask participants to make a list of “things to do” to get ready to implement writing workshop. Emphasize organization of materials—the better materials are organized and the more knowledge children have of the routines, the more successful writing workshop will be.
- If participants already have materials in place, they can also plan a series of minilessons to teach children routines such as: (1) finding materials and putting them away; (2) using a writing workshop folder; (3) using a think book or writer’s notebook (for Grades 2-4); and, (4) writing name and date on their papers.
- If your school has a teacher experienced in writing workshop, tour his/her room to look at the ways materials are organized.
- End the session with a selection of children’s literature appropriate to the grade levels of interest. Invite teachers to talk about how this text could be used as a mentor text for writing workshop minilessons by studying and discussing the writer’s craft.

For the next session:

- Have each participant bring a book that they have read aloud to their students since the first session. Or, they can bring a favorite story that they plan to read aloud to their classes.
- Assign Chapter 3 as a reading for the next session. You may want teachers to read the sections of Chapter 3 that apply to the grade level of interest (K, 1, 2). Third or fourth grade teachers should read the section about Grade 2.

SESSION 2: BUILDING A LANGUAGE FOUNDATION FOR WRITING WORKSHOP

Materials:

- *Guiding Writers to Independence (GWI)*

- Writer talks
- Several examples of children’s literature, appropriate to the grade levels of interest

Activities:

- Begin by demonstrating several “writer talks.”ⁱ These very short talks help children understand something about the way writers work. You can easily find information about authors of children’s books on the Internet. Just one or two interesting items will help children know authors as people.
- Read a work of children’s literature to the group (possibly one by an author you have talked about). Have participants talk about the potential of the text as a resource for writing workshop. Examine the questions:
 - Would this make a good mentor text? Why or why not?
 - For what type of writer (emergent, early, or transitional) would this text work best? Why or why not? [If you have *The Continuum of Literacy Learning, K-2* by Pinnell and Fountas, this volume may help in deciding the appropriateness of the text for different grade levels.]
- Participants can share the books that they brought to the workshop and talk about their potential as mentor texts.
- Then, discuss Chapter 3 and make a plan for implementing interactive read aloud before the next session, with the explicit goal of creating a set of quality books that are read aloud, discussed, and then used as mentor texts.

For the next session:

- Ask participants to bring writing samples from about 5 or 6 typical students in their classrooms. Drafts can be a story, personal narrative, or informational piece. They could also bring a sample of the student’s *writing about reading*. (If participants are unfamiliar with the process of writing about reading, wait until after the discussion of Chapter 8--Session 9 to bring in these samples.) Note: these samples should be saved for Session 12 to compare with work gathered before sessions 8 and 11 from the same students.
- Ask them to also bring their observations from the interactive read aloud they do before session 3, as well as more books that they have read aloud or plan to read aloud.
- Assign Chapter 9 as a reading to prepare for the next session.

SESSION 3: SETTING GOALS FOR WRITING WORKSHOP

Materials:

- *Guiding Writers to Independence (GWI)*
- Writing samples [Save or make copies of these writing samples to use in a later session.]
 - Writing about Reading Samples
 - Writing Process Samples (stories or informational pieces)

Activities:

- Participants come to the session with writing samples from about 5 or 6 typical students in their classrooms. It can be a draft of a story, personal narrative, or informational piece. They may also bring a sample of the student's *writing about reading*.
- Discuss Chapter 9 with the goal of planning minilessons that will help students notice aspects of children's literature that will help them in their writing. (Keep in mind that for kindergarten and early first grade children, the children's literature books may also be used as the basis for interactive writing).
- Next, in pairs or small groups, examine the writing sample brought to the session. [If they have *The Continuum of Literacy Learning, K-2*, they can use it as a resource.] Use the following questions to guide the discussion of students' writing:
 - What strengths are students showing in their writing?
 - What are they demonstrating that they know about craft, conventions, and the writing process?
 - What do they need to know next about writing in terms of craft, conventions, and the writing process?
- Based on the analysis of student work and the characteristics of the children's literature texts, help participants to design several minilessons that they will use to support their students as writers.

For the next session:

- Ask participants to come prepared to share their organizational plans for writing workshop.
- Assign Chapter 5 in preparation for the session.

SESSION 4: EXPLORING COMMUNITY WRITING

Materials:

- *Guiding Writers to Independence (GWI)*
- Plans for implementing writing workshop
- Collection of folk tales appropriate to the grade level.

Activities:

- Begin this session by sharing the plans participants have made about implementing writing workshop in their classrooms. Share ideas about what has gone well and brainstorm ways to solve issues that have come up.

- Next, introduce the concept of “community writing” and discuss the relationships between interactive writing, shared writing, and writing workshop.
- For young children, interactive writing is a good way to get the writing process going. In Chapter 5, you have an extended example that can serve as a model. Using Figure 5-5 (page 66), help participants to explore the idea of levels of support in writing.
- Examine Figure 5-6, Essential Elements of Interactive Writing, on page 67, and then read and discuss the example, *Tacky in Trouble*. Discuss the ways that the children’s experiences writing about Tacky support them as writers in a range of contexts.
- Next, have participants look at the collection of folktales you have selected and prepare a multi-day plan to use one book as a foundation for interactive and shared writing.
- Be sure to look at Appendix E, Children’s Books Supporting Community Writing, to think about texts that support community writing. Brainstorm ways that collections of books can be available for teachers to use.

For the next session:

- Assign Chapter 10 to be read in preparation for the next session.
- Ask each teacher to bring examples of community writing to share and discuss.

SESSION 5: LOOKING CLOSER AT THE WRITER’S CRAFT

Materials:

- *Guiding Writers to Independence (GWI)*
- Collection of folk tales appropriate to the grade level.

Activities

- Begin this session with participants sharing their examples of community writing. (You may want to use the following questions to guide discussion.)
 - What evidence was there that children were using the text as a resource for writing?
 - What new learning took place over the series of lessons?
 - What do children need to learn next?
- Next, start a list of the ways that children can learn about the writers’ craft through examining texts and the role of oral language to support learning. Working with a partner, ask each person

to describe a memory of a personal experience. Then, take a few minutes for each person to write their personal narratives.

- Working with the same partner, ask each to read their narratives and then compare them to the oral storytelling. As a group, discuss the role of oral storytelling as a support for writing personal narratives. What are the implications for teaching and learning? What are the ways that oral storytelling can be part of writing instruction?
- Next, give participants copies of the same children’s literature book (fiction or biography). (Or, put them in small groups and give the group a book.) The book should have several characters, a problem or conflict, and resolution. Try to pick a book that will have meaning for adults. (You can check Appendix A of *Guiding K-3 Writers to Independence* for suggestions.) In groups or pairs, have participants read the text and mark (with sticky notes) some things they would like to talk about. Ask them to discuss the meaning of the story and what it makes them think about. Then, analyze the text and list the responses on chart paper:
 - What is the story structure (beginning, episodes, ending)?
 - What is the problem/conflict in the story?
 - How is the problem resolved?
 - What is the character like? Does the dialogue help the reader understand the characters? (If applicable.)
 - How does the author help you understand the characters and their actions?
- Ask participants to return to their personal narratives and look for the same kinds of elements. Since the personal narratives will be short, they may find only a few. But, they can then discuss how their own narratives might be expanded.
- Discuss Chapter 10 using Figure 10-2 and 10-3 to talk about how writers can use fiction texts as mentors for writing their own stories.

For the next session:

- Read Chapter 4 of GWI.
- Continue daily interactive read aloud to build a foundation of mentor texts. Bring 3 or 4 favorites to the next session.
- Implement procedural minilessons to get the routines of writer’s workshop established. (Refer to Giacobbe article, Chapter 16 in *Word Matters: Teaching Phonics and Spelling in the Reading Writing Classroom*ⁱⁱ, Chapter X of *Teaching for Comprehending and Fluency, K-8: Thinking, Talking, and Writing about Reading*ⁱⁱⁱ, or *Extending Our Reach: Teaching for Comprehension in Reading, Grades K-2*^{iv} if you need more help with the “nuts and bolts” of writing workshop.)

SESSION 6: THE ROLE OF ORAL LANGUAGE IN SUPPORTING YOUNG WRITERS

Materials:

- *Guiding Writers to Independence (GWI)*
- Collection of picture books for each grade level. (Participants can bring some of the favorites that they plan to read during the year. You can also work with the librarian to provide a rich collection. Also, you can supplement the collection with books from the public library. A goal to work toward is a common collection of picture books that are available to all teachers across grade levels. As funds are available, consider building this collection for interactive read aloud.)

Activities:

- Begin the session by looking at page 49 of Chapter 4 to study the numbered list in the first column. Read the list and think about the implications of each point for teaching and learning during interactive read aloud and writing workshop.
- Next, go to Figure 4-1 on page 50 and discuss the benefits of interactive read aloud. Emphasize the important role of conversation in constructing meaning.
- Then, examine the picture books they have brought to the session. (If you have access to *The Continuum of Literacy Learning, K-2* or *3-8*,ⁱⁱ they can consult the list of text characteristics for interactive read aloud at each grade level.) Which books offer rich opportunities for discussion as described on pages 49-50?
- Begin to plan a core curriculum for interactive read aloud at each grade level by selecting and sequencing about 20 books per grade. (This plan still leaves plenty of room for individual teacher choice but will give children a backbone of common texts as they move to the next grade.) Teachers can build into the selection:
 - Books for author study.
 - A variety of genres—traditional tales, realistic fiction, simple animal fantasy.
 - Books connected by topic to expand content knowledge.
 - Books connected by theme.
 - Sequence—from less complex to more complex.

For the next session:

- Continue daily interactive reading aloud with conversation.
- Continue daily writing workshop minilessons.
- Assign Chapter 6 to read in preparation for the next session.

SESSION 7: HELPING STUDENTS FIND TOPICS FOR WRITING WORKSHOP

Materials

- *Guiding Writers to Independence (GWI)*
- Writers' Notebooks (supply a simple blank notebook, which may be handmade, or ask each participant to bring a notebook)

Activities

- Start by read *Momma, Where Are You From?* by Marie Bradby (New York: Orchard Books, 2000) or any other book in which the narrator talks about a home town, city, or neighborhood.
- Using the writer's notebook, ask participants to make a quick sketch of their own neighborhood or of a place they remember strongly.
- Then, they make lists of memories connected to the place. They can write words, phrases, or sentences. They should make notes quickly and not worry about conventions.
- In partners or triads, have them share their sketches and lists of memories. They can draw stars of two or three of the ideas and choose one of them to expand into a short write.
- Ask everyone to write for about half an hour. At the end of the time, ask participants to share topics, phrases, sentences, or the whole piece with the group.
- Then, discuss Chapter 6, by looking at the examples at different grade levels and using the summary chart in Figure 6-9, page 93.
- Participants can discuss how they can implement the ideas in the chapter at their various grade levels. (For example, younger children might draw and label pictures before writing. Second and third graders might begin to use a Think Bookⁱⁱⁱ or Writers' Notebook.^{iv})
- Reflect on new learning from this experience. What minilessons can be planned to support young writers as they write their personal narratives?

For the Next Session

- Ask participants to bring writing samples from the 5 or 6 "typical" students that reflect the minilessons they have taught. (Save these samples as they will also be used in Session 12.)
- Assign Chapter 7 to read in preparation for the next session.

SESSION 8: TEACHING WRITERS TO REREAD AND "RE-SEE" THEIR WRITING

Materials:

- *Guiding Writers to Independence (GWI)*
- Writing samples from classrooms

Activities:

- In small groups, ask participants to share writing samples they have brought. Ask each to:

- Tell the principle they taught in the minilessons.
- Talk about the strengths they see in the students' writing.
- Discuss what students learned during the minilessons and insights about future minilessons.
- Then, discuss Chapter 7. Locate in the chapter answers to questions and chart the answers:
 - What is revision?
 - What is the purpose of revision?
 - What do writers learn from revision?
 - When should young writers learn to revise their writing?
- Next, look again at the writing samples.
 - What revisions would be appropriate?
 - What kind of revision would help students learn what they need to know next about writing?
- Work in pairs or grade level groups to plan several minilessons that will help students revise their writing.

For the next session:

- Assign Chapter 8 to read in preparation for the next session.
- Have each participant bring two children's literature books that will be read (or reread) within the next week and one guided reading book that will be used within the next week.

SESSION 9: WRITING ABOUT READING

Materials:

- *Guiding Writers to Independence (GWI)*
- Two children's literature books that each teacher plans to read (or reread) within the next week and one guided reading book that each teacher plans to use within the next week

Activities:

- Begin with a discussion about the ideas in Chapter 9, Writing about Reading. Some guiding questions are:
 - What is the role of intentional conversation in helping students learn to write about their reading?
 - In which instructional contexts can you use writing about reading?

- What are the different kinds of writing about reading?
- What are the values of writing about reading?
- Ask participants to look at the texts they have brought to the session and think about ways that their students can be writing about their reading during interactive read aloud and guided reading.
- Share the ideas for writing about reading in both contexts and discuss the values of each.

For the next session:

- Bring samples of children’s writing about reading from the 5-6 “typical” students in the classroom. (Save these samples for further use during Session 12)
- Bring guided reading books that each teacher plans to use within the next week with two different groups.

SESSION 10: EXTENDING THINKING THROUGH WRITING ABOUT READING

Materials:

- *Guiding Writers to Independence (GWI)*
- Samples of children’s writing about reading. Samples may be interactive writing, shared writing, or independent writing.

Activities:

- Begin having participants share their samples of writing about reading. Ask each to address these questions:
 - What aspects of the text students heard and discussed contributed to the composition of the writing?
 - What is the evidence of learning as children wrote about their reading?
- Next, look again at Figure 8-10 on page 119 to think about the many different kinds of writing about reading.
- Ask participants to review the guided reading books they brought and analyze them for writing possibilities. They can think about:
 - Mapping the structure of the story.
 - Looking at the written dialogue and selecting something interesting that a character says.
 - Writing a summary.

- Writing interesting facts from an informational book.
 - Making a web of a character's traits.
 - Writing about the most exciting part of the story.
 - Drawing and writing about a funny part.
- Provide time for each participant to plan to have a group write about their reading.

For the next session:

- Implement writing about reading as an extension of guided reading with at least one group and bring examples of students' writing to the next session. Be sure to have samples from several of the "typical" students you have discussed in previous sessions.
- Assign Chapter 16 to read in preparation for the next session.

SESSION 11: WORKING ON THE CONVENTIONS--HANDWRITING INSTRUCTION

Materials:

- *Guiding Writers to Independence (GWI)*
- Examples of children's writing about reading as an extension of guided reading
- Saved examples of children's writing from previous sessions

Activities:

- Begin with participants sharing their examples of writing about reading. They can place them along a continuum from the lowest to highest level.
- Next, generate characteristics of the writing at each level represented and discuss the gradual increase in complexity. (If you have access to *The Continuum of Literacy Learning: A Guide to Teaching*^v, they can compare their own descriptions with the Writing About Reading Continuum.)
- Next, ask participants to look at the handwriting of the samples from children and talk generally about handwriting instruction. What are students' needs?
- Then, discuss Chapter 16. Some focus questions are:
 - Why should we teach handwriting?
 - How does efficient handwriting help children?
 - What is the role of language in helping children use efficient handwriting?
 - How should handwriting instruction begin with young children--*what* do I teach?
 - Discuss the role of the verbal path in working for efficient letter formation (Figure 16-6).

- Based on the needs identified from the student writing samples, work on plans for minilessons for handwriting instruction.

For the next session:

- Implement handwriting instruction at least three days per week, consulting Chapter 16.
- Gather data from a small group or the whole group to help assess the impact of handwriting instruction. Dictate 2-3 sentences and observe the students as they write. Implement the minilessons and instruction as described in Chapter 16 and repeat the dictation tasks just before the next session. Bring both sets of data to the next session.
- Assign Chapter 12 to read in preparation for the next session.

SESSION 12: Assessing Individual Learners' Needs

Materials:

- *Guiding Writers to Independence (GWI)*
- Handwriting samples from before and after the handwriting instruction intervention.
- Writing samples from “typical” 5 or 6 students--brought in Sessions 3, 8, and 11.

Activities:

- Be sure that enough time lapses between Sessions 11 and 12 for teachers to do quite a bit of handwriting instruction. If you cannot arrange this, you may want to move this session to the end of the professional development series.
- Have teachers bring their “before” and “after” samples to the session and describe progress for individual children. Discuss the impact of the handwriting intervention and plans to continue to support children as they learn to become fluent writers.
- Next, begin to discuss how to assess students as writers using Chapter 12 as background. Some guiding questions are:
 - What should be assessed in children’s writing?
 - What are the limits of assessment rubrics?
 - How can I build accountability through conferring?
 - How can I use assessment to drive instruction?
- Have participants look at the writing samples from the “typical” group of 5 or 6 students (Sessions 3, 8 and 11). Use the rubrics in Figure 12-4 and 12-5 to evaluate the writing and then discuss progress children have made over time.

- In grade level groups, discuss the writers in each classroom and establish goals to assess some of their writing. Look specifically at writers that are having difficulty. What do they need to learn?

For the next session:

- Continue to implement writing workshop and identify children who are having difficulty—students who are reluctant to write and/or are having difficulty with writing.
- Bring writing samples from writers having difficulty to the next session.
- Assign Chapters 13 & 14 to read in preparation for the next session.

SESSION 13: WORKING WITH RELUCTANT WRITERS

Materials:

- *Guiding Writers to Independence (GWI)*
- Writing samples from writers having difficulty

Activities:

- Begin with a discussion of Jesse’s progress as described in Chapter 13. What are the critical factors that moved Jesse from a reluctant writer to an enthusiastic one? Discuss the implications for instruction.
- Use the following questions to guide your discussion of Chapter 14:
 - What is the relationship between reading and writing as reciprocal processes?
 - What do children learn in writing that will help them in reading?
 - How can writing help children learn word solving?
 - Discuss Figure 14-3. What are levels of scaffolding in writing?
- Share the examples of writing from students who are struggling and generate ways to help each writer.

For the next session:

- Continue implementing writing workshop.
- Continue working with readers who are struggling and bring some samples to show their progress.
- Assign Chapter 11 to read in preparation for the next session.

SESSION 14: CREATING BRIDGES TO CHILDREN’S HOMES

Materials:

- *Guiding Writers to Independence (GWI)*
- Samples for struggling writers

Activities:

- Begin with participants sharing their progress with the writers in their classrooms who are struggling. Examine the samples for evidence of progress and work together to plan small group instruction and individual conferences that will help them.
- Discuss Chapter 11 using the following guiding questions:
 - How does the sequence of actions by which John introduces books to children support them as writers?
 - How does he make the link to children’s own writing?
 - What is the potential for these mentor texts to help children produce their own writing?
- Have participants tell a story to each other that they want to write. They might think about the last 24 hours of their lives or they might have a memory from long past. Then, have time for them to draft their story, share it with a colleague, revise, and publish it using a “My Own KEEP BOOK.” (Visit www.keepbooks.org to order My Own KEEP BOOKS.) Ask individuals to share their stories.
- Discuss the implications of this experience for writing instruction.
- Finally, plan some writing activities to connect home and school. This should include sending at least one teacher-made book or KEEP BOOK home with children each week, along with the books that children have written and suggestions for students to spend time reading and writing at home each day.

For the next session:

- Ask each teacher to bring samples of children’s writing (in response to teacher written texts or KEEP BOOKS) from the 5-6 “typical” students you have studied during these professional development sessions.
- Assign Chapter 16 to read in preparation for the next session.

SESSION 15: THINKING ABOUT WRITING IN CLASSROOMS

Materials:

- *Guiding Writers to Independence (GWI)*
- Children’s writing samples

Activities:

- Study the writing samples for the typical 5 to 6 students who were discussed in previous sessions. Discuss progress of students over time and the instruction that has guided their progress. What evidence do you see of the impact of writing instruction over time? What evidence do you see of the influence of reading and writing on achievement?
- Review Chapter 16 as a summary of many of the suggestions in *Guiding K-3 Writers to Independence: The New Essentials*. Take some time to discuss the chapter and all 15 suggestions.
- Finally, reflect on the learning from the professional development sequence and chart your goals for future learning.

ⁱ See Fountas, I.C., & Pinnell, G.S. (200). *Guiding Readers and Writers, 3-8: Teaching Comprehension, Genre, and Content Literacy*, Chapter 25, for more examples.

ⁱⁱ Pinnell, G.S., & Fountas, I.C. (2007). *The Continuum of Literacy Learning: A Guide to Teaching—K-2, 3-8, and K-8*. Portsmouth, NH: Heinemann.

ⁱⁱⁱ Pinnell, G.S., & Scharer, P.L. (Eds.). (2005). *Extending Our Reach: Teaching for Comprehension in Reading, Grades K-2*. Columbus, OH: Literacy Collaborative at The Ohio State University.

^{iv} Fountas, I.C., & Pinnell, G.S. (200). *Guiding Readers and Writers, 3-8: Teaching Comprehension, Genre, and Content Literacy*. Portsmouth, NH: Heinemann.

^v Pinnell, G.S., & Fountas, I.C. (2007). *The Continuum of Literacy Learning: A Guide to Teaching—K-2, 3-8, and K-8*. Portsmouth, NH: Heinemann.