

## Sylvan Learning Center Academic Writing Research

By Emily Mitchell

Prepared under the direction of

Richard E. Bavaria, Ph.D. Vice President of Education, Sylvan Learning Center

The Sylvan Academic Writing Program was created in accordance with the standards for language arts instruction in major school districts across the nation, such as those in Texas and California. The program is also in compliance with the standards set by the National Council of Teachers of English (NCTE). An excerpt from these NCTE standards expresses the fundamental principles on which the program was based:

“Students employ a wide range of strategies as they write and use different writing process elements appropriately to communicate with different audiences for a variety of purposes... apply knowledge of language structure, language conventions (e.g., spelling and punctuation), media techniques, figurative language, and genre... to gather, evaluate, and synthesize data from a variety of sources (e.g., print and nonprint texts, artifacts, people) to communicate their discoveries in ways that suit their purpose and audience... [and] use a variety of technological and information resources.”

More specifically, the Sylvan Academic Writing program is designed to incorporate the key methodologies which, over the past 20 years, have come to be the universally-accepted foundations of education in writing instruction worldwide. These educational strategies are:

- Student-Centered Instruction
- Active-Learning Methodologies
- The Process Approach to Writing
- The Drive for Authenticity
- Adaptation to Learning Styles

Student-centered instruction incorporates strategies that allow students to take responsibility for their own learning and that take into account the individual needs and abilities

of each student. All of Sylvan’s programs epitomize this personalization of instruction, and the Academic Writing program is no exception.

Active learning methods engage the students and challenge them to become participants in learning, rather than to be passive recipients of information. By asking students to perform thinking and writing activities (rather than simply to read or listen without acting upon what they are absorbing), the steps of the program offer the potential to increase students’ learning exponentially.

The process approach to writing is founded on the idea that the task of writing is composed of a number of smaller tasks, and attention to each is necessary for the successful development of a piece of writing. This includes a solid foundation in grammar, usage, spelling, and mechanics, as well as an understanding of the organization of well-written sentences, paragraphs, essays, and fiction. It is safe to say that almost all English classes, even those in the youngest grades, have come to incorporate the steps of (and usually even the exact terms for) the Writing Process: *prewriting, drafting, revising, editing and publishing*.

“Authenticity” in education builds learning and teaching tasks into a meaningful context. Students learn optimally when they practice their skills in assignments with real-life settings, or through activities that mimic the events of their daily experiences, rather than through abstract drills and exercises. In other words, practicing vocabulary by using new words in a letter to a friend will be more effective than by memorizing dictionary definitions.

Throughout the activation of all of these principles is the attention to students’ varying learning styles. Visual, verbal, auditory, kinesthetic and other kinds of learners

should all have the opportunity to explore knowledge in ways that are comfortable, efficient, and effective for them. Accommodations for “multiple intelligences” and various learning styles are built into the program’s activities.

The rubric as an assessment tool has been used in many fields, and in recent years has become increasingly popular in writing instruction. Sylvan’s Academic writing assessment rubric has helped Sylvan teachers to give students meaningful feedback on the many kinds of work that students create in the program.

The following bibliography will be of use to anyone who wishes to explore more of the specific details underpinning the general principles discussed above.

## REFERENCES

### JOURNAL ARTICLES

Bunce-Crim, M. (1991). *What is a writing classroom?* *Instructor*, 10 (2), 36–38.

Calkins, L. M. (1985). I am one who writes. *American Educator: The Professional Journal of the American Federation of Teachers*, 9 (3), 26–29, 42, 44.

Calkins, L. M. (1983). *Making the reading-writing connection.* *Learning*, 12 (2), 82–83, 85–86.

Calkins, L. M. (1980). The craft of writing. *Teacher*, 98 (4), 41–44.

Calkins, L. M. & Graves, D. H. (1980). Research update: when children want to punctuate: Basic skills belong in context. *Language Arts*, 57 (5), 567–573.

Calkins, L. M. (1980). Work in progress: One school’s writing program. *National Elementary Principal*, 59 (4), 34–38.

Calkins, L. M. & Graves, D. H. (1980). Research update: Children learn the writer’s craft. *Language Arts*, 57 (2), 207–213.

Clay, M. M. (1982). Research update: Learning and teaching writing: A developmental perspective. *Language Arts*, 59 (1), 65–70.

Cummings, A. (1994). Activity book. A writing process primer: Show students the steps to writing well. *Learning*, 22 (6), 21–28.

Domsy, D. (1990). On the “Write” Track: The Writing Process at Work in a First Grade Classroom (Ideas from Teachers). *Writing Notebook: Creative Word Processing in the Classroom*, 8 (2), 41–42.

Ede, L. & Lunsford, A. (1985). Let them write—together. *English Quarterly*, 18 (4), 119–127 .

Elbow, P. (1997). High stakes and low stakes in assigning and responding to writing. *New Directions for Teaching & Learning*, 69, 5–13.

Elbow, P. & Yancey, K. B. (1994). On the nature of holistic scoring: An inquiry composed on e-mail. *Assessing Writing*, 1 (1), 91–107.

Emig, J. (1982). Inquiry paradigms and writing. *College Composition & Communication*, 33 (1), 64–75.

Flower, L. & Hayes, J. R. (1981). A cognitive process theory of writing. *College Composition & Communication*, 32 (4), 365–387.

Graves, D. H. (1996). Teaching writing. If you write, they will too. *Instructor*, v105, n5, 40–41.

Graves, Donald H. (1994). Writing workshop. Be a better writing teacher. *Instructor*, 104 (4), 43–45,71.

Graves, D. H. (1985). All children can write. *Learning Disabilities Focus*, 1 (1), 36–43.

Graves, D. H. (1978–1981). A case study observing the development of primary children’s composing, spelling, and motor behaviors during the writing process. Final Report for National Institute of Education, Washington, DC, September 1, 1978–August 31, 1981.

Graves, D. H. & Jacobbe, M. E. (1982). Questions for teachers who wonder if their writers change. *Language Arts*, 49 (5), 495–503.

Graves, D. H. (1982). How do writers develop? *Language Arts*, 59 (2), 173–179.

Hall, S. E. M. (1985). Fat letters and other observations of young children learning to write. *Insights Into Open Education*, 18 (2).

Harlin, R. P. & Lipa, S. E. (1993). Assessment: Insights into children’s beliefs and perceptions about process writing. *Reading Horizons*, 33 (4), 287–299.

Henry, J. & Wiley, B. J. (1999). Answers to frequently asked questions about interactive writing. *Classroom Connections. Council Connections.*

Hilton, M. (2001). Writing process and progress: Where do we go from here? *English in Education*, 35 (1), 4–11.

Lunsford, A. & Ede, L. (1986). Why write...together. *Rhetoric Review*, 5 (1), 71–77.

Perl, S., et al. (1983). How teachers teach the writing process. *Elementary School Journal*, 84 (1), 19–44.

Poindexter, C. C. & Oliver, I. R. (1998-1999). Navigating the writing process: Strategies for young children. *Reading Teacher*, 52 (4), 420–423.

Rayers, C. (1987). Writing should be sharing. *Reading*, 21 (2), 115–124.

Schirmer, B. R. & Bailey, J. (2000). Writing assessment rubric: An instructional approach with struggling writers. *Teaching Exceptional Children*, 33 (1), 52–58.

Schwartz, M. (1983). Two journeys through the writing process. *College Composition & Communication*, 34 (2), 188–201.

Strickland, D. S. & Morrow, L. M. Young children's early writing development (Emerging readers and writers). *Reading Teacher*, 42 (6), 426–427.

Walker, Ian. (1987). Process writing in the content areas. *Australian Journal of Reading*, 10 (4), 243–253.

## BOOKS

Boone, R. (Ed.). (1991). *Teaching process writing with computers*. Revised Edition. Eugene, OR: International Society for Technology in Education.

Calkins, L. M. & Harwayne, S. (1991). *Living between the lines*. Portsmouth, NH: Heinemann.

Calkins, L. M. (1983). *Lessons from a child: On the teaching and learning of writing*. Portsmouth, NH: Heinemann.

Calkins, L. M. (1986). *The art of teaching writing*. Portsmouth, NH: Heinemann.

Collins, J. (1985). *The effective writing teacher: Eighteen strategies*. Andover, MA: The Network, Inc.

Combs, M. (1997). *Developing competent readers and writers in the primary grades*. Upper Saddle River, NJ: Merrill.

Emig, J. (1971). *The composing processes of twelfth graders*. Urbana, IL: National Council of Teachers of English.

Freeman, M. S. (1998). *Teaching the youngest writers: A practical guide*. For Primary Grade Teachers. Gainesville, FL: Maupin House.

Fuller, C. (1997). *Teaching your child to write: How parents can encourage writing skills--for success in school, work, and life*. New York City: Berkley.

Graves, R. L. (Ed.). (1999). *Writing, teaching, learning: A book*. Portsmouth, NH: Heinemann/Boynton-Cook.

Hillerich, R. L. (1985). *Teaching children to write, K-8: A complete guide to developing writing skills*. Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice-Hall.

McCarrier, A., Pinnell, G. S. & Fountas, I. C. (1999). *Interactive writing: How language & literacy come together, K-2*. Portsmouth, NH: Heinemann.

Mosenthal, P. Tamor, L. & Walmsley, S.A. (Eds.). (1983). *Research on writing: Principles and methods*. New York City: Longman.

Norton, D. E. (1997). *The effective teaching of language arts. Fifth Edition*. Upper Saddle River, NJ: Prentice-Hall.

Petty, W. T. (1994). *Experiences in language: Tools and techniques for language arts methods. Sixth Edition*. Boston: Allyn & Bacon.

## ERIC-ACCESSIBLE DOCUMENTS

Brand, W. (1992). *Expanding writing opportunities for elementary school children and assisting teachers' knowledge of the writing process*. Ft. Lauderdale, FL: Nova University. Document Number ED347561

Graves, D. (1981). *A case study observing the development of primary children's composing, spelling and motor behaviors during the writing process: Final report*. Washington, D.C.: National Institute of Education. Document Number ED218653

Hayes, J. R. & Flower, L. (1981). *Uncovering cognitive processes in writing: an introduction to protocol analysis*. Los Angeles: American Educational Research Associates. Document Number ED202035

Reimer, C. N. (2001). *Strategies for teaching writing to primary students using the writing process*. La Mirada, CA: Biola University. Document Number ED459471

Smith, C. B. (1999). *Improving your child's writing skills*. Bloomington, IN: ERIC Clearinghouse. Document Number ED427322