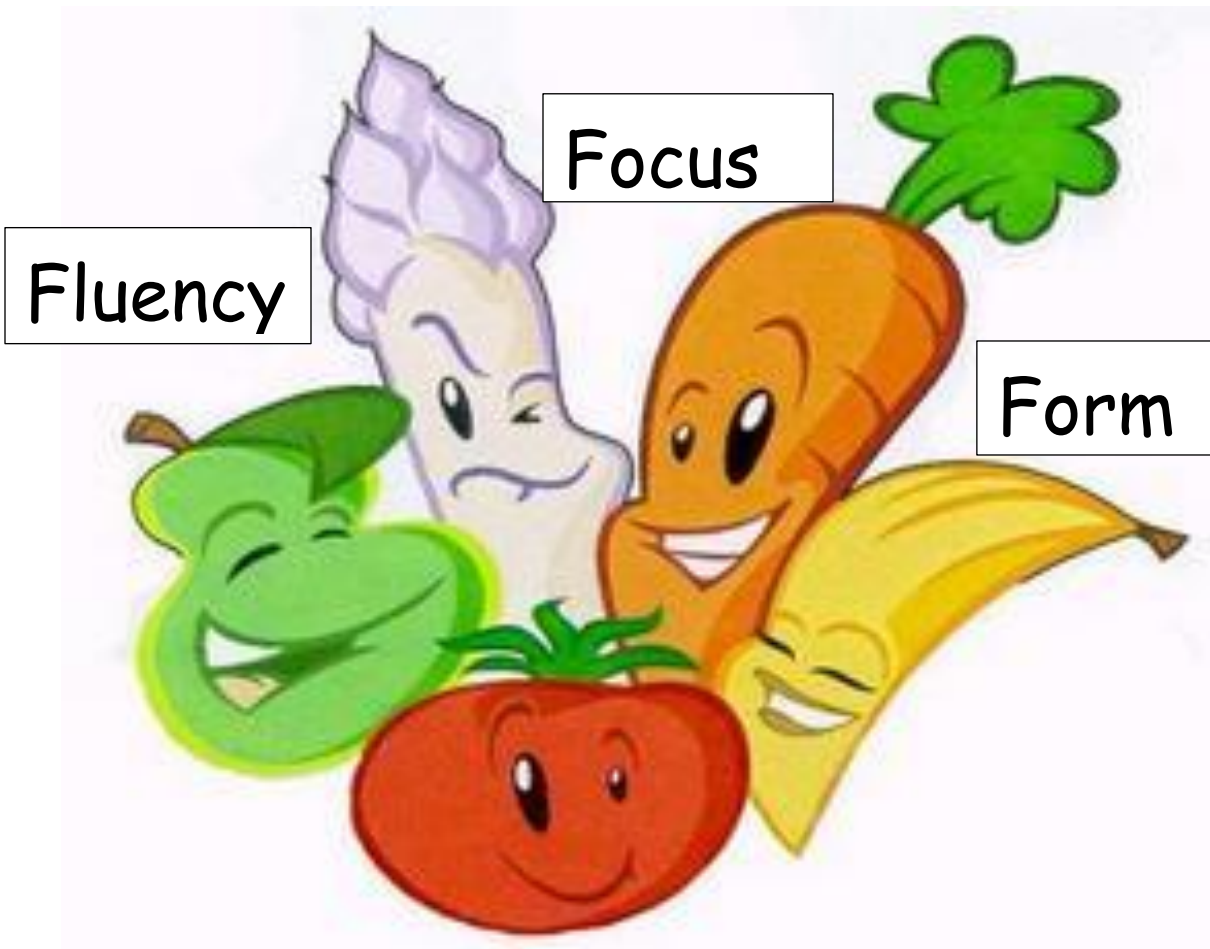


Ingredients of Good Writing



Grow Writers

Dr. Elaine M. Weber, Language Arts Consultant
Macomb Intermediate School District

Introduction



Writing Tracker is a process to “grow writers.” The idea behind growing writers is to give students maximum opportunities to share their ideas in writing. It is assumed that we can all write the most about things we know the most about. So we first tap those sources.

Writing Tracker has a built-in monitoring system so students are encouraged to write more of their ideas in a fluent, coherent way. They are initially not stifled by worrying about spelling, punctuation, paragraphing, etc. The major goal is to build fluency and stamina for getting ideas on paper. These writings are drafts and are intended to give the teachers information about how students think, how they express themselves in writing, and how their language is developing. This becomes the individual and grade-level blueprint for interventions and instruction.

The research by Steve Graham (www.missionliteracy.com, Literacy in Action, Module 1), suggests that writing informational text has the power to improve students' achievement over the entire curriculum. As a result, students, once fluent, are taught to write in text structures used for informational writing. This becomes more of a “casting system” for developing writing. Students are taught to use the forms and structures to write about the information they are sharing.

Develop Fluency and Stamina

Write, write, and write: Write about what they know, see, experience, hear, touch, smell, wonder, and think.



Find a topic to write about: What's in my heart, list of things I like, things I know, headlines of my life, map of my neighborhood, lifeline and more...



Things I like:

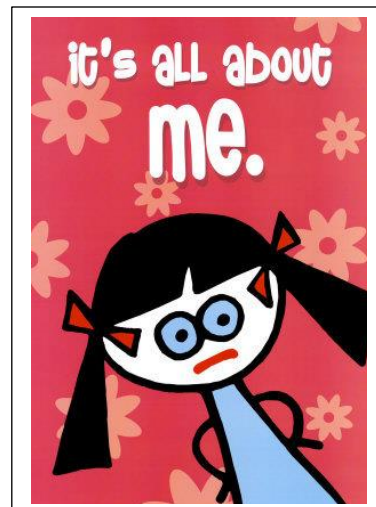
My family
friends
My dog, Russell
Disney World
Pizza

Lifeline

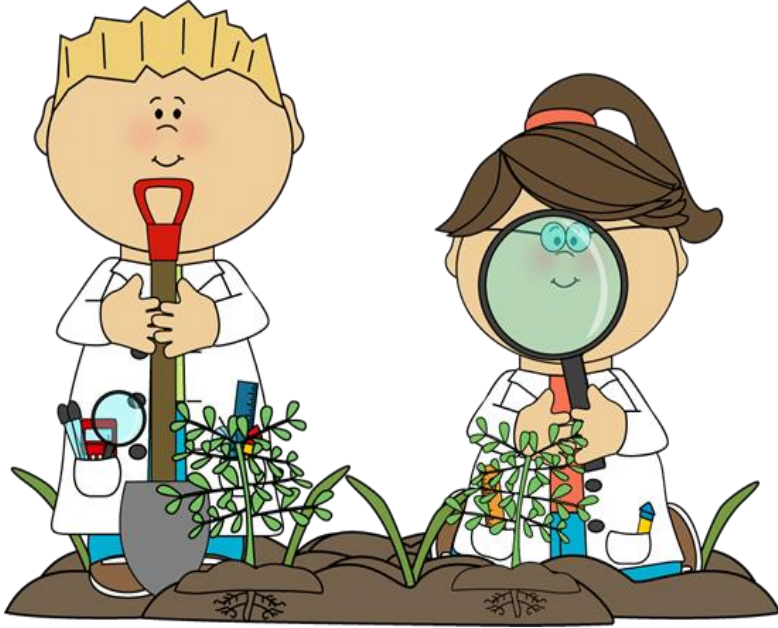
Born Sister Got Dog Disney

Things I know:

Different kinds of dinosaurs
How birds build nests
How to play video games
How to make cookies



Monitor Fluency: Writing Tracker



Select a topic.

Write for five minutes.

Count every word.

Record data: number of words, date, topic.

Chart progress.

Set goals.

Write three to five days a week.

Keep all writings, data, chart and goals in a folder.

Grow Focus with Writing Tracker



Stay on topic. Tell the students they will get a "star" for writing about just one topic. Once they have completed their writing, counted the words, and recorded data, then have them read through their writing to check if they wrote about just one topic. (Give students an example.) If they wrote about only one topic, ask them to make a star on the top of the paper.

Support their efforts to stay on topic by giving them extra stars for details and examples. Tell them to read through their writing and make one star for staying on topic and one star for three details and/or examples.

Sometimes your goal for the students is just to write and build fluency and stamina. Other times you want to develop their ability to develop one topic. Vary the activities to keep their interest and balance their growth.

Upgrade the Words



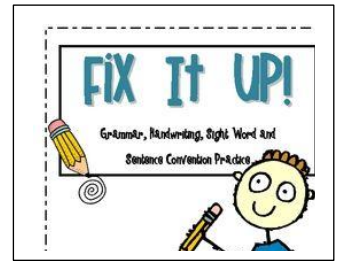
You become the orchestra leader and decide from your observations which of these "word" skills you will focus on to illuminate their writings.

After a writing tracker session, direct students to choose 3 verbs and upgrade them --- make them active. Ran: dashed, sprinted, darted, jogged. (Select a few students to share their upgrades.)

Another time have students upgrade their adjectives and/or adverbs. Very big: enormous, gigantic, huge. Ran fast: quickly, speedily, rapidly (Share)

To bring clarity to the vision the readers have for their writing, encourage them to use specific nouns: store - Toys R Us, amusement park - Disney World --- specify, specify, specify everything --- the name of the game, the player, the place, the city, the store, the park, etc. (Share)

Arranging and Rearranging Sentences



After a writing tracker session, have students count the words in each of their sentences, have them add a "star" if they have written sentences of different lengths. Next, have them select a sentence from their writing tracker writing that they can lengthen or shorten. *"On my birthday my mom and dad took me to Disney World and I rode my first roller coaster and it was scary."* This sentence could be adjusted to two sentences of different lengths.

Encourage students to vary the length of their sentences. Have a few students share.

Another time, have students find a sentence in their writing that could be written in a better order. *At Disney World I rode my first coaster ride.* Is the ride more important than where you did it? *"I rode my first coaster ride at Disney World."* Look for a sentence that could be rearranged to tell your story in the best way. Select a few students to share their examples.

Another way to help students spice up their writing is to write using different kinds of sentences. Have students look through one of their writing tracker writings to see if there is a place they could add a question, *"This was me on a roller coaster, can you believe it?"* or give their reader information with a question, *"Did you know that Disney World has five different kinds of roller coasters?"*

Form: Write in Text Structures

Once students know the text structures have them play Text Structure Draw (www.missionliteracy.com - literacy in action, card game: Text Structure draw). On a Writing Tracker day select a text structure and explain that you want them to choose something they could write about in the given text structure. Once a topic is selected, give them time to think about how they will write it: think in their head, list the things on their fingers, turn and tell a partner, etc.

After writing, counting, and recording, have the students silently read their writing and determine if they have followed the directions.

Description

Tell the students to select a topic they can describe. Tell them about attributes.

Detailed attributes determine word choice and are based on the emotional value of words...

Attribute	Sample	Comparative
Size	9 by 12 in.	as big as...
Color	pale pink	reddish
Shape	oval	tubular
Movement	gliding	faster, more frenzied
Texture	rough	slickest
Number	nine	more than...
Composition	wooden	---
Smell	putrid	like smoke
Taste	salty	like chips
Habitat	underground	---
Temperature	below zero	hotter than...
Weight	ten pounds	as heavy as...
Age	five years old	older than Methuseleh...

Before writing ask the students to think about their topic and think about the attributes they could use to write a description.

Sequence

Sequence of Events



Events in a story happen in order. First, next, then, and last or beginning, middle, and end words might be used to tell the events in order.

Santa Maria Bonita School District

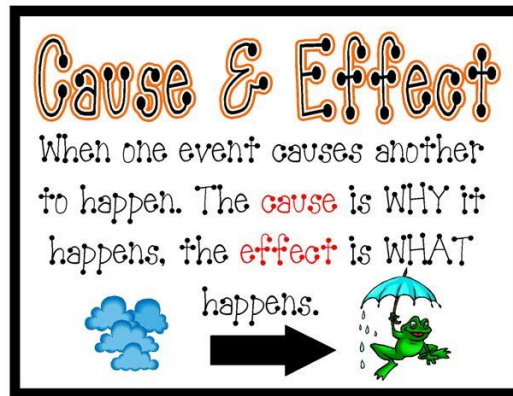
Guide students to think through their story or information in the sequence of events. When they are finished, reward them with a star for writing their story or information in sequential order.

Comparison



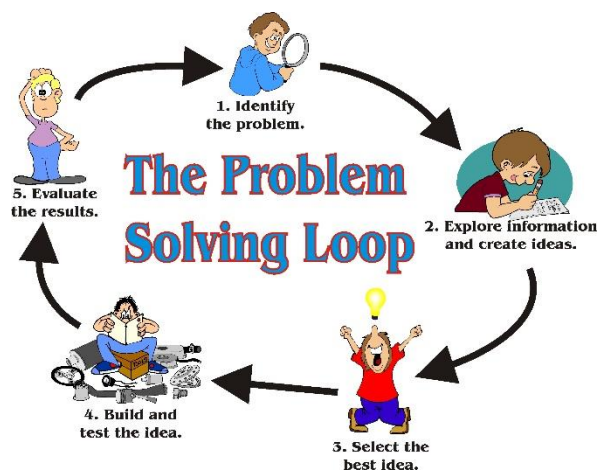
Students select two or more things they can compare: friends, pets, toys, games, houses, neighborhoods, schools, etc. They can also use the attributes from description to guide their comparison.

Cause and Effect



Students select something from their life or something they know about from science or social studies in which one event was caused by one or several things or a chain of causes and effects. Give stars for writing a cause and effect example.

Problem / Solution



Have students select a potential problem they are facing or one they know about. They are to write about the problem using the five step process. Let students outline the five steps before writing in a writing tracker session.