

Module 4

Supporting Students
with Learning Disabilities
in *Written
Expression*

A decorative graphic consisting of ten colored circles of various sizes and colors (purple, brown, blue, green, pink, orange) arranged in a cluster to the left of the main title.

This module provides information about the characteristics of students with a learning disability in written expression as well as programming approaches to support these students.

● Key Ideas in this Module

- Students with a learning disability in written expression can have difficulties with all aspects of writing.
- Writing instruction is an integral and meaningful part of the curriculum in all subject/content areas.
- Educators should use a process-oriented approach to writing instruction.
- Students with writing disabilities can benefit from the use of assistive technology to support their learning.
- Instructional methods that include direct instruction, strategy instruction, and practice/ rehearsal are effective approaches to supporting students with identified writing disabilities.

● What Is a Learning Disability in Written Expression?

A learning disability in written expression affects the ability to write and organize thoughts using appropriate detail, sequence, sentence structure, and literary form. In order to progress academically, students must be able to effectively express their knowledge in writing. For students with writing disabilities, writing difficulties exist on two levels: (Schumaker & Deschler, 2003)

1. Transcription skills, which include handwriting, spelling, punctuation, and grammar
2. Composition/expressive writing skills, which include generating ideas, planning, organizing, and revising thoughts/ideas to communicate meaning in a written product (composition)

In the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders, Fifth Edition (2013) (DSM-5), the diagnostic term “Specific Learning Disorder with Impairment in Written Expression” is used as outlined in Module 1, specifically for individuals who experience difficulty with spelling accuracy, grammar and punctuation accuracy, and/or clarity or organization of written expression. (p. 67, DSM-5)

Students with a learning disability in written expression do not have a cognitive disability. Students with writing disabilities have average to above average cognitive abilities. Their difficulties with writing are not caused by problems with vision, hearing, or fine motor control but these conditions can complicate their writing difficulties.

● Characteristics of Students with a Learning Disability in Written Expression

During the school year, students are expected to take notes, write assignments, and take tests; all of which require fluent and legible handwriting. When transcription skills are not automatic, students must direct their time and cognitive energy toward the basic writing skills involved with handwriting, spelling, and grammar instead of more complex skills such as planning, organizing, and revising. As a result, these students may have difficulty with every stage of writing, from thinking of ideas through to revision and editing.

Not only can students' perception of themselves be affected by the quality of their handwriting, other people sometimes make judgments about intelligence and capability based on poor handwriting.

By the time students with writing disabilities reach middle years and high school levels, their compositions are generally shorter, less organized, less varied in vocabulary, and of lower quality than their peers who do not have a learning disability.

Students with a disability in written expression may have difficulty in the following areas:

Whether a student has difficulties with transcription or expressive writing skills, the quality of writing will be affected.

(Teaching Students with Reading Difficulties and Disabilities p. 46 /Beringer, Abbott, Whitaker, Sylvester & Nolan, 1995.)

Transcription Skills

- **Mechanical aspects of writing:** The handwriting of students with a writing disability is often less legible than their peers and they tend to make considerably more spelling, grammar, and punctuation errors.

Composition

- **Generating content:** Students with a writing disability are capable of generating the ideas orally. Their difficulty may lie in the mechanics and organization skills needed to initiate and endure the task during the time allotted. They consequently often do not spend much time preparing to write. They do not recognize the value of the pre-writing phase and they do not know what to do with time allotted for pre-writing unless guided.
- **Creating and organizing compositional structure:** Students often begin writing what comes to mind or what they can easily remember. They do not adequately frame stories/compositions; they repeat simple sentences; and they use short, "choppy" sentences as well as run-on sentences.
- **Revising text and formulating goals:** Students tend to focus on correcting punctuation, grammar, and spelling errors rather than organizing ideas, refining content, and completing the task.

- **Understanding the purpose of writing:** Students often view writing assignments as question/answer tasks that require little preparation. As such, if they feel the question has been answered, they may abruptly end their composition.

Adapted from Steve Graham, steve.graham@vanderbilt.edu ppt from CEC Convention 2010.

Supporting the Student with a Learning Disability in the Area of Written Expression

To become proficient writers, all students must learn to synchronize multiple skills in transcription and composition. For students with a learning disability in written expression, additional instructional interventions and adaptations to support learning in both these areas are essential for them to be successful. The combined use of direct instruction, strategy instruction, practice, and rehearsal is the most effective way of addressing writing disabilities.

A decision related to the appropriate use of compensatory strategies like assistive technology can help a writer with a learning disability overcome the barriers of frustration and disengagement.

For some students with persistent difficulties with written expression (transcription or composition) who may or may not have a formal diagnosis of a learning disability, the collaborative process of student-specific planning may be necessary. Early intervention is important so that the student remains motivated and engaged in the learning process. The student-specific planning team may recommend instructional strategies, adaptations, or appropriate assistive technology to assist the student in accessing the curriculum therefore allowing the student to show what they are capable of when the act of writing is supported appropriately.

Transcription

As the student progresses to middle years and beyond it is important for educators to keep in mind that a learning disability is lifelong and that some students may not develop the skills necessary to use written expression fluently or easily, even with interventions and extensive direct instruction. At some point, the support team may need to make a decision about refocusing from intensive instruction to teaching adaptations and using assistive technology (AT) and other compensatory strategies that the student can use throughout life.

For example, the team may decide that the energy and time required to physically write assignments is no longer practical for the student. Instead, the student would benefit more by learning to use assistive technology, such as speech-to-text software (e.g., Dragon Naturally Speaking Software, www.nuance.com/dragon/index.htm) for notes and assignments. Effort may be directed toward practicing keyboarding skills so that the student's work is more legible and is completed in a shorter time frame. These or other compensatory strategies may help the student produce longer and more in-depth written discourse, enable the student to keep up with note-taking, and allow the student to feel more capable when demonstrating what they know.

In order for educators to best support learning they should begin by identifying the skill areas in which the student is having difficulty. Analysis of a student's writing samples can be an effective way to gather this information, which can then be used to select appropriate instructional strategies and to make decisions about the appropriate lifelong compensatory strategies. Consider low, mid, and high tech support when making your plan. Refer to the [Assistive Technology](#) section in Module 2.

For information on supporting transcription skill development, refer to [Appendix 4-A](#).

Composition

A learning disability in written expression affects a student's ability to generate and organize thoughts on paper using appropriate detail, sequence, sentence structure, and literary form. Effective writers are able to work through each stage of the writing process, from planning to revision, and produce a coherent written product. Students with disabilities in written expression benefit from direct or explicit instruction, strategy instruction, and rehearsal and practice at each stage of the writing process.

Traditional instruction in written expression emphasizes the conventions of mechanics (e.g., handwriting, spelling, grammar, punctuation) but shifting the focus of instruction to the conceptual aspects of writing, such as generating ideas, planning, organizing, and revising allows students to focus on composition skills.

Note Taking in Content Areas

Note taking requires the ability to listen, comprehend, and retain information while processing the new information and summarizing the important points into a useful format. The physical act of writing must occur simultaneously with these cognitive processes. Notes must be taken quickly, automatically, and legibly.

As curriculum requirements increase in volume and complexity, students with a writing disability may find note taking challenging. The McREL study also suggests that *note taking strategies are not intuitive and that all students benefit from explicit instruction in how to take notes*. Students with a learning disability in written expression will need explicit instruction, strategy instruction, and opportunities to rehearse and practice note taking on a more frequent basis.

Current research builds on the premise that the ability to complete a coherent, organized written product such as an essay is more critical than mastering transcription skills.

"Findings from McREL's 2010 study indicated that summarizing and note taking have positive effects across content area and grade levels, with note taking having a significant higher impact on learning than summarizing does."

Ceri B. Dean et al. 2012. p.79.

Supporting Note Taking through Instruction

- Teach students a variety of note taking formats. In conjunction with the student determine which one works the best, then focus on that strategy until it is mastered and

can be applied in all content areas. For example, visual learners often prefer webbing while other learners may prefer column-style note taking.

- Provide explicit instruction of note taking through teacher modeling and demonstration .
- Provide explicit corrective feedback to improve note taking skills.
- Teach students shorthand techniques such as the use of symbols, abbreviations, and contractions.
- Allow note taking to include drawings/pictures of what students are learning instead of just writing.
- Provide students with partially completed notes that they need to fill in as they follow along.
- Give students teacher prepared notes and ask students to highlight the main ideas in one colour and the supporting details in another colour.
- Teachers can provide the daily notes for the subject in an electronic format.
- Allow the use of audio devices to record the information being given orally.
- Set up a buddy system to support note taking or provide a scribe.
- Highlight and extract notes from electronic print material to supplement class notes.
- For more information, please see the article Teaching Students to Take Class Notes written by Emily Levy in 2007. It is available at www.ldonline.org/article/teaching_students_to_take_class_notes?theme=print.

Supporting Note Taking through Rehearsal and Practice

- Provide students with frequent opportunities to practice note taking using a template or structure that demonstrates what is important using familiar information. (See Note-Making Frames on pages 6.53-6.55 of *Success for all Learners: A Handbook on Differentiating Instruction: A Resource for Kindergarten to Senior 4 Schools*.)
- Use graphic organizers like webbing, mind maps, and concept frames.
- Teach a strategy for note taking (e.g., two-column note taking) and then use this strategy in all areas of note taking to provide lots of practice. (See Note-Making on pages 6.82-6.84 of *Success for all Learners: A Handbook for Differentiating Instruction: A Resource for Kindergarten to Senior 4 Schools*.)
- Provide time for students to share their thinking with peers.
- Provide opportunity for students to revise notes and use them for review (helps students see the purpose and aids their understanding).
- Determine which strategy works best for individual students and give many opportunities to use these strategies in a variety of content areas.
- Assist the student in advocating for the use of this strategy with other teachers when note taking.

Supporting Note Taking through Assistive Technology (AT)

- Encourage and provide opportunities for the student to develop keyboarding skills.
- Experiment with note taking software (Draft Builder (SOLO), Inspiration—www.inspiration.com/ and www.donjohnston.com/draftbuilder/).
- Experiment with a word processor with Microsoft Word, Google Chrome, and Mac accessibility features.
- Experiment with a portable keyboard (iPad, wireless keyboard).
- Experiment with text-to-speech software (Microsoft Narrator at <http://windows.microsoft.com/en-CA/windows-xp/help/use-narrator>).
- Experiment with Read and Write Gold at www.texthelp.com/.
- Experiment with Kurzweil 3000 at www.kurzweiledu.com/.
- Experiment with word predication software (Co:Writer (SOLO) at www.donjohnston.com/solo/, EZ keys for Windows at www.ez-keys.software.informer.com/, Words+ at www.words-plus.com/, and Read and Write Gold at www.texthelp.com/).
- Experiment with voice-to-text software (e.g., Dragon Naturally Speaking at www.nuance.com/dragon/index.htm).

Assessment Strategies to Support Note Taking

- Accept alternatives to written products to demonstrate knowledge (e.g., oral presentations).
- Have the student present audio recordings instead of written products.
- Allow the use of a word processor to complete tests related to the notes that student took.
- Allow for additional time for written assignments and tests, or provide tests in alternative formats like multiple choice or matching which decreases the amount of writing required.

Supporting Composition through Instruction in Content Areas

Students learn to write by writing; therefore, they need frequent opportunities to write. Instructional efforts should be explicit, frequent, and focused on formative feedback to support student learning. The following strategies can be used to support students who struggle with written expression/composition. They can also benefit all students and are easily integrated into classroom instruction.

- Model the writing process and demonstrate its usefulness in the content areas.
- Show students examples of good writing within the subject area you teach.

- Teach students specifically about different writing forms (e.g., Descriptive, Expository, Narrative, and Persuasive writing), their characteristics, and examples, particularly if this is the type of writing expected in the subject area you teach.
- Help students make connections to prior knowledge related to language, subject content, and the world, in general. (For more information, see Prior Knowledge and Vocabulary Strategies on pages 6.20-6.36 of *Success for all Learners: A Handbook on Differentiating Instruction: A Resource for Kindergarten to Senior 4 Schools*.)
- Provide direct instruction in sight vocabulary for student-specific writing.
- Give students opportunities to talk about their writing.
- Teach students strategies to help them become independent writers.
- Hold writing conferences with students during various stages of writing in the content areas to provide support, feedback, and opportunity for guided revision to ensure they are getting the content knowledge.
- Provide rubrics with exemplars and encourage students to self-assess and peer-assess products that require written components.
- Teach the use of an assignment calculator which breaks down large projects into manageable steps. See the following link for an example: www.lib.umn.edu/help/calculator.

Students with learning disabilities may be confused by differences in writing requirements from one subject to the next. Using a consistent model helps the student become a more confident writer through repetition. Although different subjects require different types of writing assignments, the production of all writing can involve the same process and follow the same stages or steps.

For example, your school may support the use of the 6 +1 Writing Traits Model or the POWER model (Plan, Organize, Write, Edit, and Revise), or another strategy to assist students in developing a written assignment whether in English Language Arts or a content area.

Consistency in process also assists with memory issues as students have to master one single process which can be used throughout their schooling rather than isolated skill sets.

Teaching specific strategies related to the content areas benefits students with a learning disability and empowers them to advocate for what works for them. Refer to www.ldonline.org/article/6201/ for more information.

For more information on POWER, link to <http://coe.jmu.edu/LearningToolbox/power.html>.

For more information on 6+1 Writing Traits Model, link to <http://ethemes.missouri.edu/themes/1283>.

Assessment Strategies to Support Writing in Content Areas

- Look for alternative ways students can demonstrate what they know or have learned in the content area.
- Accept alternatives to written work.

- Break down the assignment into manageable parts and assign marks for completing the parts.
- Allow assistive technology to enhance proofing and editing skills, or assist students when they have to produce written work.

● Composition: Supporting Students through the Stages of the Writing Process

This section includes information to support the following stages or steps of the writing process:

1. generating ideas;
2. developing and organizing ideas;
3. revising;
4. editing.

1) Generating Ideas

Students must learn to come up with ideas and write down what they know about a topic. They also need the skills to assess whether their writing is on-topic and fulfills its intended purpose. Some students find it difficult to:

- Decide what to write about;
- Decide what to write or include in a report;
- Come up with their own ideas;
- Write about their opinions.

Supporting the Generation of Ideas through Instruction

- Facilitate topic selection through mini-lessons, discussion, and modeling.
- Brainstorm ideas as a whole group, or as small teacher-facilitated groups with students who need more support with how to brainstorm ideas for writing.
- Make connections to the students' lives, interests, and strengths.
- Provide opportunities to talk and to remember events.
- Encourage students to jot down ideas and use their drawings for inspiration.
- Allow students to write about their own ideas.
- Allow students to write for different audiences.
- Encourage interviewing, listening to music, observing, and viewing.
- Teach students how to read about or do research on related topics.

- Provide explicit instruction on how to use graphic organizers, how to pick an idea, and so forth.
- Teach how to construct thought webs and use graphic organizers.

Supporting the Generation of Ideas through Rehearsal and Practice

- Provide opportunity and time to explore and research different topics about which to write.
- Check on the students frequently to ensure success.
- Encourage students to create and keep a list of ideas for future writing topics.
- Remind students to revisit the list and add to it or delete from it as necessary.

Supporting the Generation of Ideas through Assistive Technology

- Use technology for the initial generation of ideas (recording devices, voice recognition software, Kidspiration or Inspiration software—www.inspiration.com/kidspiration).

Assessment Strategies to Support the Generation of Ideas

- Promote self-reflection on what strategies worked with regard to the generation of ideas.
- Accept alternatives to written lists of ideas.
- Assign marks for completing steps in the writing process rather than waiting for the final product.

2) Developing and Organizing Ideas

Expressive writing requires an organizational schema: a plan for where and how to begin and what to do next in the process. Students who have a hard time organizing ideas may have difficulty with the following:

- Getting started with a writing assignment;
- Grouping thoughts or concepts into common themes or writing down their thoughts in the appropriate order;
- Thinking in advance about what they are going to write (they just start writing);
- Gathering the books, paper, pencils, and so on they need to write;
- Estimating how long it will take to write a report or story.

Effective writers use strategies to organize thoughts, and information to make connections for writing. Mind maps, webs, clusters, think sheets, and frames are all terms for graphic organizers. Graphic organizers are visual displays of thinking and are an effective tool for students with learning disabilities as they can help students visualize and monitor their progress throughout the writing process. Webs and maps give students the opportunity to see connections and relationships by organizing and grouping ideas and information into topics and sub-topics. (Refer to page 4-23 for further information.)

For additional information on graphic organizers, see Chapter 6 of *Success for all Learners: A Handbook on Differentiating Instruction: A Resource for Kindergarten to Senior 4 Schools*.

Supporting the Development and Organization of Ideas through Instruction

- Provide students with sample graphic organizers to guide them in sorting and organizing information and notes.
- Create a selection of graphic organizers for students to reference and use.
- Use beginning and advance organizers to give the planning stage some structure.
- Provide personalized kits to support students' writing efforts (e.g., prompt cards, personal dictionaries, markers, highlighters, scissors, glue, and sticky notes for selecting ideas and information). Some teachers have individual sets of supplies in a plastic resealable bag and call it the student's toolbox.
- Provide students with direct instruction about how to develop outlines or summarize materials read.

Supporting the Development and Organization of Ideas through Rehearsal and Practice

- Model the development and organization of ideas by selecting a familiar topic.
 - Have students form discussion groups.
 - Ask them to recall what they already know about the topic and questions they still have on the topic.
 - Students take turns and record one idea or question on a sticky note and place it in the middle of the table. Encourage students to build on each other's ideas.
 - When students have contributed everything they can recall about the topic, they can sort out and organize their sticky notes into meaningful clusters on chart paper.
 - Ask students to discuss connections and relationships, and identify possible sub-headings and categories. Provide students with markers or highlighters to draw connections among the sticky notes.
 - Display the groups' work. They will have created a mind map or graphic organizer.

- Give lots of practice before working independently.
 - Teachers may work with a small group of students to do a group development and organization of their ideas before working independently.
 - Teachers may need to scaffold and determine skills to be taught or re-taught for students to be successful.

Supporting the Development and Organization of Ideas through Assistive Technology

- Allow students to use computers instead of transcribing their assignment by hand.
- Use computer software such as Inspiration or Kidspiration™ (www.inspiration.com/Kidspiration) to assist with the organization of ideas.
- Investigate prompting programs for the computer that ask a set of questions or present reminders as writers progress through the various stages of writing, especially in the drafting stage.

Use word prediction software programs. (e.g., Co-writer or word processors with word banks) so that a student can focus on the composition versus the spelling or legibility.

Assessment Strategies to Support the Development and Organization of Ideas

- Some students might only be able to use computer generated software because writing is too labour intensive and they wouldn't be able to get their great ideas out if they were expected to fill out the graphic organizer independently.
- Allow for less detailed outlines to help frame their thoughts (3 layers: main topics, subtopics, and supporting details).
- Allow their planning and thinking sheet to be their outline.
- At this stage of development have exemplars available for students to compare their own work with.

3) Revising

Once students have written a draft of a story, paragraph, or essay they should be encouraged and supported to improve their written product. Students must be able to work individually and in groups to assess their own work and the work of others for content, clarity, form, and style; and, during the editing stage, for errors in grammar, punctuation, and spelling. Teachers need to be sensitive to and cognizant of students' comfort level and esteem in sharing their work with peers. Sharing of work should always start with a trusted adult.

At the revision stage, students should focus on the meaning of text and not allow the mechanical aspects of their work, such as handwriting, spelling, punctuation, and grammar, to overshadow the organization and coherence of their writing.

The TAPS strategy can be used to help students focus ideas and provide constructive feedback. The TAPS strategy should be used to emphasize organization, clarification, and the elaboration of ideas rather than the mechanical aspects of writing.

Revising is a term that refers to making changes to the ideas in a written product. This may involve adding details, deleting details, or changing word order to clarify ideas and points of view.

- The TAPS mnemonic stands for the following:
 - T: Tell the person what you liked about the written product.
 - A: Ask questions about parts that are unclear.
 - P: Provide suggestions for making the writing better.
 - S: Share the revised work.

The Before, During and After (BDA) process can be used to teach strategies such as the TAPS strategy. (Refer to page 4-24 for further information.)

Supporting Revisions through Instruction

- Allow students to use computers to produce written products in order to make the process of revising and editing less labour-intensive.
- Teach specific strategies for revising their writing.
- Teach students how to revise their work focusing only on content.
- Provide guidelines for revisions.
- Provide checklists for students to begin to self-evaluate their work.
- Praise parts of the written product that are well explained and ask questions to help the students clarify areas of confusion. The following chart contains examples of questions and praise that teachers can use to benefit students in their writing and model the metacognitive process related to revisions.

Praise (be specific and give concrete examples that demonstrate/explain your praise)

- This work really seems complete. Here is your main idea, here are the supporting details, and finally here is your conclusion (pointing out each concrete example).
- I really like the way you wrote... (Be specific!)
- Your point of view is very clearly stated when you said, ...
- Your supporting details are very strong in this paragraph (identify these details by reading aloud to the student or by different coloured sticky notes to highlight each supporting detail.
- Your introduction is very strong. (Explain what you mean by strong by indicating how they made it strong—choice of words/phrase/analogy/alliteration, etc.)

Questions (be specific and give concrete examples that clarify your question so they know how to fix the issue)

- Your writing doesn't seem finished because I don't know what happened to the main character. What are your plans for finishing it so the audience knows what happened to your main character?
- This part confuses me: I'm not sure who is saying this statement. What could you do to make it clearer to the reader?
- You seem to want to defend the no hat rule but you have not indicated why no hats in class are important. How can you make your argument stronger?
- What is your topic sentence? I'm thinking it is this one but it is at the end of the paragraph. How could you rearrange the ideas in this paragraph to have a clear topic sentence?

Supporting Revision through Rehearsal and Practice

- Frequently model how to revise text using a think aloud strategy.
- Provide frequent opportunities for students to revise teacher prepared material to practice this skill.

Supporting Revision through Assistive Technology

- Examine the use of writing software such as SAS Curriculum Pathways' Writing Reviser at www.sas.com/resources/demos/curriculum_pathways/writingreviser/writingreviser.html, Co-Writer, Read and Write Gold, and so on.
- Teach how to use word processing software to move sentences and so on rather than having to do extensive copying over previously written text.
- Speech synthesis software or hardware which translates texts into speech is not as natural-sounding as digitized speech but its advantage is that it can be used to speak any text. A computer system used for this purpose is called a **speech synthesizer** and can be implemented in software or hardware products.
- Teach students how to use thesaurus programs on the word processor to enhance their use of words.
- Provide a visual thesaurus such as www.visualthesaurus.com/.

Assessment Strategies to Support Revision

- Provide exemplars for comparison by students at this stage of the process.
- Revise chunks of material rather than the whole assignment.
- Focus on the content of the writing versus the transcription.
- Have students highlight the revisions that they made. When you meet with them ask what they changed and why.
 - Changed the beginning to be stronger. It used to say... now it starts...
 - Used some million dollar words... Instead of said, I used whispered.
 - Used adverbs or adjectives, or both.
- Determine the number of changes required according to the student's needs.

4) Editing

Editing is a term that refers to one of the final stages of completing a written product. Editing a piece of writing involves the correction of spelling, punctuation, and grammar. Professional writers often combine editing with proofreading to polish a piece so that it's ready and acceptable for publication. Students can use the COPS strategy to remind them of what to look for when editing their work or the work of their peers.

- The COPS mnemonic strategy stands for
 - C—Capitalization: Does a capital letter appear at the beginning of each sentence and as the first letter of every proper noun? (Point out the relationship between periods and upper case letters.)
 - O—Overall appearance: Is the work neat and attractively formatted?
 - P—Punctuation: Is the punctuation correct?
 - S—Spelling: Are the words spelled correctly?

The Self-regulated Strategy Development (SRSD) model (see [Module 2 pages 2-22 to 2-26](#)) can be used to teach strategies such as TAPS or COPS.

Students gain independence when they develop strategies for proofreading their own work. It is important that we teach how to proofread by modelling and through practice. It is also important to determine what strategy works for each student and to ensure we provide opportunities to use those strategies until mastered so that they can be applied in a variety of contexts.

Support for Editing through Instruction

- Teach students how to use the spell-check feature using the procedural strategy CHECK (Check the beginning of the word, Hunt for the correct consonants, Examine the vowels, Changes in suggested words may give hints, Keep repeating previous steps) when editing work on the computer.
- Teach how to use the grammar check program on word processor software such as Microsoft® Word or Ginger Software (see www.gingersoftware.com/grammarcheck).
- Model thinking and reasoning by explaining each procedure in the editing process.
- Provide students opportunities to edit their own work in chunks with specific goals.
- Avoid red marks and negative comments.
- Provide students with a checklist of mechanical skills.
- Teach students about editing marks.

Supporting Editing through Rehearsal and Practice

- Frequently model how to edit using a think aloud strategy.
- Provide frequent opportunities for students to edit teacher prepared material to practice this skill.
- Scaffold the editing stage until the student can do a section independently.

Supporting Editing through Assistive Technology

Encourage students to use a word processor such as Microsoft® Word from the start of the writing, not at the end of the editing stage.

- Encourage students to use features such as track changes and editing marks.

Assessment Strategies to Support Editing

- Encourage students to revisit older writing samples to see the progress they have made in their writing.
- Recognize that every piece of writing doesn't have to be edited; only those that the teacher and student jointly determine should be completed to 'publication'.

Module Summary

Students with writing disabilities can have difficulties with all aspects of writing. Writing instruction should be an integral and meaningful part of the curriculum in all subject areas. Instructional methods that include direct instruction, strategy instruction, and rehearsal and practice are effective approaches to support students with writing disabilities, and benefit all students. The process-orientated approach to writing instruction in the content areas helps students with learning disabilities generalize strategies across curricular areas. Educators need to recognize that, at some point, an educational decision may need to be made as a team to reduce the focus on direct instruction and to identify the adaptations, the assistive technology and the other compensatory strategies that the student needs to master in order to facilitate a successful transition to post-school life.

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Troia, Gary A. (Editor). *Instruction and Assessment for Struggling Writers: Evidence Based Practices*. New York, NY: Guilford Press. 2009.

Recommended links

- Learning Disabilities Association of America at <http://ldaamerica.org/educators/>
- American Federation of Teachers at www.aft.org/
- Center for Applied Special Technology (CAST) at www.cast.org/index.html#VlzAp0CFO70
- AccessSTEM at www.washington.edu/doit/programs/accessstem/overview

- Learning Through Listening (RFB&D) at www.rfbd.org/
- CAST at www.cast.org/learningtools/index.html
- homepages.wmich.edu/~acareywe/engl479sum11.html
- Cognitive Strategy Instruction Teaching Strategy: University of Nebraska Lincoln at <http://cehs.unl.edu/csi/>
- Self-Regulation at <http://cehs.unl.edu/csi/>
- How to Teach a Teenager with a Learning Disability How to Spell at www.ehow.com/how_11461_teach-teenager-with.html#ixzzlmzU93Et6
- Memory and Children with Learning Disabilities at www.education.com/reference/article/memory-children-learning/

Appendix 4-A

Transcription Skills: Handwriting

Supporting Handwriting through Instruction

- Model paper positioning, pencil grip, and letter and word formation.
- Provide directional arrow cues with numbered directions for tracing letters.
- Provide paper with raised lines to act as a sensory guide.
- Provide paper positioning marks on students' desks.
- Emphasize letters that are difficult to form, such as: *a, j, k, n, q, u, z* and those that are frequently reversed.
- Have students say the names of letters as they write them.
- Use strategies to support memory, such as: look, cover, and visualize the letter; then write, check for accuracy, and say the letter.
- Have the student practise writing letters from memory and circle letters that represent student's best work (develops student's ability to self-monitor handwriting skills).
- Experiment with different utensils and media.
- Have student practise writing letters and numbers in different sizes with different media.
- Use outlines of letters to create characters (pictograms) Ensure students have daily practise writing letters and words.
- Some school divisions have adopted a Handwriting without Tears program for younger students (evidence-based strategies to improve handwriting).
- Support the development of fluency and speed by giving the student frequent opportunities to practise composition.
- Allow the use of a word processor to complete tests.
- Accept point form answers or a completed graphic organizer for assignments/tests.
- Consider a take-home test if extra time is required.
- Allow oral testing (may be required on occasion or for portions of the test).

Cursive versus Manuscript?

There are benefits to teaching both cursive and manuscript to beginning writers. Because of the relative simplicity and legibility of manuscript, as well as its use in printed texts, manuscript is often a better option for beginners. When carefully taught, it can lessen problems with writing.

Benefits of manuscript for beginners include the following:

- It is more familiar.
- It has fewer fine motor movements.

Benefits of cursive (or toward cursive) for beginners include the following:

- Reduces problems between word spacing.
- Avoids letter reversals.
- Trains kinesthetic memory.
- Eliminates need for transition from manuscript to cursive.

(Graham, Harris, & Fink, 2000)

Transcription Skills: Spelling

According to stage (or phase) theory, children develop spelling skills over time. As they progress they make certain types of errors at each stage. It is important, therefore, for educators to focus on the types of errors students are making rather than the fact that they are making errors. Error analysis can help educators understand the reasons students are making mistakes and identify the skills students need to become better spellers. Classroom quizzes, writing assignments and tests can be meaningful sources for error analysis.

Invented spelling serves as a transitional step between reading and writing. Spelling is closely linked to reading because reading involves breaking apart a spoken word and encoding the sounds into corresponding letters. Invented spelling allows children to gain phonemic awareness and practise applying the alphabetic principle.

Sousa, David A. 2007.

Supporting Spelling through Instruction

- Use word study programs that incorporate a developmentally appropriate approach. These can be found in books like *Words Their Way: Word Study for Phonics, Vocabulary and Spelling Instruction* and the Making Words Series (*Making Words; Making More Words; Making Big Words*).
- Chunk words: Word chunking is a strategy that involves breaking words into smaller, easily remembered parts. Single syllable words can be chunked (great: gr/ea/t) as well as multi-syllable words (fantastic: fan/tas/tic). Encourage the student to look for and think about smaller words within large words (“fan” in fantastic). Point out similarities among words and letter groupings (great is a “gr” word and an “ea” word).
- Make word families: This is a visual strategy that allows students to see word similarities by listing them together in “families.” Make a large chart in the classroom and add new words as you discover them. If a student is struggling with a particular word combination, make a chart for that word family.
- Use a hands-on approach to spelling. Many children with writing disabilities have difficulty with oral spelling; as such interactive spelling exercises can improve retention. Use word tiles, magnetic letters, flash, cards and other visual aids to make spelling hands-on and interactive.
- Use games like Scrabble and Spill and Spell to strengthen spelling accuracy in a fun way.
- Teach students to understand spelling rules. Use direct instruction to teach spelling rules and have students look at correctly and incorrectly spelled words to determine which rule applies and whether the rule is applied correctly.
- Encourage students to keep and use a personal dictionary of frequently misspelled words.
- Have the students use a computer, electronic spell-check, and/or word-prediction software such as *Write Outloud* (which also has a homonym checker).
- Allow students frequent opportunities to practise spelling.
- Encourage reading to support both spelling and reading difficulties. To that end, have students choose material that is interesting to them.
- Read with the students, have the students listen to books on tape.
- Do not penalize the students for spelling errors on tests and assignments.
- Allow the students to use a computer and spell-check for assignments and tests.

Before/During/After (BDA) Strategy Process for teaching the use of a graphic organizer

The following BDA process can be used with strategies such as webs or maps. It should be used to emphasize the organization, clarification, and elaboration of ideas rather than the mechanical aspects of writing.

What Teachers Do Before, During and After (BDA)	What Students Do Before, During and After (BDA)
<p style="text-align: center;">Before</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Select a specific writing task. ■ Prepare a Smartboard, overhead transparency, or paper chart with possible ideas and information on the topic (e.g., point form notes for a report on the effects of global warming in a specific geographic region). ■ Model the process of making connections (e.g., draw arrows, circle, number, colour code). ■ Use a graphic organizer like webs or maps to group the information into meaningful clusters. ■ Teach students to use computer programs that generate graphic organizers (e.g., Inspiration or Kidspiration software). 	<p style="text-align: center;">Before</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Recall what you already know about the topic. ■ Add to your own notes and make connections. ■ Note the links and connections the teacher makes with ideas and information. Consider similarities and differences in your own thinking. ■ Use a graphic organizer that works for you to record and organize your thinking.
<p style="text-align: center;">During</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Ask students to contribute to the class generated web by identifying important ideas and key information and suggesting how to place points to create a web. ■ Use probing questions to stimulate their thinking and model how to put the ideas onto the web. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ What is the main idea? ■ What does this mean? ■ Is this important? Why? ■ What are the patterns and trends? ■ What evidence is missing? ■ Is a particular viewpoint evident? ■ How are the ideas connected? ■ Model for students how to use the web to create an outline or template for writing a first draft. Help them identify subtopics, headings, and structure by exploring the connections and relationships on the web. 	<p style="text-align: center;">During</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Contribute to the discussion. ■ Note similarities and differences in responses. ■ Suggest headings and sub-topics.
<p style="text-align: center;">After</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Provide students with a web to sort and organize their ideas and information for practice. ■ Consider having students who are writing on similar topics work in pairs to create a web for their shared notes. Some students may prefer to use sticky notes, while others may prefer to cut and paste notes to the web. ■ Ask students to study their webs and use them to create an outline for writing. 	<p style="text-align: center;">After</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Reread notes and identify important information and ideas. ■ Use question prompts from the “during” section (above) to re-phrase notes, identify key points, and group ideas and information to create your own web or a partner-group web. ■ Share and compare webs. ■ Explore the connection between the web and possible ways of organizing information for writing.

Supporting Revision: Before, During and After (BDA) Process for Revising with a Partner

The following BDA process can be used with strategies such as the TAPS strategy; it should be used to emphasize organization, clarification, and the elaboration of ideas rather than the mechanical aspects of writing.

What Teachers Do Before, During and After (BDA)	What Students Do Before, During and After (BDA)
<p style="text-align: center;">Before</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Determine students' previous experience with the revision process. ■ Introduce and discuss the strategy you have selected for revising or editing. ■ Discuss the importance of the strategy you are introducing. (Point out that all professional writers have editors who help them). ■ Provide direct instruction regarding the "how," "why," and "when" of the strategy. ■ Use a writing sample based on the assigned subject area to model the strategy. ■ Prepare a Smartboard, overhead, or paper copy of the writing sample. 	<p style="text-align: center;">Before</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Listen to the teacher read the writing sample or assignment and follow along on your printed copy. ■ Look and listen for areas of confusion or concern in the writing sample.
<p style="text-align: center;">During</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Put students in groups. ■ Explain each of the steps and the thinking processes that are involved. ■ Make statements/ask questions such as <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ "What do I have to do next?" (defining focus) ■ "That is the first step, now for the second step I have to..." (self-regulation) ■ "I think I succeeded in making the descriptions better" (self-reinforcement and reflection). ■ Use the strategy and plan for maintenance until each student knows the steps from memory. ■ Provide guided practise and opportunities to rehearse. Have students take turns being editors for their peers. Provide whatever support they need to use the strategy appropriately. 	<p style="text-align: center;">During</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Offer suggestions about areas of confusion or concern. ■ Exchange writing drafts with your partner or other group member. ■ Repeat the procedures modeled by the teacher.
<p style="text-align: center;">After</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Support independent learning by fading the supports as each pair of students becomes proficient at using the strategy. ■ Have the student practise independently. Provide feedback and review as necessary. Generalize/apply the strategies to other situations and writing tasks in the content areas. 	<p style="text-align: center;">After</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Revise your own writing drafts based on your partner's prompts and questions. ■ Use the strategy in your independent work whenever possible.

Adapted from: Ontario Ministry of Education. *Think Literacy: Cross-curricular Approaches, Grades 7-12*. Toronto, Ontario: Ontario Ministry of Education, 2003. <http://edu.gov.on.ca/eng/studentssuccess/thinkliteracy/files/writing.pdf>.