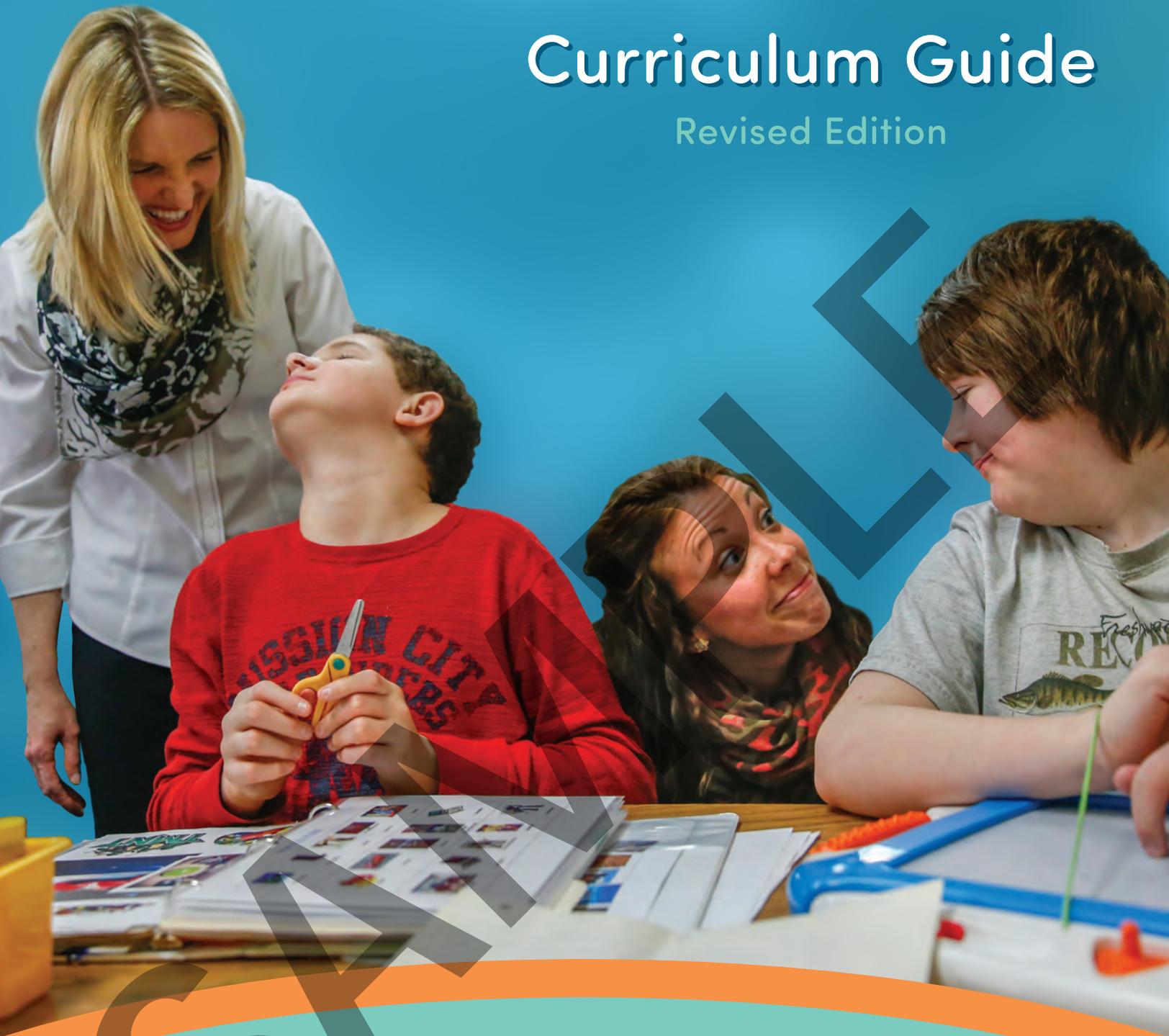


Curriculum Guide

Revised Edition



First Author™

by Building Wings

Janet Sturm, PhD, CCC-SLP, BCS-CL, ASHA-F



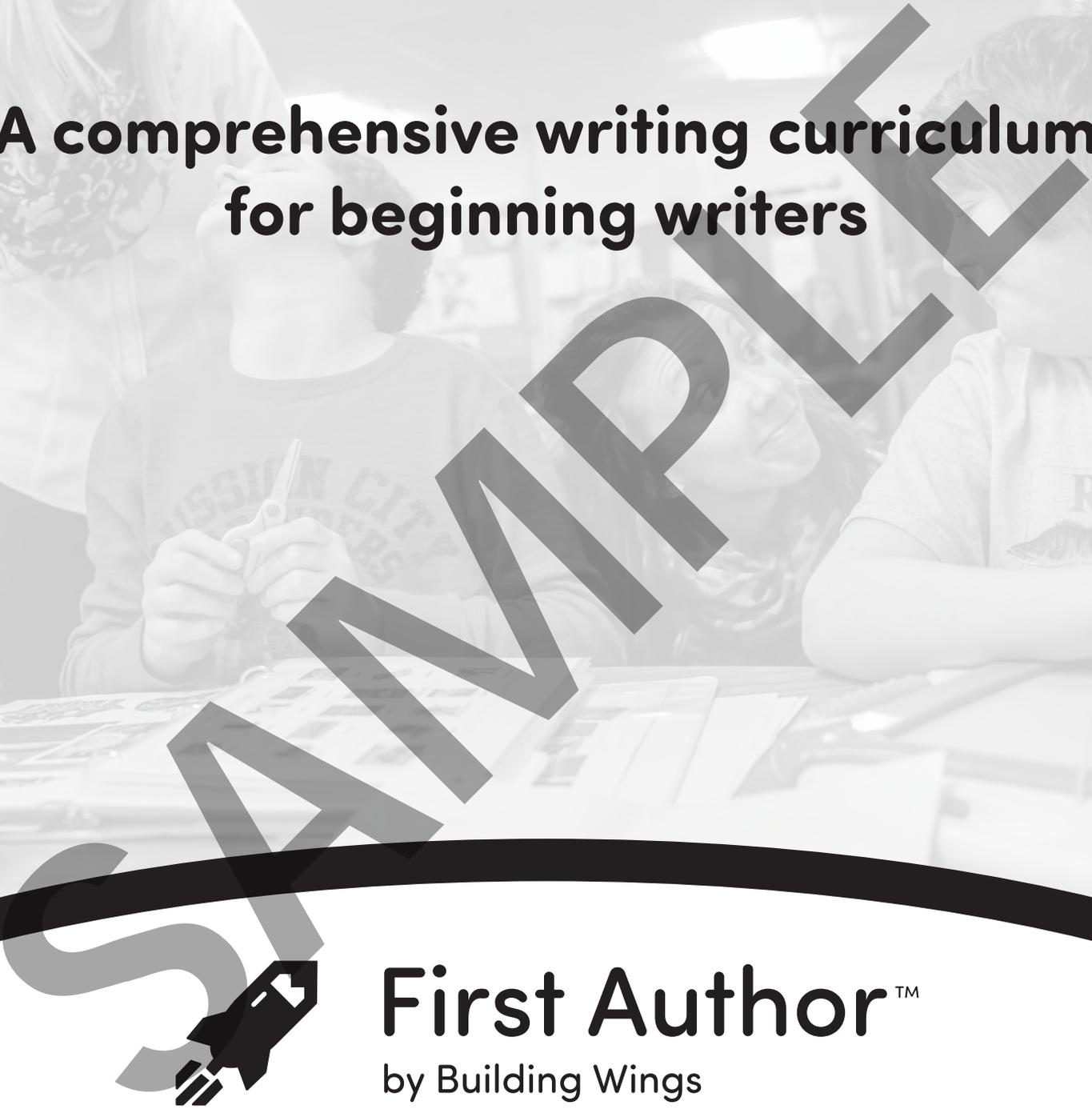
Building Wings™
How ALL learners soar

SAMPLE

Curriculum Guide

Revised Edition

**A comprehensive writing curriculum
for beginning writers**



First Author™

by Building Wings

Janet Sturm, PhD, CCC-SLP, BCS-CL, ASHA-F



Building Wings™
How ALL learners soar

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How ALL learners soar

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WHAT'S INCLUDED IN *FIRST AUTHOR* WRITING CURRICULUM



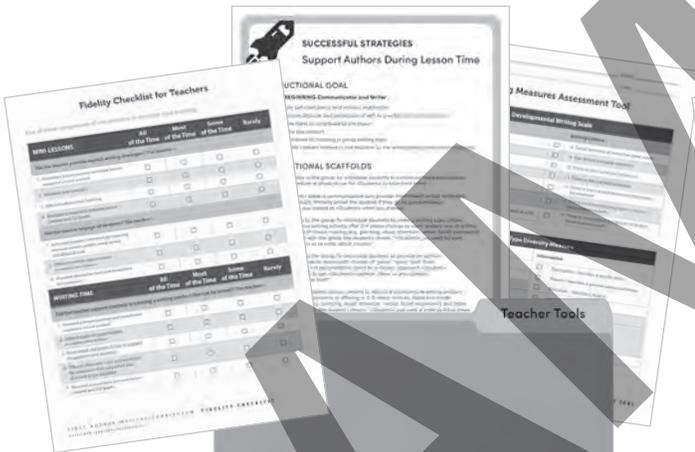
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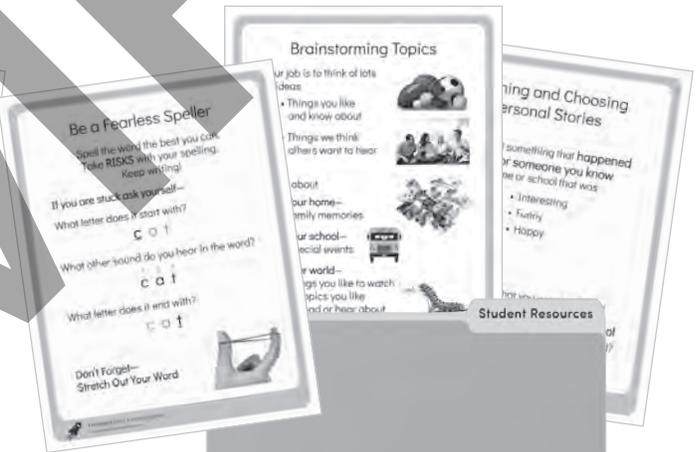
Writing Measures



First Author Lessons
and Tip Sheets



Teacher Tools



Student Resources

Posters



Teacher Resource USB



- Teacher Tools and Forms
- Student Tip Sheets
- Posters
- Parent Letters
- Awards and Certificates
- Toolkit Binder Tabs

OVERVIEW

First Author Writing Curriculum is a comprehensive, classroom-tested writing curriculum for beginning writers. It was designed to provide explicit daily instruction in both writing, and speaking and listening that is grounded in early writing development. **First Author Writing Curriculum** draws from practices of writing instruction that have been scientifically-derived. (See Table 1 in the Appendix for a summary of the evidence-based foundation of the **First Author Writing Curriculum**.)

Research Support

A beginning writer is one who is learning to use written language to express communicative intent, and beginning writing is defined as starting with emergent writing (drawing, scribbling, and writing letters) and ending with conventional writing abilities, usually acquired by second or third grade for typically developing children.

(Sturm, Cali, Nelson, & Staskowski, 2012, p. 299)

This curriculum was designed with consideration for Universal Design for Learning (UDL) to offer instructional supports and accommodations that support students with complex instructional needs including those with:

- Mild to complex learning needs
- Intellectual disabilities
- Autism spectrum disorders
- Physical disabilities
- Complex communication needs

First Author Writing Curriculum is comprised of three key components that are part of the instructional framework.

Lesson Time emphasizes a target concept for the day and contains an easy set of steps to deliver the lesson. First Author Lessons are intended to be repeated with variety over time to foster student independence in use of writing strategies.

Writing Time offers each student an opportunity to write about a self-selected topic and create a writing product that can be shared.

Author's Chair provides students with a crucial learning environment where they share their writing. Students learn to value writing as communication with others.

First Author Writing Curriculum draws upon principles of cognitive strategy instruction. Lesson Time is a time to introduce the concept, provide modeling, and offer guided, collaborative learning opportunities. Writing Time and Author's Chair offer repeated, guided opportunities to practice lesson concepts and foster generalization.

This curriculum provides a comprehensive group of measurement tools to assess and monitor small increments in students' development of writing, communication, and behavior. The **First Author Writing Measures** were developed to be valid, reliable, and easy to use. These writing quantity and quality measures offer educators tools to assess and monitor progress, inform instruction, and celebrate even the smallest gains in written language for beginning writers of all ages.

The **Student Accomplishments for Communication and Classroom Behavior** tool was designed to support educators in demonstrating the positive changes that occur not only in students' ability to engage in successful interactions, but also their overall capacity to regulate their behavior successfully in the classroom.



Research Support

Use of varied approaches, which integrates process-based approaches with strategy instruction and includes writing skill and text structure instruction, is one of ten essential components of best practices of writing instruction.

Troia, 2014

FIRST AUTHOR WRITING CURRICULUM COMPONENTS

First Author Writing Curriculum is a process-based writing instructional approach. It is paired with cognitive strategy instruction and social interaction training. This is accomplished through extensive modeling and collaborative, constructive learning.

Students communicate and write through all components of instruction and learn that writers compose texts to make meaning with others (Sturm, 2012b). Writing is also viewed as an in-the-head process where students learn to become strategic thinkers, monitor their cognitive resources, and self-regulate during the writing process.

Important!

What is Cognitive Strategy Instruction?

Cognitive strategy instruction teaches students explicit and systematic steps to engage in all aspects of the writing process (planning, composing, and revising) (Graham, 2006; Graham & Perin, 2007). It is embedded into an instructional approach and includes the following features that were described by Harris and Graham (1996):

- Introduction of the strategy
- Discussion of goals and purposes
- Modeling of the strategy
- Guided practice feedback
- Independent performance and generalization

Mastery of strategy steps is accomplished by providing students Tip Sheets that offer scaffolds for strategic, skilled thinking, and by offering repeated opportunities to employ the strategy in meaningful contexts.

Lesson Time

The purpose of each First Author Lesson is to provide students with explicit instruction. Lessons are repeated with variety to build student skills and foster independent performance and generalization.

During the focused 5-15 minute lesson, principles of cognitive strategy instruction are utilized to systematically target concepts. Start each lesson by asking enthusiastically, “Who in here is an Author?” Pass out the Tip Sheet that provides pictures and text content support, reinforces attention, and facilitates processing of information.

“ When I first started this writing program I thought well, yeah, okay, good ... but now ... I would never have thought, after 30 something years of teaching, that some of the kids you are getting to write, were capable of writing.

Sue Courington, Classroom Teacher, April 10, 2008



As the lesson begins students are provided with a strategy description and the goals and purposes for the day. Opportunities for guided practice and feedback of lesson concepts are an essential part of each lesson. Educators model “think-alouds” that demonstrate communication and writing skills. They also role play to illustrate core concepts (e.g., good listening).

Students are active participants by:

- Voting on lesson content (e.g., choosing the topic to write about that day)
- Giving feedback during role playing activities (e.g., providing input on the quality of the behavior being targeted such as eye contact)
- Acting as collaborative contributors to co-constructed writing products (e.g., writing a plan for the future)

Writing Time

Writing Time is held immediately following Lesson Time. The learning goal of this component is to support students in producing a writing product that can be shared with others. Students have meaningful opportunities to apply new writing skills and ownership of their writing is fostered by supporting students in using self-selected topics and text types.

During Writing Time students are divided into small work groups where they vary in writing ability. Each student is provided with essential or specialized writing tools that support them in ease of text production. For example, a student who is unable to use a pencil to form letters is provided access to the alphabet through a laminated alphabet board or through computer tools. For any beginning writer, drawing often serves as the planning phase. Because many beginning writers cannot use words to tell educators their topic or draw a recognizable drawing they are offered accommodations through individualized photo images (more on this later).

By the end of each writing session the goal is for each student to have a photo image or drawing and a writing product that can be shared with the group.

Research Support

Effective writing instructional programs provide daily times for students to write. Through extensive practice, students gain the skills and strategies needed to become effective writers and gain confidence in their writing abilities.

From What Works Clearinghouse—Teaching Elementary Students to Become Effective Writers (Graham et al., 2012)

Author's Chair

The instructional focus of Author's Chair is to provide students with an opportunity to read (or have a chosen reader share) what he or she has written. Authors give feedback to others and celebrate writing. The Author's Chair is considered a place of honor. There are lots of ways for students and teachers to collaborate together to create a unique Author's Chair for the classroom:

- A special chair
- A special quilt (squares created by students)
- A special arch (students can sit under) or backdrop

Author's Chair is held weekly and students can choose to share their best or favorite writing for that week. Immediately after the student shares his or her writing he or she asks the group, "Any questions or comments?" Peers and educators take turns (three speakers per Author) communicating with the Author. Involvement of all students is promoted by—

- Use a Talking Stick to help students know whose turn it is to talk
- Use an Author Board (or pocket chart) set up by the Author's Chair to state the writing topic or the text type

Author's Chair provides opportunities for students with a range of abilities to find common ground (e.g., I love race cars. You and I have that in common), use a public speaking voice, foster communication skills (e.g., use eye contact or engage in multiple communicative turns on a single topic), and develop their love of writing. With accommodations and instructional scaffolds all students are able to be successful.

The Author's Chair is decorated by the students with ideas generated collaboratively by the group. Some ideas for decorating include:

- Using photos of the students (laminated or ironed on special fabric)
- Voting on color choices and spray painting a wooden chair
- Affixing glitter, gems, ribbon, pompoms or other craft materials
- Adding drawings (e.g., on special fabric for a quilt)
- Using stickers representing favorite topics

Author Conference

Occasionally following Lesson Time or Writing Time, an Author Conference is held with students. After Lesson Time, an Author Conference is used to support lesson objectives and enable a small student group to apply concepts with adult support. An Author Conference can also be conducted after Writing Time to discuss writing goals and achievements and provide feedback on the student's writing process or product.



Author's Chair is the "carrot!"

During Author's Chair students quickly learn that writing is something we share with others. Students will look to see who has their hand up to make a comment or ask a question. Students enjoy being the center of attention and have everyone focus on what they have to share! Even if it is a tough day at school students often show you their best selves during Author's Chair.

**QUICK
Tip**

CREATING A CULTURE OF WRITERS

A central principle of the social interactive, process-based approach emphasizes that all students are Authors and everyone in a classroom is also a writing teacher. Educators' positive perceptions about students, and their capabilities, optimize what can be achieved in your classroom.

- During Lesson Time, educators use strategies to draw every student in as an active participant, including those with complex communication needs.
- During Writing Time, all students are reminded to “Choose a topic that you want to share in your writing” and “Think about what you want to write and share during Author’s Chair.” Talking with your students using this type of language supports understanding of writing as a form of communication, builds their understanding that people write to share their writing with others, and develops knowledge about writing for specific audiences.
- During Author’s Chair, all aspects of a student’s writing product are shared and praised. For example, a more capable student who has a new topic or text type to share should be praised for this accomplishment. Another student may share a writing product that contains a photo, some scribbles with a pencil, and random letters of the alphabet. Peers and educators might praise this student for choosing a new topic, using their pencil to fill the page with scribbles, or choosing lots of letters of the alphabet to share in his or her writing.

In the ***First Author Writing Curriculum*** both student peers and the adults in the classroom help celebrate individual student accomplishments in writing as well as speaking and listening. One of the most exciting aspects of the ***First Author Writing Curriculum*** is watching your students learn and grow. Educators in the classroom will begin to notice the sometimes subtle changes in students (e.g., the student was calm and stayed in the Author’s Chair) in addition to occasional greater leaps forward (e.g., the student wrote his or her first simple sentence or cohesive paragraph).

One way to develop your lens for identifying accomplishments is to discuss “**special moments**” for the day with other adults in the room and **record them on a notepad**. If you are on your own, keep the notepad nearby and record your observations as you see them happening. You might also spend five minutes at the end of a writing session to record quick notes about the gains observed in your students each day.

Celebrating new skills in speaking, listening and writing across all aspects of your writing instruction increases students' perceptions of themselves as writers by highlighting what they did right, helping students internalize the skills that result in independent performance and generalization. Some examples of students' speaking, listening and writing accomplishments might include:

- Purposefully pointed to multiple letters on an alphabet board for the first time when asked to "Show me the letters you want to share in your writing today."
- Wrote an intelligible letter
- Wrote a new text type today—it was a fictional narrative
- Wrote a new topic today—it was about beaches
- Wrote her first intelligible word and it was a label of a picture
- Made a spontaneous on-topic comment
- Made an on-topic comment and told why they liked their peer's writing
- Initiated turn-taking by spontaneously raising his hand for the first time
- After praising an Author using a speech generating device, spoke aloud the words (e.g., said, "cool")
- While in the Author's Chair, eagerly looked up to see who wanted to make a comment and pointed to the peer

QUICK Tip

Have fun referring to your students as "Authors" throughout a writing session. For example, if students are interrupting a student writer, jump in using a fun tone of voice saying, "Don't interrupt the Author! He has more great ideas to get on his paper." Referring to students as Authors who have something important to share builds their self-perceptions as writers.



Be Fearless and Joyful

Students are perceptive—they know when you are enjoying what is happening in the classroom. Teaching writing is not easy for any educator and implementing a daily writing curriculum for beginning writers who struggle may feel daunting. Create a culture that empowers learners by being fearless and joyful and letting your students feel your excitement for them as they embark on a journey as Authors.

Challenge Your Students and Keep Them Safe

Writing is hard, even for skilled writers. Students who struggle with writing may have developed negative perceptions about themselves as writers. Regularly remind each student that they are smart and capable. Tell students that to become a better writer that they need to write and keep on writing. When students are partners in the learning process, and are challenged but kept safe, they will often exceed our expectations! It is important that educators identify the individual barriers to the writing process for each student and set clear expectations that foster student growth in writing and in speaking and listening.

OLD ASSUMPTIONS AND NEW PERSPECTIVES

Students with developmental disabilities need access to high-quality instruction from the first day of school to optimize potential for literacy learning and provide access to the power of writing (Sturm, 2012a). Implementing the **First Author Writing Curriculum**, educational teams should view all students as Authors who have the potential to share and communicate with others.

Success of the **First Author Writing Curriculum** is enhanced when educational teams **reflect** on past practices of instruction for students with disabilities that has focused on functional drill and practice skills such as copying, tracing, and worksheets and **challenge** assumptions that may inhibit student performance. The following table provides a brief overview of these assumptions and some new perspectives to consider.

TABLE 2**Old Assumptions and New Perspectives on Students with Developmental Disabilities**

OLD ASSUMPTIONS	NEW PERSPECTIVES
<p>ASSUMPTION 1</p> <p>Students should show prerequisite literacy skills such as letter formation, phonemic or phonological awareness, or sound symbol connections.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Exposure to the alphabet through meaningful writing opportunities facilitates the acquisition of early literacy skills.
<p>ASSUMPTION 2</p> <p>Reading skills occur before writing skills.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Through repeated meaningful writing opportunities, writing skills may be observed in students with complex learning needs before reading skills.
<p>ASSUMPTION 3</p> <p>Conventional writing is not possible.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Research has shown that students with significant disabilities can make positive gains in writing when provided with consistent, strategy-based instruction.
<p>ASSUMPTION 4</p> <p>Early writing should be conventional.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Typically developing children write hundreds, if not thousands of times before becoming conventional writers. Students with complex instructional needs may require even more meaningful opportunities to write.
<p>ASSUMPTION 5</p> <p>For students with complex learning needs, writing skills will be acquired if we teach them in simple, isolated tasks.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The cognitive, in-the-head process of learning to read and write is the same for all individuals. Students with complex learning needs need access to frequent, high-quality, explicit instruction that fosters the central goal of writing—to communicate and share with others through text.
<p>ASSUMPTION 6</p> <p>Older students cannot acquire writing skills.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Adults with complex learning needs who are introduced to systematic writing instruction are developing conventional writing skills.

OLD ASSUMPTIONS

NEW PERSPECTIVES

ASSUMPTION 7

Spoken communication isn't needed during writing.

- Beginning readers frequently read aloud during sustained silent reading because they have not yet developed their inner voice.
- Likewise, typically developing students are often communicating and sharing during independent writing time.
- Students with complex learning needs need accommodations that support them in communicating throughout all components of writing.

ASSUMPTION 8

Symbol writing (pictographic writing systems) leads to conventional writing.

- Research evidence does not exist demonstrating that writing with symbols is a necessary developmental first step supporting the development of writing skills for students with complex learning needs.
- There is also no research evidence indicating that student instruction focused on “writing” with pictographic symbols supports the development of writing with the sounds of one’s language.
- Use of symbols adds cognitive load as students must process both the pictographic symbol and the text labels.
- Using a pictographic symbol set may restrict the range of words and topics a student can compose.
- Pictographic writing systems do not provide students with essential, repeated opportunities to use individual letters to inventively spell and learn the sounds of language.

ASSUMPTION 9

Work on fine motor skills leads to conventional writing skills.

- Many students with disabilities have lifelong fine motor constraints that inhibit the ability to produce legible text with ease.
- Work on fine motor skills is not a writing curriculum.
- Fine motor activities (e.g., copying and tracing) do not enable students to learn that writing is a form of communication.
- Accommodations that support students with ease of access to the alphabet are crucial to developing beginning writing skills.

What attitudes and beliefs do you have about your students that match the old assumptions? What new perspectives are you thinking about?

