Effective Writing

Composing consists of joining bits of information into relationships, many of which have never existed until the composer utters them. Simply by writing—that is, by composing information—you become aware of the connections you make, and you thereby know more than you knew before starting to write. In its broadest sense, knowledge is an awareness of relationships among pieces of information. As you compose, your new knowledge is your awareness of those relationships.

———ALBERT DOUGLASS VAN NOSTRAND, "Writing and the Generation of Knowledge"

In good literacy programs, writing is as important as reading. Although students learn and practice much of the knowledge and many skills related to effective writing in English language arts classes, fourth and fifth graders also should be writing in history, science, and mathematics (Guthrie et al., 2004; Halliday & Martin, 1993; Levstik & Barton, 2005; Whitin & Whitin, 2000).

A Perspective for Writing: Processes and Strategies

As with reading, there are a range of literary strategies and devices, as well as specific knowledge and habits, that are prime ingredients of an effective writing program. Our discussion of the knowledge and skills that

students need to become effective writers reflects both research and classroom practice.

In this chapter, we discuss the individual habits and practices that make writing a dynamic collection of processes. And we show how fourth and fifth graders use writing strategies that add style to what they write as they help readers make sense of what they have written.

Setting the Stage: Context, Purpose, and Audience

All writing takes place within a *context* that influences what the writer says and how he says it. Context includes the writer, the audience (person or persons with whom the writer communicates), and the situation for the writing (Britton, 1997; Halliday & Hasan, 1989; Prior, 1998). Awareness of context benefits students' writing because it helps them consider who they want to communicate with, what information they want to convey, and how to communicate that information effectively.

The context for a research paper, for example, is shaped by the assignment: the number of references required, the topic to be addressed, the format of the report, and so on (Langer, 1986; McGinley, 1992; McGinley & Tierney, 1989; Newell, 1984; Prior, 1998, 2006). The context for a research paper assigned in history will include students' understanding about the quality of work expected by the history teacher; the knowledge structure of history as a discipline, including the importance of perspective and validity of sources; and the time constraints imposed by the teacher. The context for a research paper assigned in an English class, however, will differ. Students will consider the English teacher's expectations related to quality, the time constraints set by this teacher, the knowledge structure of literary criticism, and the teacher's stylistic preferences.

Writers write for many *purposes*. They write to persuade, to inform, to express, and to entertain. They write to plan and to learn. In school, students frequently write as a means of displaying an understanding of content, a facility with language, or an understanding of a literary form or genre (Britton, Burgess, Martin, McLeod, & Rosen, 1975; Kinneavy, 1980; Moffett, 1968).

Whatever their purpose, however, writers always take into account the *audience* for their text (Britton el al., 1975; Kinneavy, 1980; Moffett & Wagner,

1976). In school, the audience is often the teacher, but students benefit from the opportunity to write for audiences beyond the teacher. For instance, a fifth grader who wants to recommend a favorite book to readers might write a review of the book that will be published on the school or class website. In this case, she writes for her peers as well as for the larger audience of people who can access the website, including the school community, family members, and the public, which is likely an unknown audience. As she drafts and crafts her piece, she must keep in mind that her audience includes people who may not be familiar with her interests, her reasons for writing, the author, or the text. She will draw on her knowledge of the book review genre and her awareness of audience to help her shape her piece.

Writing Processes: Individual Habits and Practices

Writers actually develop several *processes* rather than a single fixed process for writing. The particular process they employ at any given time depends on the context for the piece they are working to produce (Atwell, 1987, 1998; Berkenkotter, Huckin, & Ackerman, 1988; Calkins, 1994; Graves & Kittle, 2005; Portalupi & Fletcher, 2001). Students develop their writing processes through their different experiences as writers. They may also learn about the processes of their favorite writers and use that knowledge to experiment. For example, they might mimic a writer who starts with a quickwrite to get ideas down on paper and discover a perspective rather than with more typical planning activities. And they develop habits that support their writing, such as writing daily and using published pieces as models for their own work (Jenkins, 1999; Kamberelis & Bovino, 1999).

As writing assignments become more challenging in the upper elementary grades, students need to develop more sophisticated processes for meeting different academic demands. They must learn how to go from writing assignments in which they are asked to explore what they know to longer, summative assignments that require lengthier or more elaborate writing processes, such as research papers and on-demand writing.

In school, writing asks that students be competent using the standard process approach (planning,

drafting, revising, editing), using an on-demand process, and using a set of processes to develop a research paper. All these approaches to writing vary widely among writers, and all three are most likely recursive in nature.

Process Writing: What's Involved

PLANNING: GETTING READY TO WRITE

Planning is crucial to producing an effective piece of writing (Flower & Hayes, 1981; Graves, 2003). During the planning stage, writers consider the context, purpose, audience, and genre for their piece, and they think hard about the subject of their writing. They consider whether they know enough about their topic to have something worthwhile to say. Often, the planning stage necessitates gathering information about the topic to find answers to questions such as these: Is my subject too broad? How can I expand or narrow my focus to make it manageable? How do I develop a big question that centers my writing?

DRAFTING: ROUGHING OUT IDEAS AND INFORMATION

Once they have a tentative plan for a piece, writers can begin to get ideas down on paper. They can rough out a draft that conforms to some genre expectations and contains the main chunks of information that they want to convey to readers. The process of putting an initial draft on paper gives writers the opportunity to see where they need to clarify their own thinking, perhaps by gathering more information about the topic or talking with others about the strengths and weaknesses of the piece as drafted (Atwell, 1987, 1998; Calkins, 1994; Gillet & Beverly, 2001; Graves, 2003; Graves & Kittle, 2005; Routman, 2005).

Writers' processes for drafting will vary depending on the subject area and genre. In science, for instance, the teacher might provide a table of contents for students to use as an organizing structure to present information they have learned. To write a position paper in English language arts, writers might plan the piece by developing a graphic organizer with the features of that genre. Or they might draw a timeline as a way to structure a fictional narrative. They then can refer to their organizer as they draft their pieces. (For more on writing in different academic subjects, Chapter 6.)

RESPONSE AND REVISING

Among the stages of the writing process, it is perhaps access to response from a reader that is most useful to a writer. The purpose of writing, after all, is the communication of ideas, emotions, and knowledge that the writer wants a reader to consider. As a result, writers are ever aware of their intended audience when they shape a piece, when they consider word choice, when they decide what to put in or leave out. Writing is intentional, and every decision counts if the author's message is to be well received and well understood by an audience.

Revising is a complex process. It is the writer's opportunity to reconsider everything about the writing so far, including topic choice and genre. Guided by responses from others, a writer may choose to reorganize a piece completely, to simply append a different ending, or to leave things as they are.

During the revision phase, writers should focus on big-picture issues, asking questions such as these (Atwell, 1987, 1998; Calkins, 1994; Calkins & Bleichman, 2003; Conner & Moulton, 2000; Graves & Kittle, 2005; Heard, 2002; Saddler, 2003; Scardamalia & Bereiter, 1986): Am I accomplishing my purpose for writing? Have I included enough information? Have I organized the piece effectively? Is the tone right? Do I need to clarify? Will people be able to understand my argument? Have I developed the characters enough? What about my lead?

EDITING

Good writers attend primarily to editing after they have addressed all the global revisions. When editing, writers review the piece for word choice and correctness of content and conventions. They check for ambiguous sentence structure, incorrect or missing words, spelling errors, and punctuation problems. Editing should be the final phase—otherwise, writers can become so concerned with correctness and language choices that they restrict what they write (Atwell, 1987, 1998; Calkins, 1994; Conner & Moulton, 2000; Gillet & Beverly, 2001; Graves, 2003; Graves & Kittle, 2005; Heard, 2002; Routman, 2005).

On-Demand Writing Processes

On-demand writing requires much planning, drafting, revising, and editing in a compressed and sometimes stressful amount of time. Students who have a good deal of experience as writers in less pressured, everyday circumstances have an advantage in on-demand

writing tasks (Shelton & Fu, 2004; Wolf & Wolf, 2002; Wollman-Bonilla, 2004). Although few writers are comfortable expressing themselves in a first-draft-is-final mode, there are times when such writing is required. In school, most essay tests are first-draft-is-final events, as are state writing tests, though some states allow brief time and extra paper for planning. The process for a first-draft-is-final event is truncated, but there can be a process nonetheless.

PLANNING FOR ON-DEMAND WRITING

To plan an on-demand piece, students must pay particular attention to what they are being asked to do. This means understanding a prompt or essay question and reading it carefully to determine what, if any, requirements it imposes. Some prompts specify a particular genre; others do not. Some specify information to include, such as "Be sure to include *enough details* so that your reader can envision the sequence of steps," or "Trace the *political significance* of the work," or "*Relate this piece to the period* which fostered its central premise." Planning must take into consideration all the requirements (Downing, 1995; Flower & Hayes, 1981; Hillocks, 2002).

DRAFTING FOR ON-DEMAND WRITING

In most on-demand situations, the writing time is limited, so writers should go into the drafting stage with an organizational structure in mind. To the extent possible, they should try to get things right the first time. The most important consideration in drafting is attending to organizing the writing so that it follows a structure that readers can understand. (Here is where genre knowledge and understanding of midlevel structures can be extremely helpful.) Students also should focus on the task as specified, addressing the prompt and not diverging from the topic. Niceties of language are not the primary concern, but clarity, coherence, and exactness count a good deal on the first—and only—draft (Heard, 2002).

REVISING FOR ON-DEMAND WRITING

Revising an on-demand piece should be concerned first with the quality of the content. The writer should make certain that the piece addresses the prompt and that the information is valid. Beyond addressing content, the writer should try to read through the work a final time to assess its total quality, perhaps adding a thought here or there and checking to make sure nothing of importance has been omitted. The writer should consider the intended audience and check to see whether there is enough text to build background understanding, the stance is appropriate, the tone is appropriate, and the major sections fit together logically and coherently.

EDITING FOR ON-DEMAND WRITING

Students should pay attention to the correctness of sentence structure, spelling, and punctuation.

Writing Processes for Research Projects

In the upper elementary grades, students write research-driven and term research reports on topics that relate to their curricular learning. Such assignments require students to gather information about a topic and then synthesize this information in writing. Students might write to answer questions about their favorite authors, such as "How has Kate DiCamillo's life influenced her writing?" Or they might write about topics they are learning in science, such as "How has the reintroduction of wolves to Yellowstone Park affected the park's ecosystem?" Students need to be taught—and taken through—the steps involved in such a project (Derewianka, 1998; Kuhlthau, 1993; McMackin & Siegel, 2002; Nelson & Hayes, 1988).

PLANNING AND DEVELOPING QUESTIONS

Students must be taught to generate an open-ended research question or a controlling idea (thesis) that is general enough to be significant but narrow enough to be realistic. Nelson and Hayes (1988) make a distinction between *content-driven* and *issue-driven* reporting. Content-driven writing takes its shape from the content collected during the research process (based on a prompt such as "Write a report about the Battle at Lexington"). Issue-driven writing responds to a controlling idea or "big" research question ("Who fired the first shot at the Battle of Lexington? Why is it a debatable question?").

Students can learn how to develop open-ended questions by formulating questions relevant to their lives ("How can we recycle paper in school?") Then they can brainstorm about how they might gather information to answer these questions.

Students need a significant amount of background knowledge about a topic to come up with a big research question or a thesis statement for their research. Students should have time and support as they work through this part of the research process because this exploratory stage is vital to the success of the investigation.

Ideally, students should have some say about their topic to truly engage with the content (Chandler-Olcott & Mahar, 2001; Kent, 1997). Some choice—even within a specified unit of study—is important.

CONDUCTING RESEARCH

Students need to articulate the main idea of their research before they begin collecting information. This doesn't mean they need to have preconceived notions of their conclusions, but rather that they know what they are trying to find out. If the topic isn't explicit, students often end up with a list of unrelated facts under predetermined categories, so they randomly include whatever facts they find in their research. When this happens, it's difficult for students to write cohesive and coherent reports. In addition, it's difficult for them to create a model of the research writing process that they can then transfer to other, similar situations.

According to Carol Kuhlthau (1993), researchers read in different ways at various points in this process. First, they read to get a general sense of the topic, to see if there is enough appropriate material available, and to generate a thesis or question. Once they have the research question or thesis, they revisit the texts with a focused goal in mind: to find answers or support for the thesis or question. Different skills are involved in each stage.

DRAFTING

Genre knowledge helps students in their planning and drafting because they can use their knowledge of the genre's structure to help them create an organizing framework for their pieces (Derewianka, 1998; Martin & Rothery, 1980, 1981).

If a student who is writing about Yellowstone Park knows that she wants to explain why reintroducing wolves to the park is important to conservationists, she can consider the claim–evidence–reasoning structure of explanation in the planning stages of her research before she even begins to collect information.

Knowing that she will use a claim–evidence–reasoning structure in her piece helps her draft her claim and guides her research. She knows what she's going to try to accomplish when she sets out to collect the information and how she might organize the information she finds to support her claim. As she finds information, she can begin to organize the ideas.

On the other hand, a student who knows before she begins to collect data that she will be comparing and contrasting conservationists' views and ranchers' views about wolves in Yellowstone Park will approach the task in a slightly different way. Students who haven't thought about text structure in the planning stages are often at a disadvantage when they begin to draft the report.

REVISING

As students complete a first draft of a research paper, they should see where they need to gather more information and reorganize and revise their writing to match their developing understanding of the topic at hand. Students should receive suggestions for revision from their teacher and peers. The thesis or open-ended research question should remind students what they want to say and how to say it. Students' genre knowledge helps them mold the structure and incorporate the features of the genre when they revise their pieces. Global revision that focuses on structure and big ideas should be the priority.

EDITING

After students address global issues, they can focus on grammar, punctuation, spelling, checking facts, and citing sources.

CITING SOURCES

Fourth and fifth graders need to understand why it's important to put information from sources in their own words and cite sources in a bibliography. Students do not know automatically how to put information from sources into their own words. Internet sources may be particularly seductive to young writers because it is so easy to cut and paste from an electronic file. Students must be taught to use information from sources to support *their* idea about the topic, and they must learn to paraphrase the information from sources and incorporate it into their pieces.

Writer Strategies:
Tools for Effective Writing

Fourth- and fifth-grade writers who have benefited from a strong K–3 writing program are, at the very least, familiar with several genres and can identify them by name. They understand the function of introductions and closings. They are aware that writing must be organized in such a way that readers can follow a story line or an argument structure or a compare–contrast format. They recognize the need for appropriate details, and they are mindful of sentence structure (Graves & Kittle, 2005; Heard, 2002; Pappas, Kiefer, & Levstik, 2006).

These writers likely have learned some writer strategies as well, although which strategies—and even the names for them—certainly will vary among writers and classrooms. There is no set list of "one size fits all" strategies for writing. Different strategies accomplish different purposes. Here we focus on a selection of strategies that writers use to make their writing clear and coherent for their potential audience; in other words, the strategies we describe are those that foster readers' understanding, that help them build a textbase and a rich mental model.

Writers typically employ genres and other predictable structures whose formats allow readers to follow a plot line or the development of ideas; they use cohesive devices to link sentences and paragraphs; they provide forecasting to give readers a roadmap of what is to follow; they create analogies to make the strange familiar; they employ precise word choice and details to create realistic people and situations or to help readers better understand information. All these strategies—and others routinely employed by writers—are characteristics of well-written prose. They keep us engaged and on track, and they are a hallmark of a writer who writes through a reader's eyes.

We are not suggesting that teachers label certain strategies as being important to help readers build a textbase and others as important to help readers construct a mental model. Many strategies serve both purposes. Teachers should simply build student awareness that making text intelligible is fundamental and that certain strategies are especially useful in accomplishing this purpose. The strategies that help readers build a textbase are those that make writing cohesive and coherent, make the writing flow, structure an argument, and follow a predictable format, genre, and midlevel structure. The strategies that help readers construct a mental model are those that make what is expressed resonate with readers (Halliday & Hasan, 1992) so that the text taps into readers' memories and knowledge base, allowing them to build a world (Kintsch, 1982).

The following samples of student work are illustrative of writing that is intentionally reader friendly. All come from students who have been part of a strong writing program for at least one year. They are in regular classes in schools with diverse student populations.

Writer Strategies That Help Readers Develop a Textbase

Some strategies used by writers to help readers link ideas appropriately include employing recognizable, familiar genres and midlevel structures; using signal words and cues to segment information, including paragraphing and punctuation; building a context for readers; addressing readers directly through forecasting; and creating cohesion among the sentences and coherence in the text as a whole. Even with all of these strategies, however, readers will need to make some inferences as they build a textbase, so simplicity and clarity of expression are essential. William Zinsser, author of the classic *On Writing Well* (1985), tells us, "The game is won or lost on hundreds of small details. Writing improves in direct ratio to the number of things we can keep out of it that shouldn't be there."

Genres and Midlevel Structures

Writers use genres as a means of organizing their thoughts and communicating effectively with their audiences. Because genres are not rigid structures, writers have a good deal of latitude in how to employ them. For example, a narrative has sequence as its deep structure, but if the writer so chooses, he can "play" with time, using flashbacks and flash forwards; dividing the narrative into a series of vignettes, each devoted to a different character; or even embedding informational text in the story.

The example on page 61 is from a piece in which a fifth-grade writer contrasts a family trip to northern California with one to the Texas Gulf Coast. Notice how she makes the contrast through describing the similarity of events rather that through a more predictable

Then, my relatives came, just to miss the snow and cold weather back home. Their arrival was closely followed by long, peaceful walks on the the bluffs, accompanied by the waves' rythemical crashing on the silky, still untouched sand. None of us talked much, but when we did, it was just to say things like, "I remember when we would go on walks like these in the woods when we were little," or just to call the dog we were taking care of. When we came home, we were all muddy, dirty, cold, but happy.

Before I knew it, I was sitting on one of those itchy, uncomfortable airplane seats with my sister and my dad sitting next to me, going to Corpus Christi, Texas, to see my father's parents. Our suitcase was curiously packed, with nothing but sunglasses, shorts, funky old T-shirts, bathing suits, and baseball caps. Texas in wintertime is like summertime in Half Moon Bay. We spent the rest of our time jumping off sand dunes, swimming in the Golf, snorkling, surfing, and pushing eachother into the shallow warm ocean water. In the evening, we would come back home, sandy and wet yet happy, and play a good game of Croquet on my grandparents' perfectly-mowed lawn, get bitten by mosquitos, feasting on our sweet, California blood, and end the day itching like crazy, until we were back in the airport, back in the airplane on the itchy seats, and, after 4 long hours, back home, from where we started.

choice of elements, such as details about the weather or the physical characteristics of the two beaches.

The pictures this young writer creates set up a vivid contrast, although she never uses signal words (e.g., *by contrast*, *on the other hand*) typically used to set up the contrastive structure. Readers get a sense of quiet and calm associated with a northern California beach and of action and exuberance that comes with the warm Texas Gulf Coast beach. The similarity associated with the beaches is that both experiences are happy and family-oriented ones.

The following sentence is an example of a more traditional contrastive structure: "Charlie, on the other hand, wants a golden ticket." This signal is short and unambiguous, yet no less effective. It is not necessarily the subtlety of the structure or the length

that is important. Rather, what is important is that readers can appropriately link the ideas.

USING SIGNAL WORDS TO LEAD READERS THROUGH A TEXT

Signal words lead readers through the text and allow them to link ideas. These are "signposts," as researcher Judith Langer (1984) refers to them: transition elements and other cohesive devices. These signposts provide a structure that, if not predictable, is at least logical. They produce "flow" at the sentence level and signal the logical progression of ideas throughout the text (Cox, Shanahan, & Sulzby, 1990; Fang & Cox, 1998; Halliday & Hasan, 1992; Meyer, 1975; Pappas et al., 2006).

Some signaling strategies are so obvious that even the youngest writers use them. Consider the need to signal sequence. As they mature as writers, kindergarten writers frequently move from "once" or "one day" to "and then...and then...and then" with no difficulty—or finesse—at all. The move from "and then" to simply "then" or "later" or "after that" or "the next day" may require some nudging but, still, this facility with "time cue" words—or transitions, the literal sign-posts—is well within the purview of young writers (Biber, 1988; Kamberelis, 1999). Most young writers know they have to tell readers that one action follows another so readers can "see" and follow the progression of action.

More proficient writers frequently omit signal words with the expectation that a logical organization of ideas coupled with readers' sophistication will carry an audience through the text. The "If your having a hard time..." excerpt here, from a piece written by a fourth grader, shows that the writer knows how to omit temporal signal words and yet leave no gaps in a reader's understanding.

Notice the repeated omission of the implied word *then*, in brackets here:

> If your having a hard time getting your foot in, [then] you can pour newt juice or dish soap into your binding to make it slippery. [Then] slip your feet in and [then] get in the water.
>
> Once you have the handle in you hand, [then] sit in the water, [then] make sure you're facing the boat. Then, tuck your knees into your chest. Once the boat starts going, get up....

Notice also, in the second paragraph, the writer's use of a more sophisticated strategy for keeping readers on track: "Once you have the handle..." and "Once the boat starts going...."

COHESION

Some sentence-to-sentence progressions can be quite sophisticated. The repetition of "some" in the second writing sample here signals both contrastive and additive linkages.

This writer uses "some" to give contrastive information. Moreover, the repetition of "some" imparts a literary quality to this informational text. Perhaps this piece is original, perhaps the syntax is borrowed, and perhaps these three sentences are lifted whole cloth

If your having a hard time getting your foot in, you can pour newt juice or dish soap into your bindings to make it slippery. Slip your feet in and get in the water.

Once you have the handle in your hand, sit in the water, make sure you're facing the boat. Then, tuck your knees into your chest. Once the boat starts going get up,

Introduction
ALL CRYSTALS ARE DIFFERENT!
Some crystals grow from lava and some grow from sea salt. Some are circular and some are triangular. Some crystals are colorful and some are not. AND THAT'S WHAT MAKES THEM SO WONDERFUL!

Findings from the research on writing for second-language learners indicate that students benefit from explicit teacher attention to form and the opportunity to make revisions based on this attention. For example, in a study by Gómez, Parker, Lara-Alecio, and Gómez (1996), in one condition, teachers responded to student's writing through written comments about the content but did not correct students' errors. In the second condition, teachers corrected errors, focusing on those deemed most important, and students were instructed to focus on ensuring these errors did not appear in the next segment of their work. In the latter condition, students demonstrated superior growth in five of the nine areas assessed rather than in only one area, as was the case in the first condition.

In a second study (Prater & Bermudez, 1993), second-language learners were placed in peer-response groups with monolingual English speakers. Group members made topic suggestions, responded to first drafts, and cooperatively edited the papers, with group members taking on different editorial responsibilities. The result was that students wrote more, but their writing did not necessarily improve. As the authors noted, "it may be necessary for the teacher to provide more direct instruction in specific aspects of the writing that were assessed by the scoring rubric" (p. 108). They also suggested more modeling of appropriate responses and explanation of group general procedures.

The Origon of Rabbits

You are on the egde of the woods standing alone, then you hear a loud thumping as loud as a heard of wild buffalo. The noise echoes trough the grassy plains. Then you hear the noise again it is coming closer toword you. Then you hear the noise louder than ever. You look behind you, it is a wild rabbit pounding his hind legs and looking out onto the plains. He starts to stare into your eye. As soon as you blink he is gone in a flash; zig zagging away 25 miles per hour.

from a reference book. However, though it is not all included here, the remaining text from which this excerpt has been taken features syntax that is equally sophisticated.

LEADING READERS INTO A TEXT BY BUILDING CONTEXT

Very young writers often begin their informational text in one of two ways. Either they announce up front the topic of their writing ("I'm going to tell you all about whales") or they expect the title of their piece to provide the context for readers, so they dive right into the substance of their writing (Chapman, 1995; Donovan, 2001; Kamberelis, 1999; Newkirk, 1989; Sowers, 1985). As students mature as writers, their opening strategies become more sophisticated, as shown here in "The Origon of Rabbits."

This is a very nice lead-in for a piece of informational text about rabbits. However, using a direct opening, known as forecasting, can be an effective strategy as well. The sample opening with "Intro" on the next page illustrates this.

In another interesting opening, the writer speaks directly to readers to introduce the topic and explain the context for the piece:

The first time I really got interested in guide dogs was when I was at school. I was watching a play and one of the characters had a guide dog. I realized that without the dog the person would not be able to go places. So two years later I decided to do my report on guide dogs because I was interesting in them. I started by looking on the internet. I wanted to know how guide dogs are trained from beginning to end.

"The Author and his Literature" on the next page shows another introduction that forecasts the writer's intent to discuss the similarities (setting and characters) in Roald Dahl's books.

Intro:
> Before you buy a finch you first need to know what it needs and how to take care of it to keep it happy, and healthy. This pamphlet will tell you the basics.

What to Buy

step 1: Buy a cage big enough for your finch to fly around in with perches to rest on.

step 2: Than fold some newspaper and fit it on the bottom of the cage.

step 3: If your cage doesn't already have a food dish or water dish you can buy one at any pet shop but make sure it's not too big for your small finch.

step 4: After you buy the water dish and food dish buy a nesting box with cut up string or special nesting hair in it and hang it in your cage for your finch to rest in.

#22

The Author and his Literature
By ▮▮▮▮▮

All the books Roald Dahl has written are very similar. They have the same setting, England and the plots involve a poor or orphaned child trying to do some good, paired up with a horrible adult. For example in Matilda, she is a 5 year old girl who gets treated like dirt from her rotten parents and the abominable trunchbull at school.

The charectars all have different personalities. Some can be rude, obnoxious and so scary they'll make your blood turn to ice, while others are so nice and sweet that you can't believe that they're in a story about filthy witches or giants named bonecruncher or bloodbottler. Like I said their total opposites. The bad guys always get punished and the good guys always win.

Roald Dahl paints pictures in my mind. He makes up words that make the story fun, such as whizzpoping from the BFG. He is such a cool author. Heres a example from the witches.

HELPING READERS SEGMENT TEXT WITH PUNCTUATION AND PARAGRAPHS

Writers use punctuation and paragraphs to help their readers chunk information appropriately, create pacing, and make text intelligible (Schuster, 2003; Smith & Wilhelm, 2006; Weaver, 1996).

Punctuation.   In the sample below, the writer uses a strategy known as "exploding the moment"—a way to slow readers down through a series of short sentences (Lane, 1993):

INTRO
> Today's your big day. You stare out at the bright-green baseball feild. You step into the dug-out, the place where you wait to bat. You wait on-deck while your best friend, Tony, is at bat. He hits the ball and makes it to second base. Now it's your turn. Nervously, you step up to homeplate.

The sentences, which are marked by periods and at times commas, cause readers to pause at each punctuation mark and so "build up" to the big moment (Berger, 2003; Fletcher, 1992). This writer also helps readers construct a mental model of the situation by providing details on the series of events preceding the narrator's big moment.

The next example of the effective use of punctuation, this time ellipses, should resonate with anyone who has heard the almost mandatory pause announcers make before naming a winner. The young writer of "Suddenly, she heard the announcer say" (opposite) wants the dialog to be authentic and uses punctuation toward this end.

"Surfing on some Fun" offers another example of a writer using ellipses, this time for a different effect. The ellipses signal the end of one thing and the start of something else, something more significant for the writer—the final school bell before Christmas break. Ellipses do not seem to intimidate young writers. In fact, they seem to use them correctly in most cases and, sometimes, with aplomb: As one young writer

Suddenly, she heared the announcer say, "Holy cow! We have a winner! The winner is..... Patricia ▮▮▮▮ from ▮▮▮▮ Junior High!" Patricia lifted herself out of the water and yelled, "I did it! I did it! Wahoo!" Somebody handed her a shiny trophy. The crowd went wild, cheering her name, "Patricia! Patricia!" they screamed. "Thank you!" she shouted back. She had never been so proud.

Surfing on some Fun   01/04/02

It all started with a "Yippee!" and a "Harray!" from my fellow classmates when the relieving sound of the 3:00 bell rang in the classrooms with an echoe following close behind. We all rushed out the door, pushing and shoving eachother playfully without even bothering to push in our chairs. It was the end of quizzes, pencil-sharpeners, and squeaky desks opening and closing... and the beginning of a long, relaxing Christmas break, and the beginning of "Mommy, Mommy, I ate too much turkey and gravy!" "Well, tough luck!" My backpack felt as light as though I were carrying a butterfly on my shoulder.

wrote, "Ellipses are...you know...a way of slowing a reader down...making him pause."

All three of these examples, because they lead readers through the text and because they create a sense of authenticity, illustrate how strategies can be useful for creating both a textbase and a mental model.

Paragraphing   Strunk and White (1999) describe the paragraph as "a convenient unit." Hence, a writer who uses paragraphs correctly helps readers chunk units of meaning relating to a single topic. Students who produce expository text also frequently use paragraphs to signal the move from one major topic to another. Paragraphs have no explicitly prescribed length; they are generally long enough to develop a single idea or to create a linkage or transition between ideas. (For examples from student writing, see Chapter 7.)

ENGAGING READERS WITH WORDS

Word choice is significant on a number of levels (Beck, McKeown, & Kucan, 2002; National Writing Project

Chocolate Blackberry Truffliets

I am a truffle sort of person. I love See's candy and I beg my dad to make homemade ones. So since he still almost never makes them, and I knew my parents wouldn't spend a bunch of money on candy, a couple of weeks ago I decided to try to invent some of my own. And I ended up with what I dubbed Chocolate Blackberry Truffliets.(I came up with the word "truffliet" after thinking that they were "a little variation on truffles." Since adding "et" to the end of a word usually means it is a little version of that word, I thought if I added an "i" to that ending it would be a "variation on little." So if you think about it backwards enough it literally means (sort of) "little variation on truffles.)

So since I had a recipe (and a name for it), I could make delicious candy whenever I wanted too.And now so can you!!!

& Nagin, 2006; Smith, 1996; Williams & Hufnagel, 2005). Word choice makes meaning explicit, paints pictures in readers' minds, and establishes a writer's credentials. We discuss each of these in turn.

Consider the introduction to a piece of functional writing entitled "Chocolate Blackberry Truffliets" (above), in which the writer explains the meaning of "truffliets" and uses the stem of that word to give readers insight into her personality.

All word choice is not so deliberate, of course, but careful word choice is of fundamental importance in painting an exact picture. In "Ji Ai ought to be my name...," the writer helps readers understand that what she's describing is more than just a typical adult conversation. The word *urgent* cues readers that the conversation is indeed serious, and it is exactly the right word to help readers imagine the expressions on the parents' faces.

The appropriate use of specialized vocabulary demonstrates students' understanding of concepts and validates their expertise. An integrated science program known as CORI (Concept-Oriented Reading Instruction) requires students to use science vocabulary in their writing (Guthrie & Cox, 1998; Guthrie et al., 2004; Swan, 2003). CORI specifies the reading that students do to gather information. Students use planning sheets to scaffold their understanding of sci-

ence concepts. Then students must list certain scientific terms and define them in their own words. These words become part of the classroom conversation, which students are expected to weave into a cumulative writing assignment. "Different Interactions in the Grasslands" is a sample of student writing from the CORI program.

Different Interactions in the Grasslands

There are many other interactions in the grasslands. Along with other interactions, there are other interaction types.

One type of interaction is **predation**. **Predation** is when one animal gets a benefit and the other one dies. The lion and the rabbit are an example of **predation**. The lion hunts and eats the rabbits that live there.

Another type of interaction type is **parasitism**. **Parasitism** means that one animal gets a benefit and the other gets a negative. An example of a **parasitism** relationship is the impala and ticks. The ticks come and suck the impala's blood. The impala doesn't die but it looses some blood.

In "The first days at the school...," the writer uses the word *dog* to build cohesion and move readers through the sentences. Notice also the substitution *its* for *dog* in the second sentence.

> The first days at the school may be hard for the young dog. Within a few days the dog trainer becomes it's new best friend. Dogs really do get attached to people fast. The two are together most of the time, at the kennel, and sometimes at the trainer's house. Soon the dog is having a fine time playing "training games". Training is always made fun. I wonder what training games are? A guide dog has to like it's work. During training the dog gets used to wearing a harness. With the harness around the dog's body the dog is taught to pull forward while walking on the left side and ahead of the trainer. It usually takes a guide dog several days to learn to stop at each curb and wait for a command, to go forward or to turn. Training a guide dog is a lot more complicated than I thought.

SENTENCE STRUCTURE

Notice the syntactic variety of "The Author and His Literature," a fifth-grade writer's piece. He is comparing books he read for an author study. Much of what he says reflects scaffolded learning. The sentence structure, however, with all its richness and variety, is entirely his own. One sentence flows from another; the logic of the text and the structure of the sentences and fragments support the meaning.

> The Author and His Literature
> By ▮▮▮▮
>
> Have you ever read one of Roald Dahl's books? The Witches? Charlie and the Chocolate Factory? Matilda? Well, in case you haven't, I'll tell you a little bit about them. For one thing, all of the main characters are kids. Charlie, Matilda, or the grandson. But these aren't just any ordinary kids. These kids are geniuses, orphans, even witchophiles. And now you're probably thinking, what in the world is a witchophile? Well, a witchophile is a real expert on witches. They know how to identify a witch, what to do when you see one, and other important facts. In this case, the witchophile is the grandson, in The Witches. His grandmother filled him in on all the important witch things you need to know. In Matilda, the genius in the story is Matilda. Charlie is not necessarily an orphan, but he is extremely poor in Charlie and the Chocolate Factory.

Writer Strategies That Help Readers Build a Mental Model

Helping readers build a mental model requires writers to decide how much and what kind of detail will make text come alive for readers and enable them to relate to at least some part of it (Kintsch & van Dijk, 1978). Consider the Harry Potter series that captured the imaginations of readers both young and old. Most readers can describe Harry's school (Hogwarts), his guardians (the Dursleys), and his friend Hagrid, all with great consistency and little or no effort. To bring this fantasy world to life, to make it intelligible and real, author J.K. Rowling had to select just the right details—including details readers would relate to—and decide what could be left unsaid. Rowling used enough detail to create a realistic imaginary world for her audience. She used a school as her primary setting to "ground" her readers, most of whom were of school age. She counted on her readers' familiarity with teachers, good and bad, and classmates (again, good and bad) to help readers enter her fantasy world and imagine other details. So, though the action is fantasy, readers can "buy into" the story because there's enough real-world knowledge they can bring to bear.

As we described in Chapter 2, readers work to comprehend text by simultaneously developing a textbase and building a mental model. The textbase is developed from the words, phrases, and sentences on the page—that is, from the actual text. The mental model, however, draws as well from the richness of readers' knowledge and experiences. Thus, writer strategies that help readers connect their own knowledge and experience (including texts they have read on the same or a related topic) with the ideas, characters, or events in the text are most helpful in enabling them to build a mental model. Among these strategies are providing sufficient and adequate detail; creating a context or background readers can relate to; incorporating analogies, similes, metaphors, and visuals; and, to some degree, building in sufficiency and predictability.

USING DETAILS TO ESTABLISH A CONTEXT OR BACKGROUND

Writers must decide how much background knowledge they need to provide in order to help readers understand or relate to a topic, a point of view, or a narrative sequence, for example. "The Potato War" has an opening that leads readers into a series of events by establishing a detailed setting and hinting at the story

The Potato War

In the summer when I came to my grandma's house, it was time to harvest the potatoes in her back yard that she grew. The yard was huge and colorful with many green plants. Beautiful flowers grew on the bushes. But the potato garden stuck out the most. It was a big dirt field, only speckled with some green. And there was a big white wall that seperated her yard from her neighbors.

My dad and the other adults harvested the good potatoes and left the bruised or young potatoes behind. After the adults were gone, as I looked at the remaining potatoes on the dirt, I felt an opportunity coming on. Even though my mother warned me to not play on the field, my big brother Micheal, my cousin Sandrew, and I decided to ignore my mother's warning.

to come. Notice how the writer paints a picture of the setting for readers and at the same time deftly insinuates the action to follow and the persona of the narrator: "I felt an opportunity coming on."

USING DETAILS TO BRING A CHARACTER TO LIFE

In "My Grandpa," the writer introduces his grandpa as "cool." He goes on to provide the details that for him comprise the definition of cool. This young writer clearly knows his grandfather well. He selects one word to characterize him for his readers and then paints a picture of this individual made up not of physical characteristics but of actions that exemplify "cool." _Cool_ is a familiar concept that will resonate with most readers.

My Grandpa

My grandpa was the coolest grandpa in the world. He was in good shape, he had a motorcycle, and he was the best video game player ever! I went to his house all the time and played video games, ate bar-b-que wings, and played catch.

Player   _By_

His hoves pound against the ground thump, thump, thump. They sound like a person knocking on a door. His mighty body moves aggressively. He breaths with a mighty snort. His tail whips in the misty air. He is as black as the empty midnight sky. The spot above his tail is the color of a dove's wing.

In "Player," the writer describes his horse in such a way that readers can understand not just the horse's appearance but also his character. This is a powerful horse. He's aggressive and awe inspiring. The writer's inclusion of details helps readers form a strong image. Several verb choices suggest power as well: _pound_, _break_, _whip_. And the writer uses a simile, _as black as the empty midnight sky_, to paint an explicit picture in the reader's mind.

USING DETAILS TO SCAFFOLD AND SUPPORT READERS' UNDERSTANDING

"Grownup Dingoes are 5 feet tall..." shows a writer using details to help readers understand precisely the size of a dingo both by providing measurement and by referencing a more familiar animal (the German Shepherd) to make the image explicit.

Grownup Dingoes are 5 feet tall, and their tail is 14 inches, and they mostly weight 45 pounds. If you measured one of it's shoulder, it is smaller than a German Shepherd. Their food is mostly awake at night so they hunt at night. A Dingo's diet is farm animals, rabbits, Kangaroos, and small marsupials. They hunt in packs like horses

> There are four kinds of tornadoes: weak tornadoes, strong tornadoes, violent tornadoes, and waterspouts. A weak tornado is a tornado that has winds 112 miles per hour or less. Weak tornadoes are the most common. Strong tornadoes have winds travelling from 113 to 206 mph. Only about ¼ of the tornadoes reported in the United States each year are strong. Violent tornadoes have winds travelling from 207 to 300 mph. Only about 1 out of 50 tornadoes in the United States are classified as violent. Waterspouts are tornadoes that form over water, or move from land to sea. If they start in the ocean, and come onto land, they can send down showers of salty rain.

The details in "There are four kinds of tornadoes" are also very specific and communicate to readers a wealth of information, some of which should strike a familiar chord. In a second tornado piece, the writer describes what the approach of a tornado might look like. While this lacks the technical data of the previous piece, the quality of the description make readers feel as though the writer is actually there, observing the tornado's approach. Hence, the writer helps create a mental model by using details in a different way.

> It's late in the afternoon on a hot day. The air is thick and moist. Tall, fluffy clouds appear in the sky, and as they move toward you you can see the dark undersides. As they day goes on, the air cools and the sky turns into a weird, yellowish glow. A wind starts to blow getting stronger every minute. Soon enough, the wind starts whipping your hair against your cheeks. A piece of paper goes sailing through the air. Tree branches bend, leaves and weeds fly through the air. A tunnelish shape comes down from the clouds and touches down. It starts tearing apart everything in it's path, and flinging things in the air. It's time you took shelter, because a tornado is heading your way.

It's difficult to believe this text is wholly original. We can't be certain, but in this case, the writer's teacher says it is fairly typical of the young writer who turned it in.

Most of the time, we are less skeptical about authorship because students at grades 4 and 5 are novice writers. "The One, the Only, Great America" is one young writer's description of an amusement park. Even though

> The One, the Only, Great America
> by
> I get out of the humongous parking lot and then I walk into the 100 acre Great America and it is heavenly. The sun beams down on me, I smell fried food, I see the giant pond in front of me. There are bright flowers next to the pond to greet me. There's a slight breeze in my face. The fast rides zoom in front of me click-clacking and whooshing past the giant, chattering crowd.

we're not certain this piece is wholly original either, we question it less because the topic and tone are typical of upper elementary students. The details this writer chose to include will resonate with other students his age.
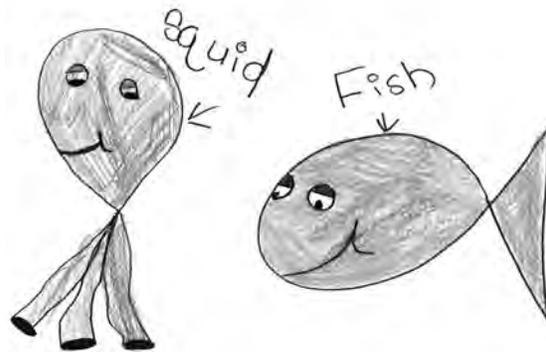
Using Dialogue to Develop Characters

In a fictional exchange involving "a girl named Amanda," a student writer uses dialogue to illustrate character (see next page). Notice how the writer provides additional clues to Amanda's character through further description of her interactions with the writer: "She glared at me...and then she sniggered."

A girl named Amanda (a 5th grader) said, "Were watching this? I've watched this before and I have the movie at home." "And," she continued, "it's not really good for young children like you." She glared at me, and I shivered, and then she sniggered. She is one of my worst enemies. I told the teacher and he told me to ignore her. I was just about to ask what ignore meant, but I did not want him to think I was unintelligent. One of the stories I remember from the movie was about a witch.

Food

Fact: Dolphins two main enemys are the shark and killer whale.

If you see a dolphin and it zooms right by you it might be looking for food. Bottle Nose Dolphins mostly eat fish and squid. Dolphins can catch up to 10 to 20 pounds of food each day. A dolphin might be swimming and see a flock of hunting birds, then it would know were the fish are.

squid

Fish

The Body

long ears

small furg scut

eyes

twitching nose

whiskers

strong front teeth

strong hind legs

sharp claws

short front legs

Using Visuals to Amplify Text

Visuals present readers with specific information that expands or clarifies or recasts the information in connected text. As such, they aid readers in constructing a mental model. Students in fourth and fifth grades frequently see visuals in the printed and online texts that they read. Most of these students are comfortable inserting visuals in their own writing (Kress & Van Leeuwen, 2006; Paillotet et al., 2000).

In the "Food" example, the writer uses both a visual and a formatting technique to provide detail for her readers. The drawing is minimally labeled; the interesting additional information is boxed to draw attention to it. "The Body," which accompanies a writer's prose on rabbits, gives readers additional information through the labeling provided. Notice that this drawing is less anthropomorphized (it has been given fewer human qualities) than the preceding drawing of the smiling squid and fish. "A Prairie Food Web" (facing page) is the most technical of the three. Here, the writer displays the relationships among various creatures.
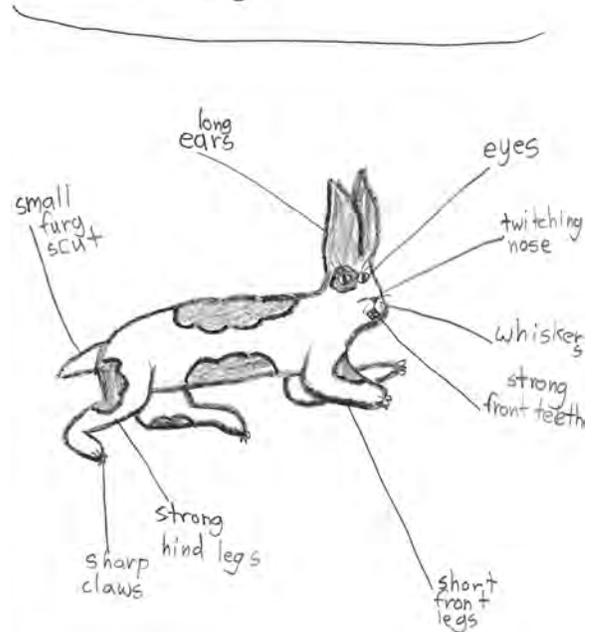
A Prairie Food Web
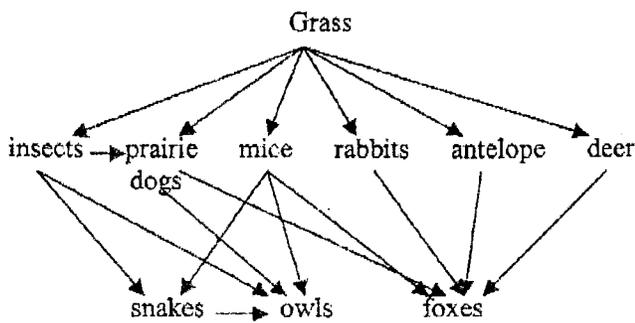
MAKING USE OF WRITER STRATEGIES

The strategies illustrated in the preceding pages are at least "pretty good" examples from typical students. However, they are snippets from papers whose overall quality is not uniform; that is, the whole of these texts is not necessarily equally accomplished.

It is important to recognize that for fourth and fifth graders, strategies may be well done, done too rarely, or, as in "Hope," overdone. In this case, the use of detail, with its repeating scenarios of dire situations, overwhelms readers. But at least the writer has made an attempt to use a strategy (repetition), and that is one of the first steps in becoming an accomplished writer.

Finally, consider this reflection by a fourth-grade writer at the end of the year:

> In my writing I use tension, some transition words, colorful language, and some strong words and I make pictures in peoples minds.

Here is a writer who clearly understands the needs of her audience.

Hope

My cat, Hope, has been missing for three weeks. We were going to put up flyers, but we didn't have any pictures of her. Each day I hoped that Hope would come back. I keep on wondering; has she been run over bye a car and lying on the ground blotend with her blood and other body parts lying around her? Has Hope been eaten by a dog and barely alive with about only two more hours to live, sitting in a bush, curled up and hiding in fear?

Is Hope hiding in a field living off mice and snakes crouching down with her razor sharp claws out ready to pounce on a poor mouse only a few feet away waiting for it to get a little bit closer so she can kill it for her meal?

Is she so hungry that she doesn't have the energy to find her way home, and so skinny that she has her ribs showing like they are trying to pop out?

Has Hope been beaten with rocks and sticks and lying there with an eye poked out, paws broken, and bleeding? Is she so badly hurt that she can barely move and has to recover before she comes back home?

Is she hiding somewhere with newly born kittens and preparing to attack any sort of danger lurking in the dark waiting for her to leave her kittens for one minute and steal one to eat it for its supper?

Hope has been gone for 3 weeks. My mind was full of terrible possibilities.