One Sentence at a Time

The Need for Explicit Instruction in Teaching Students to Write Well

ILLUSTRATIONS BY SERGE BLOCH

By Judith C. Hochman and Natalie Wexler

When Monica entered high school, her writing skills were minimal. After repeating first grade and getting more than 100 hours of tutoring in elementary school, she'd managed to learn to read well enough to get by, and she was comfortable with math. But writing seemed beyond her reach.

During her freshman year at New Dorp High School, a historically low-performing school on Staten Island in New York City, Monica's history teacher asked her to write an essay on Alexander the Great. "I think Alexander the Great was one of the best military leaders," Monica wrote. Her entire response consisted of six simple sentences, one of which didn't make sense.

An actual essay, Monica said later, "wasn't going to happen. It was like, well, I got a sentence down. What now?"

Monica's mother, who had spent many frustrating years trying to help her daughter improve her academic performance, was equally skeptical about Monica's ability to write an essay. "It just didn't seem like something Monica could ever do."[1]

Unfortunately, Monica is far from alone. Across the country—and especially in schools serving students from low-income families and English language learners—students at all grade levels have similar problems expressing themselves clearly and coherently in writing. On nationwide tests, only about 25 percent of students are able to score at a proficient level in writing.[2]

And yet, expository writing—the kind of writing that explains and informs—is essential for success in school and the work-

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place. Students who can't write at a competent level struggle in college. With the advent of e-mail and the Internet, an increasing number of jobs require solid writing skills. That's true even of many jobs—such as being a paramedic—that people may not think of as involving writing. No matter what path students choose in life, the ability to communicate their thoughts in writing in a way that others can easily understand is crucial.

The problem is not that students like Monica are incapable of learning to write well. Rather, the problem is that American schools haven't been teaching students how to write. Teachers may have assigned writing, but they haven't explicitly taught it in a careful sequence of logical steps, beginning at the sentence level.

That's not the fault of the teachers: in the vast majority of cases, their training didn't include instruction in how to teach writing. The assumption has been that if students read enough, they'll simply pick up writing skills through a kind of osmosis. But writing is the hardest thing we ask students to do, and the evidence is clear that very few students become good writers on their own. Many students—even at the college level—have difficulty constructing a coherent sentence, let alone a fluid, cohesive essay. If you're reading this article, which is drawn from our book, *The Writing Revolution: A Guide to Advancing Thinking through Writing in All Subjects and Grades*, chances are that at least some of your students, and perhaps most, fall into that category.

To be effective, writing instruction should start in elementary school. But when students do get a chance to write in elementary school, they're often encouraged to write at length too soon, sometimes at a furious pace. They don't learn how to construct interesting and grammatically correct sentences first, and they aren't encouraged to plan or outline before they write. The idea is that later on they'll refine their writing, under the teacher's guidance, bringing coherence and—perhaps—correct grammar and punctuation to what they've produced. But after getting feedback, students may be reluctant to rewrite a multipage essay that they've already worked on for hours. And teachers, confronted by page after page of incoherent, error-riddled writing, may not know where to begin.

When students get to middle school or high school, it's assumed that they've already learned the basics of writing. As many secondary teachers know, that assumption has little to do with reality. But rather than beginning with teaching the fundamental skills their students lack—by, say, guiding students through the process of writing well-crafted sentences—teachers feel pressured to have their students meet grade-level expectations and produce multiparagraph essays.

High school teachers are also likely to ask students to write analytically about the content of the courses they're taking. But many students have written nothing except narratives in elementary and middle school, often about their personal experiences. That kind of writing doesn't prepare them for the demands of high school, college, or the workforce.

In recent years, with the advent of the Common Core State Standards and the revamping of many states' standards, teachers at almost all grade levels have been expected to have students write not just narratives but also informative and argumentative essays. But there's been little reliable guidance on how to teach students those skills.[3] The writing standards tell teachers where their students should end up. But what teachers need is a road map that tells them how to get there.

Our approach to teaching writing, which we call The Writing Revolution (TWR), offers just such a road map. It provides a clear, coherent, evidence-based method of instruction that you can use no matter what subject or grade level you teach. It works just as well with elementary students as with those, like Monica, who are in high school. The method has demonstrated repeatedly that it can turn weak writers into strong ones by focusing students' writing practice on specific techniques that match their needs and providing them with prompt and clear feedback. Insurmountable as the writing challenges faced by many students may seem, TWR can make a dramatic difference.

A History of The Writing Revolution

Teachers from around the country—in fact, from around the world—have been using this method for more than 25 years, learning it through teacher-training courses held in or near New York City. First known as the Hochman Method, TWR is being implemented at a broad range of schools, spanning all grade levels. Since 2013, we have been partnering with schools and school districts in Louisiana, New York, Texas, Washington, D.C., and elsewhere to provide more intensive and hands-on training and coaching.

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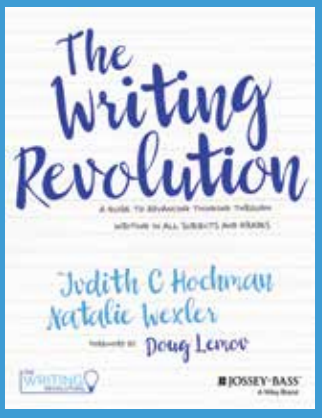

The Writing Revolution: A Guide to Advancing Thinking through Writing in All Subjects and Grades, by Judith C. Hochman and Natalie Wexler, is published by Jossey-Bass/Wiley, which is offering a 25 percent discount off the purchase of this book through May 31, 2018. To order, visit **www.bit.ly/TWR_AFT** and use discount code TWR25.

But how did this method originate? Years ago, like most classroom teachers, I (Judith) would assign writing activities that focused on my students' perceptions and feelings: a visit to an imaginary country, a meaningful moment in their lives. My undergraduate and graduate training hadn't included any preparation for teaching writing, nor had I been assigned to read any research on effective writing instruction. Later, as a school administrator, I observed many lessons in a similar vein.

I tried consulting the research, but, at the time, academic researchers were paying far more attention to reading than writing. So I began to experiment. I was fortunate to be at the Windward School, an independent school in New York for students with learning and language disabilities in first grade through high school. The Windward staff members and I were able to try varying approaches to writing instruction.

We stopped teaching the mechanics of writing in isolation as a set of rules and definitions. Instead, we asked students at all grade levels to write about the content they were learning and then used their writing to give specific guidance. The feedback might be, "Use an appositive in your topic sentence," "Put your strongest argument last," "Use transitions when presenting your points," or "Try starting your thesis statement with a subordinating conjunction." These are the kinds of moves that students often have trouble implementing, because they appear more often in writing than in spoken language. But because we had explicitly taught our students how to do these things, they were able to respond. Students improved not just in their writing, but also in their analytical thinking, reading comprehension, and oral communication.

Seeing such dramatic gains, we decided to share what we were learning with teachers who, like myself, had no proper training in writing instruction. To that end, we founded the Windward Teacher Training Institute.

In 2012, an article appeared in *The Atlantic* magazine about how the method we developed had produced dramatic results at a public high school with 3,000 students on Staten Island—New Dorp, where Monica started as a freshman in 2009. The article detailed the New Dorp faculty members' discovery that many of their students didn't know how to construct sentences using conjunctions such as *but* and *so*—not to mention words such as *although* and *despite*. The principal of New Dorp, Deirdre DeAngelis, heard about Windward from a friend, went to visit, and decided she wanted to bring that approach to writing instruction to her school.

After New Dorp had been implementing our method for a couple of years, the article reported, pass rates on state exams that included essay questions rose sharply—in the case of English, from 67 percent to 89 percent—as did the graduation rate, from 63 percent to nearly 80 percent. The article spurred a tremendous amount of interest in the method, and in response I founded a nonprofit that used the title of the *Atlantic* article: The Writing Revolution.

Good Writing Requires Deliberate Practice

TWR is as much a method of teaching content as it is a method of teaching writing. There's no separate writing block, and no separate writing curriculum. Instead, teachers of all subjects adapt TWR's strategies and activities to their preexisting curriculum and weave them into their content instruction.

In other approaches to writing instruction, a teacher might give students a description of the elements of a good paragraph or essay, or perhaps present a model piece of writing and have them try to emulate it. But for many students, that's not enough. They may be able to read and appreciate writing that flows well and uses varied sentence structure, but that doesn't mean they can figure out how to write that way themselves. For them, the techniques of good writing are a secret code they just can't crack.

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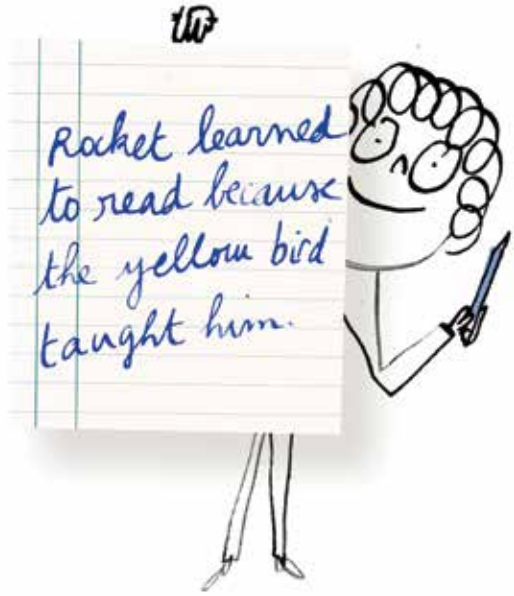

TWR's method helps them break the writing process down into manageable chunks and then has students practice the chunks they need, repeatedly, while also learning content. For example, if you want your students to make their sentences more informative and varied, you won't just ask them to do that and leave it up to them to figure out how. Instead, you'll introduce them to specific ways of creating more complex sentences, using structures that frequently appear in writing and provide the reader with more information—for example, by using appositives.

But you won't just give students the definition of an appositive—"a noun or noun phrase placed next to another noun to explain it more fully"—and ask them to start using appositives

in their writing. You'll first show them examples of appositives and then have them underline appositives in sentences you provide. For example, you might give them "George Washington, the first president of the United States, is often called the father of our country." In that sentence, they would underline "the first president of the United States." Then you'll give them a list of nouns—related to the content they've been studying—along with a list of appositives, and ask them to make the appropriate matches. After that, students will add appositives to sentences you provide, or construct sentences around appositives you give them. After a while, you'll ask them to create their own sentences using appositives—and eventually, they'll simply do that spontaneously.

This kind of practice—"deliberate practice," as cognitive scientists call it[4]—is quite different from having students practice writing by giving them, say, half an hour to write and simply turning them loose. Merely doing the same thing over and over is unlikely to improve their performance. To make their writing better, they need a series of strategies that specifically target the skills they haven't yet mastered, while building on the skills they already have, in a gradual, step-by-step process. They also need clear, direct feedback that helps them identify their mistakes and monitor their progress.

The Six Principles of The Writing Revolution

TWR's method rests on the following principles:

1. Students need explicit instruction in writing, beginning in the early elementary grades.
2. Sentences are the building blocks of all writing.
3. When embedded in the content of the curriculum, writing instruction is a powerful teaching tool.
4. The content of the curriculum drives the rigor of the writing activities.
5. Grammar is best taught in the context of student writing.
6. The two most important phases of the writing process are planning and revising.

Principle #1: Students need explicit instruction in writing, beginning in the early elementary grades.

Students won't pick up writing skills just by reading, and they need to learn how the conventions of written language differ from those of spoken language.

Many students who are good readers struggle when it comes to writing. Unlike reading, writing involves deciding what to say, which words to use, how to spell them, perhaps how to form the letters, and what order to place the words in—and that's just at the sentence level. Writing a paragraph or an entire essay requires even more decision making, planning, and analysis.

Just as good readers aren't necessarily good writers, students who can speak coherently may still write incoherently. Far too many students write the way they speak, using simple or rambling sentences or fragments. That kind of communication may

Students need to learn how the conventions of written language differ from those of spoken language.

The Benefits of Writing Instruction

As important as it is for students to learn to write well, it's not the only reason to teach writing. When teachers embed explicit writing instruction in the content of the curriculum—no matter the subject area—they see their students' academic abilities blossom. When students have the opportunity to learn TWR strategies and practice them through carefully scaffolded activities, they become better at understanding what they read, expressing themselves orally, and thinking critically.

Explicit writing instruction plays a key role in:

- **Identifying comprehension gaps.** When you ask your students to write about what they're learning, you may uncover significant gaps in their knowledge and comprehension—before it's too late to do anything about them.
- **Boosting reading comprehension.** When students learn to use more sophisticated syntax in their own writing, they become better able to understand it when they encounter it in their reading.*
- **Enhancing speaking abilities.** As students begin to use more complex terms and sentence constructions in their written language, they begin to incorporate those features into their spoken language as well.
- **Improving organizational and study skills.** TWR activities teach students to paraphrase, take notes, summarize, and make outlines. These techniques help them absorb and retain crucial information.
- **Developing analytical capabilities.** The process of writing requires even young students to organize their ideas and sequence information. They must decide for themselves what's important, which facts and ideas are connected to one another, and how to organize their thoughts into a logical progression. When done in a systematic and sequenced way, teaching students to write is equivalent to teaching them how to think.

–J.C.H. and N.W.

*Gail Gillon and Barbara Dodd, "The Effects of Training Phonological, Semantic, and Syntactic Processing Skills in Spoken Language on Reading Ability," *Language, Speech, and Hearing Services in Schools* 26 (1995): 58–68.

work when we're speaking to someone in front of us. But when we write, we don't have visual cues to draw on, and we often don't know exactly who the audience is. We need to express ourselves with far more precision and clarity, anticipating the facts and details a reader will require to grasp our meaning. We also need to rely on words and punctuation rather than intonation and pauses to indicate nuances in meaning or breaks in the narrative. We have to abide by conventions of spelling and grammar to ensure that mistakes don't distract a reader from the content.

Although good writing should be clear and direct, it often involves more complex sentence structures and a more varied and precise vocabulary than spoken language. When we speak, we rarely begin sentences with words such as *despite* or *although*, but they can be extremely useful in written language. And connecting our thoughts with phrases like *as a result* or *for example*, although unnecessary in most conversational speech, can be vital in creating a fluid piece of writing.

More generally, when we write, our words are preserved on paper—or perhaps on a screen—making not just grammatical and syntactical errors but also logical flaws far more glaring than in spoken language. And we rarely sustain spoken language for the equivalent length of a paragraph, let alone an essay, unless we're delivering a speech or participating in a formal debate. Shaping a logical, unbroken narrative or argument in writing requires far more thought and planning than having a conversation or making a contribution to a class discussion.

The elementary grades are the ideal time to begin writing instruction. If we assign only stories, journal entries, and poems in the early grades—as I did as a young teacher—we're wasting precious time. Although it's certainly possible to teach expository writing skills to older students, it's much easier to begin the process in elementary school. Elementary students can practice their spelling and vocabulary words by writing original sentences, and they can acquire knowledge by developing questions about what they're reading. At the same time, they can hone their handwriting skills.*

*For more on the importance of teaching handwriting, see "Want to Improve Children's Writing?" in the Winter 2009–2010 issue of *American Educator*, available at www.aft.org/ae/winter2009-2010/graham.

Certainly, we want children to enjoy writing and use it as a means of self-expression. But many students produce writing so incoherent that readers are unable to respond. We need to equip children with the tools that will give them confidence as writers and enable them to express themselves in a way that others can understand. And far from feeling that practicing the mechanics of writing is drudgery, students often gain a sense of pride and mastery from learning to craft well-constructed sentences and logically sequenced paragraphs.

Principle #2: Sentences are the building blocks of all writing.

In many schools, the quantity of writing has long been valued over its quality. The Common Core and other standards have only increased the pressure on teachers to assign essay-length writing. But if students haven't learned how to write an effective sentence, that is where instruction needs to begin.

The elementary grades are the ideal time to begin writing instruction.

Of course students must learn to write at length, and TWR includes strategies and activities designed to guide them through that process. But a writer who can't compose a decent sentence will never produce a decent essay—or even a decent paragraph. And if students are still struggling to write sentences, they have less brain power available to do the careful planning that writing a good paragraph or composition requires.

A sentence-level assignment is manageable for students who are still grappling with grammar, syntax, spelling, and punctuation. It's also manageable for their teachers, who may be overwhelmed by correcting an essay full of mechanical errors, especially if it also contains substantive misunderstandings.

Sentence-level writing shouldn't be dismissed as something that's too basic for older students to engage in. As one writing researcher has observed, sentences "are literally miniature compositions."[5] Producing even a single sentence can impose major cognitive demands on students, especially if it requires them to explain, paraphrase, or summarize sophisticated content.

Even at the sentence level, however, students need appropriate guidance if their writing skills are to improve. TWR gives teachers an array of activities that guide students to use complete sentences, vary their structure, and use complex syntax and vocabulary—while at the same time ensuring that students master content.

Once students have acquired basic sentence-level skills, TWR also provides structured support for lengthier writing. But crafting an effective sentence is a useful and important exercise, no matter the skill level of the student, and teachers should continue to assign sentence-level activities even after students have moved on to writing paragraphs and compositions.

Principle #3: When embedded in the content of the curriculum, writing instruction is a powerful teaching tool.

When schools do focus on expository writing, the assignments are often on topics that draw only on students' personal experiences or opinions rather than on the content they are actually studying in English, history, science, or other subjects. Students may, for example, practice persuasive writing by taking pro or con positions on school uniforms or an extended school day or year. They may learn to write a compare-and-contrast essay by weighing the benefits and disadvantages of being famous.

Such general topics can be useful for introducing students to a particular aspect of writing—say, creating topic sentences. But to maximize the benefits of writing instruction, students should start practicing their writing skills on topics embedded in content as soon as possible. When writing is embedded in content, students from the earliest grades through high school are better able to express themselves orally and in writing.

In addition, until students have had quite a bit of systematic and targeted instruction, the writing skills they develop with regard to one subject are unlikely to transfer to another. Having students write about topics unrelated to content represents a huge wasted opportunity to boost their learning. Writing isn't merely a skill; it's also a powerful teaching tool. When students write, they—and their teachers—figure out what they don't understand and what further information they need. And, when students write about the content they're studying, they learn to synthesize information and produce their own interpretations. That process helps them absorb and retain the substance of what they're writing about and the vocabulary that goes with it.

So, if students are learning about ancient Egypt, or about tornadoes and hurricanes, part of the instruction in those subjects should include having students write about them. Writing and content knowledge are intimately related. *You can't write well about something you don't know well.* The more students know about a topic before they begin to write, the better they'll be able to write about it. At the same time, the process of writing will deepen their understanding of a topic and help cement that understanding in their memory.

A corollary of this principle is that *all* teachers must be writing teachers. Although teachers of subjects other than English may be apprehensive about incorporating the teaching of writing into their curricula, in our experience most of them find that, rather than detracting from their instruction, implementing TWR actually enhances their ability to teach and boosts their students' performance. And although the strategies should be practiced daily, they may take only five to 15 minutes of class time. The strategies can be used as quick comprehension checks, do-now activities, and exit tickets.

Principle #4: The content of the curriculum drives the rigor of the writing activities.

If you follow the third principle and connect your students' writing activities with the subject matter that you're teaching, you'll find that you can use the same activities for any grade level or content area and still challenge your students. The form of the activity will stay the same, but the content is what makes it more or less rigorous.

For example, one TWR sentence-level strategy uses the conjunctions *because*, *but*, and *so* to encourage extended responses. The teacher gives students a sentence stem and an independent clause ending with one of the conjunctions, and asks them to finish it in three different ways, using each of the three conjunctions.

The more students know about a topic before they begin to write, the better they'll be able to write about it.

If you're teaching elementary students, you might give them this stem:

> Rocket learned to read _____.

You'll ask the students to complete the stem with a phrase beginning with *because*, *but*, *and*, or *so*. They might respond:

> Rocket learned to read *because the yellow bird taught him*.

> Rocket learned to read, *but at first he was bored*.

> Rocket learned to read, *so he was proud of himself*.

In math, instead of asking, "What is a fraction?," you can give your students this stem:

> Fractions are like decimals _____.

They might complete it like this:

> Fractions are like decimals *because they are all parts of wholes*.

> Fractions are like decimals, *but they are written differently*.

Fractions are like decimals, *so they can be used interchangeably*.

If you're teaching science, you could give your students this stem:

Aerobic respiration is similar to anaerobic respiration _____ _____.

Here's what they might say:

Aerobic respiration is similar to anaerobic respiration *because both start with glucose and make ATP*.

Aerobic respiration is similar to anaerobic respiration, *but anaerobic respiration does not require oxygen*.

Aerobic respiration is similar to anaerobic respiration, *so both autotrophs and heterotrophs use aerobic and anaerobic respiration*.

Research has consistently found that teaching grammar rules in isolation doesn't work.

In each of these cases, students need to return to the material they have been studying and mine it carefully for information to complete the stems.

No matter what content you use with these kinds of activities, the specificity of the prompts makes them far more powerful than an open-ended question such as, "Why did Rocket learn to read?" Instead, adding the conjunction *but*, for example, to the sentence stem "Rocket learned to read..." demands that students hold two contrasting ideas in their minds and find evidence in a text to support one of them. Your students will be exercising their own judgment independently but in a way that gives them the structure they need.

Principle #5: Grammar is best taught in the context of student writing.

Research has consistently found that teaching grammar rules in isolation doesn't work. But that doesn't mean teachers can't, or shouldn't, teach grammar. What does work is to teach writing conventions and grammar in the context of students' own writing.[6]

Just as skills developed in writing about one subject may not transfer to another, many students won't be able to apply rules they've learned in the abstract to their own writing. Although it's useful for students to have a general familiarity with basic concepts such as "noun" and "verb," that won't necessarily prevent them from writing "sentences" that lack one or the other.

Some people swear by sentence diagramming—often, those who feel that they themselves learned to write by using the technique. And it may work for some students. But for many, and especially those who struggle with language, breaking sentences into their component parts, labeling them as parts of speech, and plotting them on a diagram just adds to the confusion.

An alternative technique for teaching grammar that has been shown to produce excellent results in numerous studies—and that is incorporated into TWR activities—is sentence combining. Rather than breaking down a preexisting sentence, students create their own complex sentences by combining two or more simple sentences in a variety of ways. Perhaps they'll use a conjunction, a pronoun, or an appositive or subordinate clause. Students often find this approach more engaging than diagramming, and it eliminates the need to devote mental energy to memorizing and remembering grammatical terms.

Principle #6: The two most important phases of the writing process are planning and revising.

When students are ready to tackle longer pieces of writing—paragraphs and compositions—they'll need to go through four steps before producing a final copy: planning, drafting, revising, and editing. But the most critical phases are planning and revising.

All students need to plan before they write. Although experienced writers may be able to turn out a well-developed paragraph or essay on the fly, most of the students we work with find it overwhelming to organize their thoughts at the same time they're choosing words and figuring out the best way to structure their sentences.

That's why we provide two basic outline templates: one for planning paragraphs, and the other for planning multiparagraph writing. The lion's share of the work of writing occurs at the plan-

ning stage, as students identify the main idea or theme of their writing, the points they will make, and the order they will make them in. As they do this work, students are discovering what further information or clarification they need, making the necessary connections between ideas or claims and relevant details or evidence, and ensuring that they don't wander off into irrelevancy or repetition.

Once students have a well-organized outline, it's a fairly simple matter to translate it into a rudimentary draft. Then comes the next major phase of writing: revising the draft so that it reads smoothly and coherently. This is where students will draw on the sentence-level skills they've acquired: using subordinating conjunctions, appositives, and other techniques to vary their sentence structure and inserting transition words and phrases between sentences and paragraphs to make them flow.

Because teachers embed TWR activities in the content of their own curricula, the approach doesn't look exactly the same in every school or even in every classroom that uses it. But across the board, teachers who adhere to these six principles while implementing TWR's method have found it to be a powerful way not only of teaching writing skills but also of ensuring their students are grasping content and thinking analytically. They've learned to give students clear, explicit writing instruction and feedback, using sentence-level activities regardless of what grade they're teaching. They ground TWR's strategies in whatever substance the class is learning, forcing students to grapple with text and using the complexity of the content to ratchet up the activities' rigor. They use students' own writing and specific sentence strategies to guide them to the correct use of grammar, punctuation, capitalization, and other conventions. And they break the writing process into manageable steps, with particular attention to planning and revising, so that students don't become overwhelmed by all the factors that writing requires them to juggle.

These are the principles that teachers at New Dorp High School resolved to embrace shortly after Monica arrived there, adopting TWR's method in every subject except math. In her chemistry class, for example, Monica got a worksheet to fill out after learning about the properties of hydrogen and oxygen. She had to write three sentences about hydrogen and oxygen, one beginning with *although*, one with *unless*, and one with *if*. She wrote:

> *Although* hydrogen is explosive and oxygen supports combustion, a compound of them puts out fires.
>
> *Unless* hydrogen and oxygen form a compound, they are explosive and dangerous.
>
> *If* hydrogen and oxygen form a compound, they lose their original properties of being explosive and supporting combustion.

Monica found that the writing activities her teachers gave her dramatically boosted her reading comprehension. "Before, I could read, sure," she said. "But it was like a sea of words. The more writing instruction I got, the more I understood which words were important."

By her sophomore year, Monica—along with the rest of her class—had moved on to outlining and revising paragraphs and compositions. One of the strategies that she found helpful was using transition words. "There are phrases—*specifically*, *for instance*, *for example*—that help you add detail to a paragraph," she said. After a pause, she added, "Who could have known that, unless someone taught them?"

By senior year, Monica said, she was able to "write paragraphs and paragraphs, and essays, and *pages*." Despite having entered high school reading far below grade level, she was able to score a 77 on her state Regents exam, two points above the cutoff signaling a student is ready for college-level coursework. On her U.S. History and Government Regents exam, she got a 91.

The essay she wrote for her Global History Regents exam, which she hurried through, began:

> Throughout history, societies have developed significant technological innovations. The technological innovations have had both positive and negative effects on the society of humankind. Two major technological advances were factory systems and chemical pesticides.

Teachers have found TWR to be a powerful way of ensuring their students are grasping content and thinking analytically.

Although that may not be knock-your-socks-off writing, the essay went on for six paragraphs, was logically ordered, cited examples, and used transitions to connect ideas.

As a special education student, Monica had assumed she would never go to college. But as she developed her writing abilities—along with her reading, speaking, and thinking abilities—that assumption changed.

"I always wanted to go to college," she said during her junior year, when she was starting the process of applying, "but I never had the confidence that I could say and write the things I know." She smiled and swept her brown bangs from her eyes. "Then someone showed me how."[7] □

Endnotes

1. Peg Tyre, "The Writing Revolution," *The Atlantic*, October 2012, www.theatlantic.com/magazine/archive/2012/10/the-writing-revolution/309090.

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5. Bruce Saddler, *Teacher's Guide to Effective Sentence Writing* (New York: Guilford Press, 2012), 6.

6. Steve Graham and Dolores Perin, *Writing Next: Effective Strategies to Improve Writing of Adolescents in Middle and High Schools* (Washington, DC: Alliance for Excellent Education, 2007).

7. Most quotations from Monica are from Tyre, "Writing Revolution," with additional details from a video created by students at New Dorp. See "The Writing Code," YouTube video, 4:30, posted by "A Passalacqua," May 11, 2013, www.youtube.com/watch?v=l8Q5MaqO5Ig.

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