



Writing Foundations Handbook

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For use with the following learning levels:



Essential writing steps and strategies for critical thinking and effective communication.

Table of Contents

Introduction	4
Select the Topic & Brainstorm	7
Outlining for Organization	10
Write a Rough Draft	13
Rewrite to Edit & Improve Writing	17
Evaluating Writing	23
Appendix	26

"You don't write because you want to say something. You write because you have something to say."

F. Scott Fitzgerald

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From the Founder

You may be asking yourself, "What makes this handbook any different from all the writing curriculum already sitting on my bookshelves?" Of course, that's a valid question, and I agree that there is no need for yet another writing curriculum. Thankfully, this concise handbook contains the most essential parts of all the other great curriculum!

Perhaps you've heard of the 80/20 rule, also known as the Pareto Principle; it's a concept applied most often in the business world. The 80/20 rule is simply an observation that most things in life are not distributed evenly. Kalid Azad of *BetterExplained.com* explains it perfectly: 20% of the input creates 80% of the result. This means you can focus on the 20% that makes a difference and ignore the 80% that doesn't help. Stay with me here because this is important. Azad says, "In economic terms, there is a diminishing marginal benefit. This is related to the law of diminishing returns; each additional hour of effort adds less 'oomph' to the final result. In the end, you spend too much time on the minor details." Can you relate to that? I certainly can, and I bet you can too!

This handbook is not a comprehensive curriculum: it is the 20%. It is the part you want to invest in when teaching writing.

So, take your time as you begin learning and teaching the material contained in this handbook. DON'T RUSH! Each step in the writing process requires mastery, which is determined as students write with both accuracy and ease. Expect each student to progress at their own pace – some faster and others slower. Be careful about comparisons and expectations. I have learned from teaching many students that each one has a different set of strengths and weaknesses in writing. Your student will too.

Thank you for letting us be a part of your journey. We believe that great writers start here, and we can't wait to see where your writer will go.



A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Kris".

Kris Cordell
Founder & Owner

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Select the Topic & Brainstorm

The writing process begins before a student even sits down to write the actual composition.

As we all know, the first step in the writing process is to select a topic. When selecting a topic, it's helpful to find a topic that is interesting and engaging for the student: little interest = little effort. One of the best ways to engage students in their writing assignments is to choose a topic that relates to a book the student is reading. Pairing great literature with writing works wonders. Consider the following types of writing prompts that literature provides:

- Do you agree with Johnny's actions? Why or why not?
- Who is your favorite character, and why?
- What is the main conflict/problem in the story?
- Describe your favorite scene in the story.
- How did the author create tension and rising action?
- How did (pick a character) change throughout the story?
- Did Jane make a wise choice? Why or why not?

Take a bit of time to help your students find an engaging topic to write about. Writing should be much more than simply completing an assignment or filling a piece of paper with words, but often it's not. Writing should be an opportunity

to think about real-life situations and choices. From the beginning, the writing process should engage a student's mind in critical thinking and analysis. Surprisingly, selecting an interesting topic is half the battle of writing a quality composition. As stated by Sholem Asch, "Writing comes more easily if you have something to say."



Next, students must decide what order is most effective for presenting the information: least important to most important, least familiar to most familiar, chronological order, etc. Hopefully, if the order makes sense to the writer, it will make sense to the reader, and the paper will flow naturally.

Remember, each MP requires two sentences of supporting details (SD). We call these three connected sentences a **"chunk,"** the smallest unified group of thoughts that one can write. Make sure students use correct outline format, including properly indenting, lettering, and numbering.

The outline should look like this:

I. Topic (TS): Keywords for topic sentence

A. Keywords for main point (MP) #1

1. Keywords first supporting detail (SD) for #1
2. Keywords second supporting detail (SD) for #1

B. Keywords for main point (MP) #2

1. Keywords first supporting detail (SD) for #2
2. Keywords second supporting detail (SD) for #2

Conclusion (CS): Keywords for wrapping up

Remember: When outlining, students should use only keywords to help them focus on conciseness and avoid wordiness.



See Appendix for sample outline templates.

Let's take a look at the stylistic elements.



Strong Nouns

Quality writing contains strong nouns. Instead of writing “the man”, students may write “the policeman” or “the grandpa”. Instead of writing “the dog”, students may write “the lab” or “the poodle”. Simply focusing on clear, concise wording creates the foundation for quality writing.



Strong Verbs

ALL writers must learn to focus on using strong action verbs whenever possible. Avoid using "state-of-being verbs" (especially is, are, was, were, and be) and use action verbs whenever possible. For every sentence, the writer should develop the habit of checking to make sure the verb in each sentence is solid and accurate. The importance of mastering this stylistic element is essential. Teach your students to invest in quality action verbs, which will result in "active" writing versus "passive" writing. This idea alone will take your students' writing to an entirely new level! When students struggle to limit state-of-being verbs, ask them, "Who or what do you want to do something?" For example, "The weather is warm." can be changed to "The sun warmed the earth."



Descriptive Words

While the primary goal of quality writing is to focus on strong verbs and nouns, students will want to include a few select adjectives and adverbs in crucial places to provide an exciting description. Here, the idea is to "show" and not simply "tell." Warning: high achieving students occasionally clutter their writing with too many descriptive words. Too much of a good thing is not good; thus, too many descriptive words detract from the writing rather than enhance it.

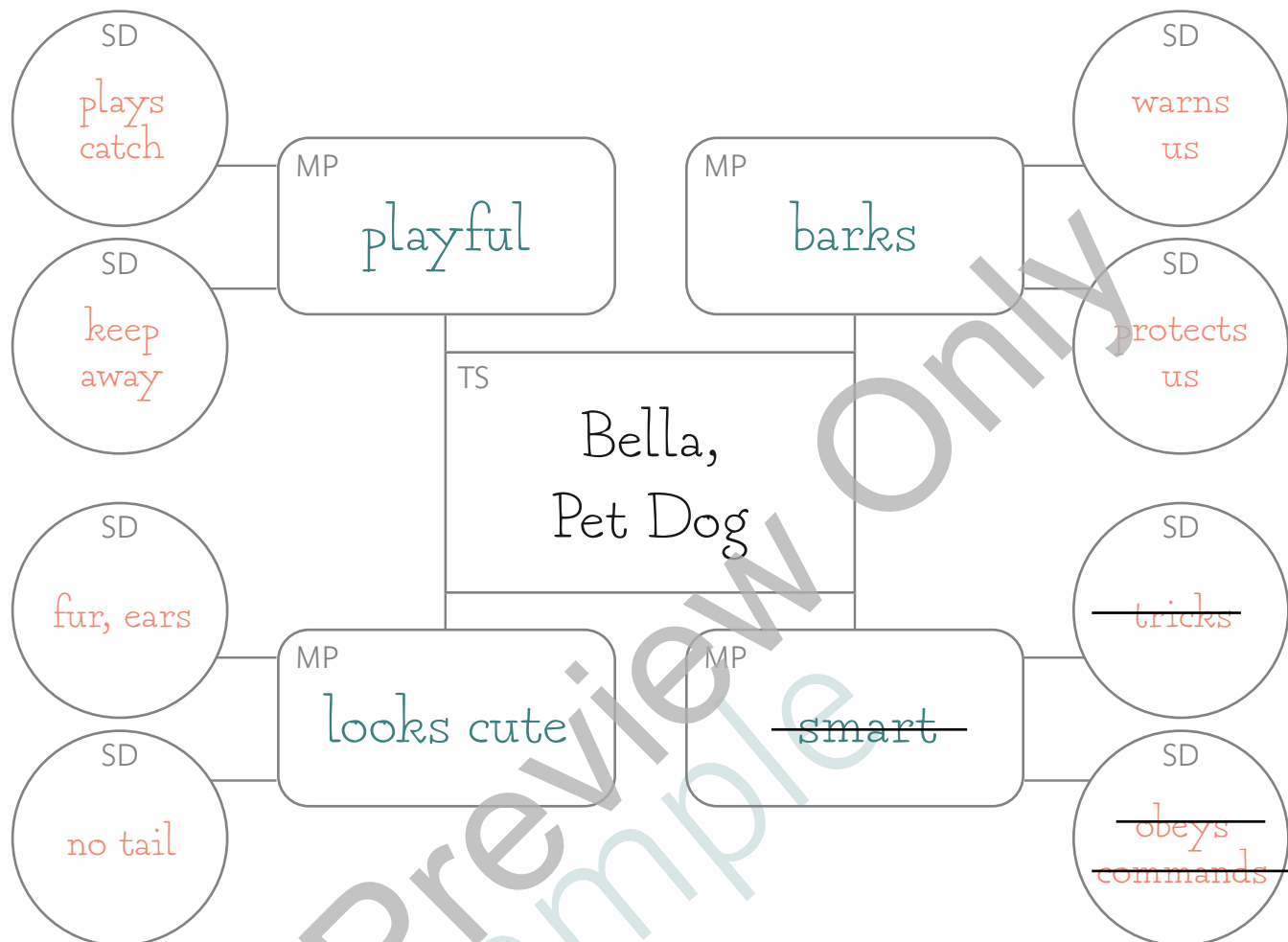


Sentence Starts

Analyze the first couple of words for each sentence and analyze how many sentences begin with the subject. Very young students will begin all sentences with the subject, while more experienced writers learn to place the subject later in the sentence as they learn to create sentences with introductory phrases. While learning this technique, students should try to include one of each of the following sentence starters in every paragraph:

Expanded Paragraph **Brainstorm & Outline**

Brainstorm - gather ideas/key words only



Key Word Outline

I. (TS)	Bella, Pet Dog
A. (MP1)	looks cute
1. (SD)	fur, ears
2. (SD)	no tail
B. (MP2)	playful
1. (SD)	plays catch
2. (SD)	keep away
C. (MP3) optional	barks
1. (SD)	warns us
2. (SD)	protects us
Conclusion	Bella, Pet Dog

Students should brainstorm so thoroughly that some of their brainstorm is NOT included in their outline. They should choose the BEST information and eliminate the weakest.