JENNIFER SERRAVALLO

With **300** strategies

Updated with new charts

The Writing Strategies Book

YOUR **EVERYTHING GUIDE** TO DEVELOPING SKILLED WRITERS

Heinemann
DEDICATED TO TEACHERS™

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Credits continue on page 410.

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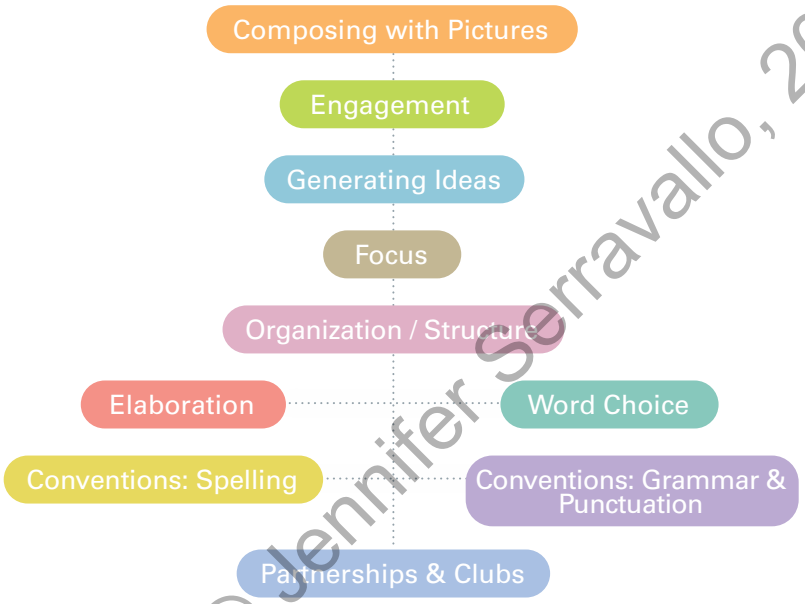
The ten goals for teaching writing are arranged in a sort of loose hierarchy. Think of it not as a hierarchy of most important to least, or from simplest to most sophisticated. Instead, this is a hierarchy of *action*. For example, if I notice a child could use support in two areas—say, structure and elaboration—I'm inclined to start at the one that's closest to the top (structure) and work my way down (elaboration). Think of that example. Why teach a child to fill her page with details if the details are disorganized and it will make the writing difficult to follow? The hierarchy is largely influenced by my studies with Carl Anderson and his book *Assessing Writers* (2005).

Determining Where to Start: A Hierarchy of Possible Writing Goals



The first goal is composing with pictures. It's a goal centered around teaching children to use sketches and illustrations to tell stories, teach, and/or persuade. The idea behind this first goal is that even before children are able to write conventionally with words, they can compose pieces of work using what they *can* do—draw pictures. Also, as children get older, using pictures as a way to practice qualities of good writing, and as a way to plan their writing, has lots of value. Teachers may therefore find this is a helpful goal to focus on for young writers, and also for more experienced writers who would benefit from focusing on the pictures they draw alongside the words they write.

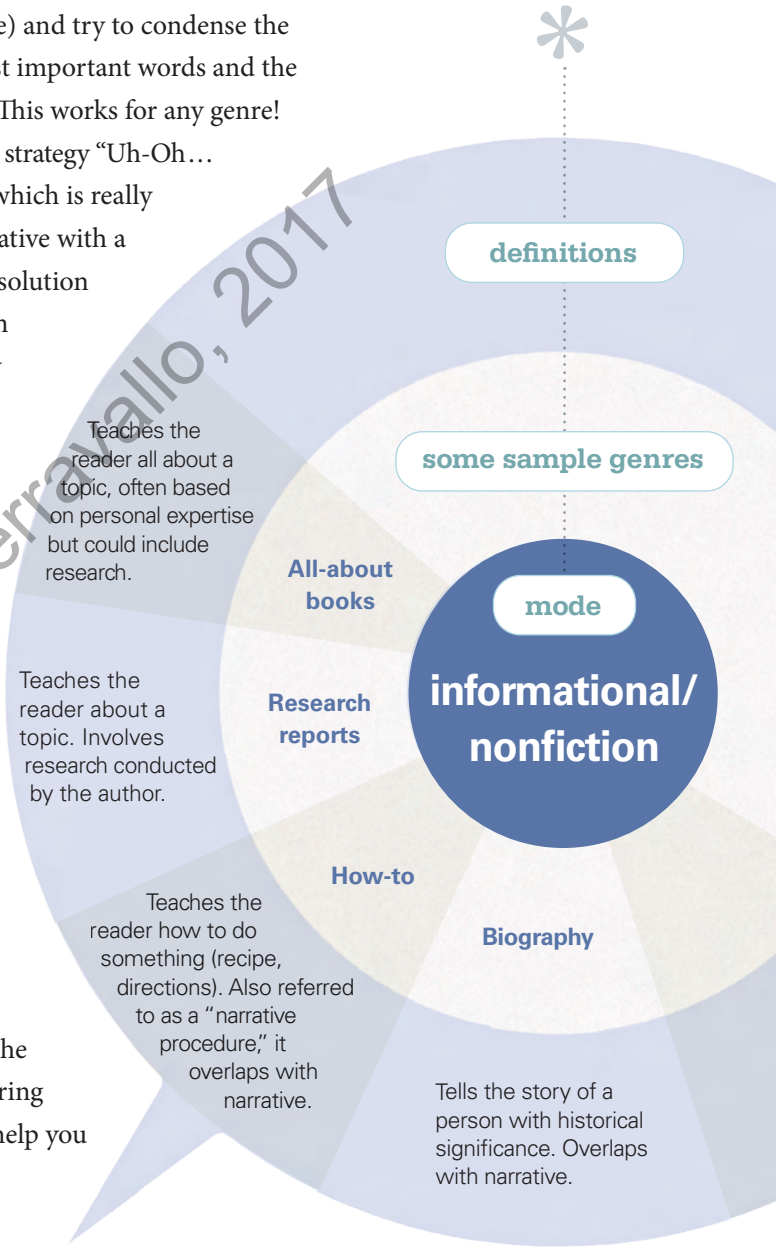
How Do I Find the Right Strategy Within the Chapter? Part II: Genre

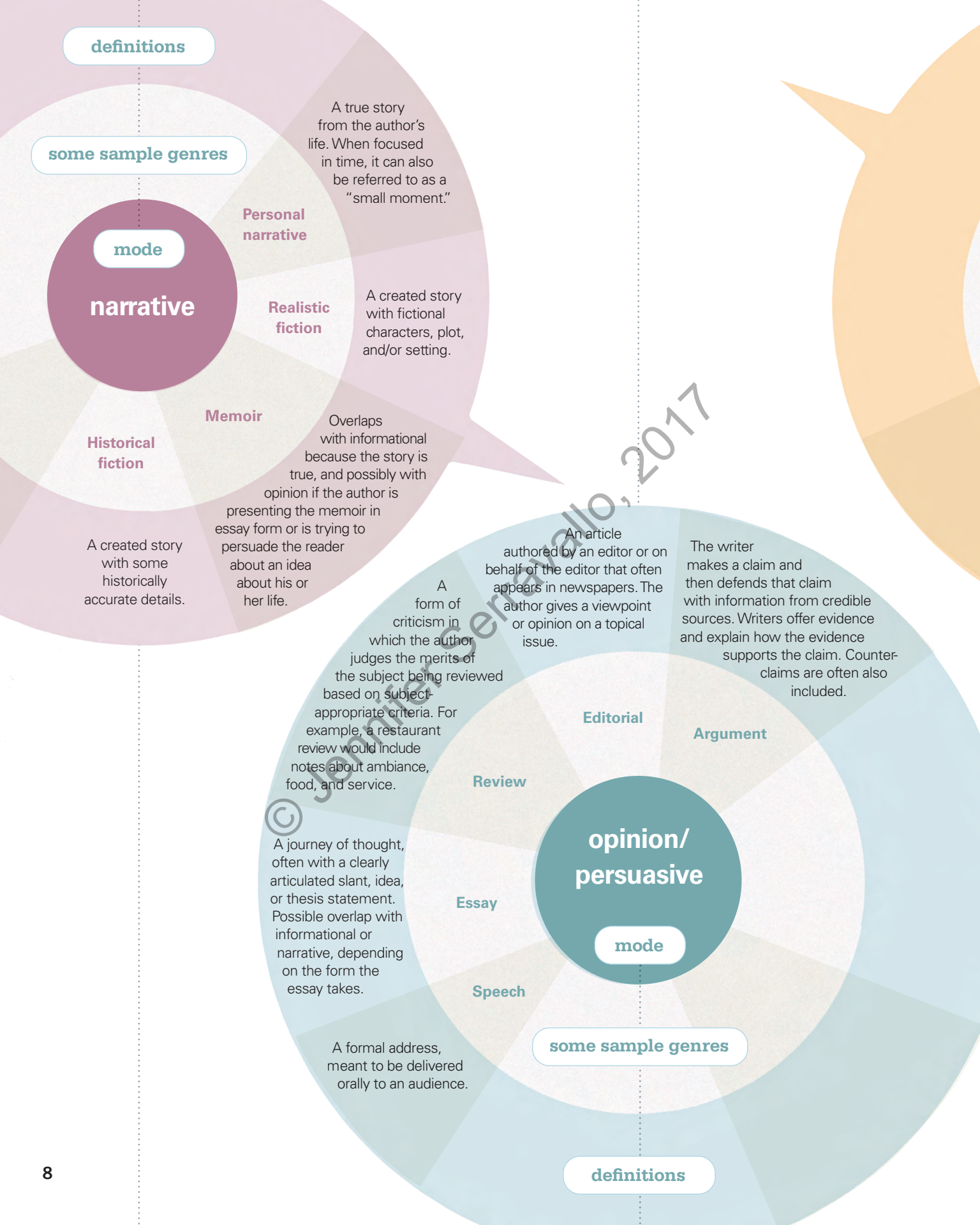
In addition to levels, I've included advice about which genres each strategy will work best for. In some cases, you'll find the strategy marked "any," meaning that with slight tweaks to the language, you can make the strategy work for any writing mode: informational/nonfiction, opinion/persuasive, narrative, poetry. For example, "Write a Poem to Try on a Focus" (page 145) is a strategy you'll find early on in the chapter about focus. The heart of the strategy is that students take their long-form writing (informational, opinion, or narrative) and try to condense the essence into a poem, causing them to consider the most important words and the most important meaning they are trying to get across. This works for any genre!

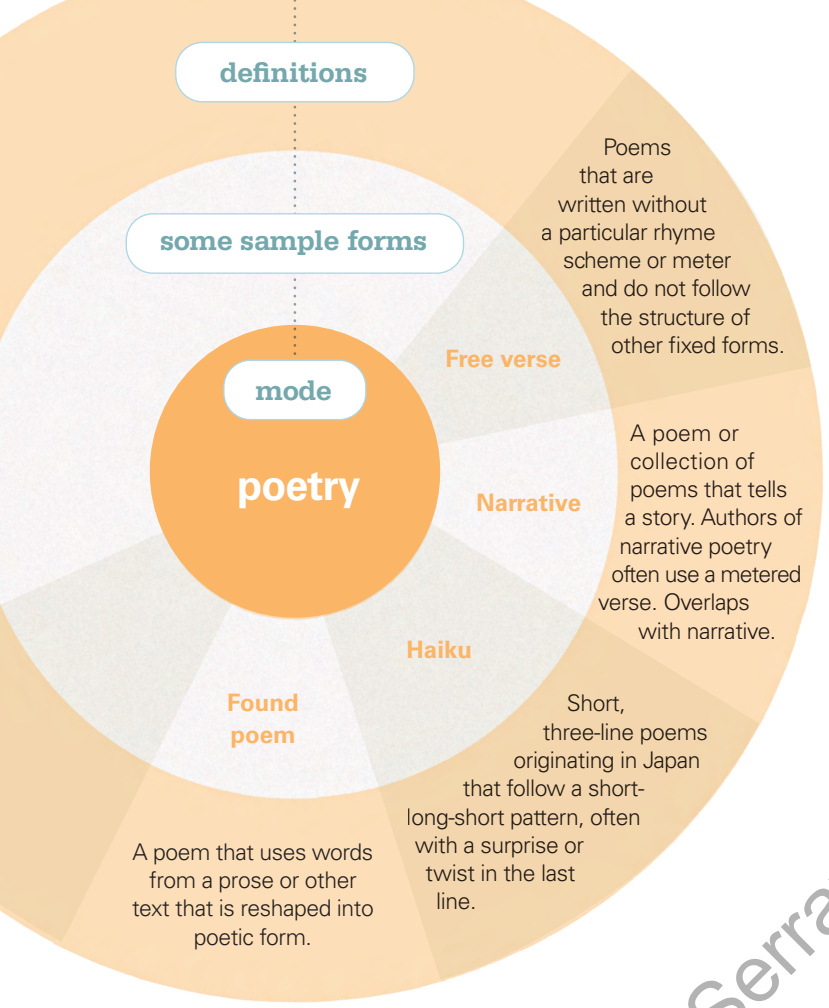
Other strategies are really unique to the genre, such as strategy "Uh-Oh… UH-OH…Phew" in the structure chapter (page 175), which is really leading children to learn about how to structure a narrative with a central problem that gets worse until the solution or resolution at the end. Another genre-specific example is the lesson about crafting a thesis statement, which will really only work in the persuasive mode of writing.

All this said, there are numerous genre-bending examples, and at times dividing things by genre is artificial. Fiction can teach us about life, the world, and people—it's not strictly informational writing that teaches. Poetry can be narrative (consider stories in poetry such as *Love That Dog* by Creech [2001]) or informational (such as some of Douglas Florian's animal or insect poems [1998]). Narrative can be used to elaborate within an informational text (consider the way Seymour Simon uses narrative in many of his informational picture books.)

Identifying the kind of writing your student(s) are choosing to make, or the type you're teaching as a class study, will be important to help match your writers to the right strategies. In the graphics on pages 7–9, I am offering examples of writing modes, genres, and definitions to help you with your planning and to help you categorize and contextualize the strategies.





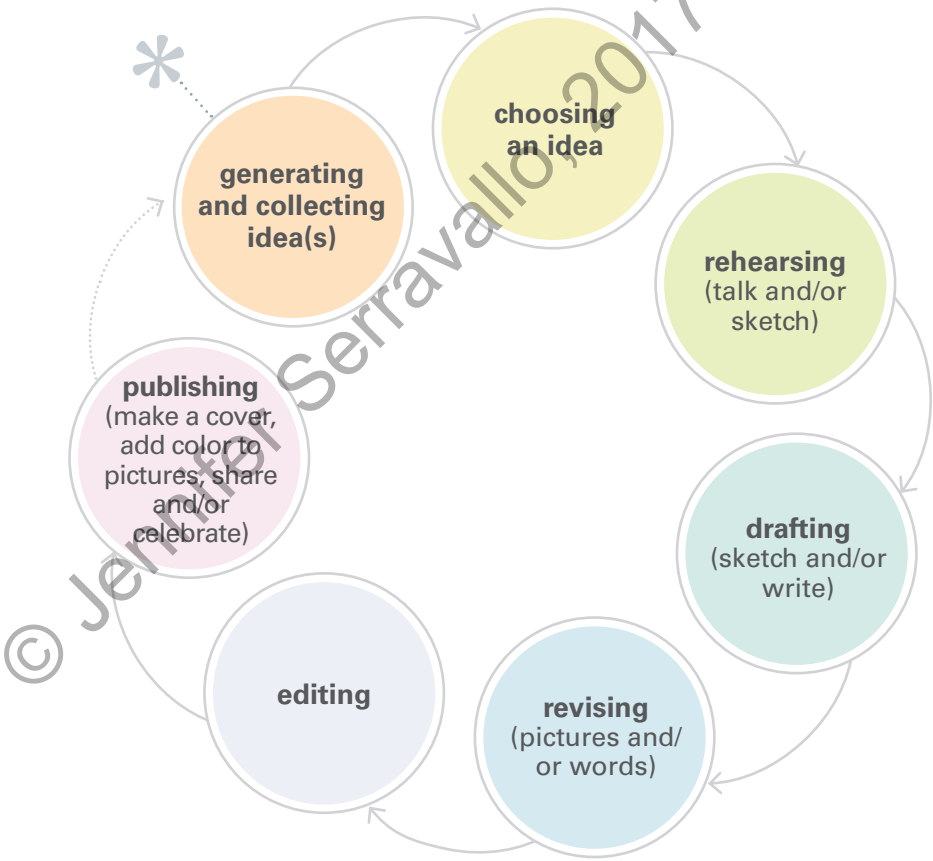


How Do I Find the Right Strategy Within the Chapter? Part III: Process

There is no single writing process. Read or listen to author interviews, and when asked to talk about how their books come to be, you'll hear a range of responses. Some just draft. Some draft and revise many times over. Others plan extensively before drafting. Some take long walks, rehearsing and rehearsing in their minds until they are ready, and then they sit down and it all comes out on the page. Writers will also use a variety of terms to talk about the same process work—for example, *prewriting*, *rehearsing*, and *developing an idea* can all be synonymous. Regardless of the differences, I think you'd be hard-pressed to find a writer who doesn't follow a process, for, as Donald Murray points out, "Thinking of writing as a process is an acceptance of the idea that writers are doing more than recording. They are thinking on the page, discovering what they want to say, and messing around with their words as they write. What results is almost never what was planned out. This means that writing is a subject that needs to be taught, not just assigned" (1985, 4).

For developing writers, it's often helpful to teach them *a* process, with the knowledge that over time they will adapt what you've taught them and will develop a process that works for them personally.

Many children in grades K–2 are taught to follow a process whereby they begin to plan by generating a topic, and then spend time talking and/or sketching to further plan out what they'll say. After that, they draft their writing, often first in sketches and then later by adding words. Often they will draft many examples of the type of writing they are trying to make, before going back to choose one or two to revise and edit (Calkins 1994). See below for a visual example of process. I find that children's stamina at this age is greatest during the phases where they are making new pieces—either planning out what they'll write or drafting.



The process many K–2 students follow when creating writing.

In early elementary grades, most teachers help each child set up a writing folder and offer students lots of choices of paper to support their work during writing time. Students will independently choose single pages or prestapled booklets. (For more on managing paper choice, see the section on writing centers, beginning on page 20.)

A **Strategy** is a step-by-step how-to. The strategy can be used as the content in any instructional format including conferences, small groups, minilessons, interactive writing, shared writing, and so on. The how-to you offer will help to scaffold students' practice with a skill they cannot yet do automatically. For more information on strategies, please see pages 16–18.

6.33 How Does Y

Who is this for?

LEVELS
4–8

TYPE

ting,

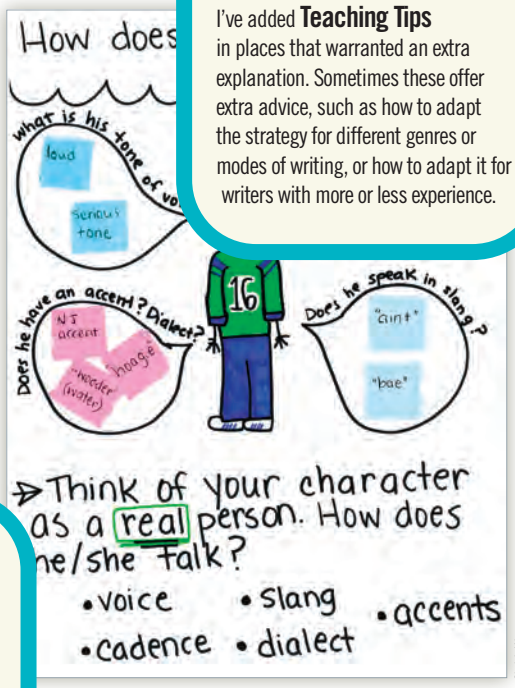
Strategy Think of the characters you create as being real people. Think about the details of how they talk (voice, cadence, slang, dialect, accents). Plan for or revise for details in the dialogue to help make your character unique.

Lesson Language *Each of the characters in your story should have a distinct voice. So clear, so different, that a reader may be able to tell who said what even without the dialogue tags. You can think about different aspects of your character's speech to develop this. One aspect is the speaker's cadence. Think about if your character would talk in short, simple sentences or long, run-on sentences. Another aspect is slang. Think about what expressions your character might use, or a word or phrase they use in common situations. You could also consider any accent or dialect your character might have and include some words spelled phonetically to reflect how they talk.*

Teaching Tip Note that this could be broken up to be several different lessons—one on cadence, one on slang, one on dialect, and so on.

Using a Mentor
One example of note is the Judy Moody series. Point out to children that Judy always says, "Rare!" when she likes something. It's something the author created for just that character, and it isn't something we've seen in other books or even heard in our lives, most likely (McDonald 2007).

Prompts
- Think about how your character will speak.
- Look back at the dialogue you've written.



Chelsie Weaver

Hat Tip: *Breathing In, Breathing Out: Keeping a Writer's Notebook* (Fletcher 1996)

Lesson Language offers an example of how I might explain or demonstrate the strategy during instruction. These examples help you, the teacher, better understand the strategy, as well as provide a sample of what you might say to students. Please make the language your own by modeling your own writing instead of using my example and incorporating references to texts your students know in place of those I suggest. That way, your examples will best match the age and background knowledge of your students.

I've added **Teaching Tips** in places that warranted an extra explanation. Sometimes these offer extra advice, such as how to adapt the strategy for different genres or modes of writing, or how to adapt it for writers with more or less experience.

Prompts are included on each strategy page to offer suggested language you may use as you coach students with practicing the strategy. Prompts are a way to nudge children into trying something they are working toward, or to offer feedback on what they are attempting. For more information on coaching prompts, please read pages 18–19.

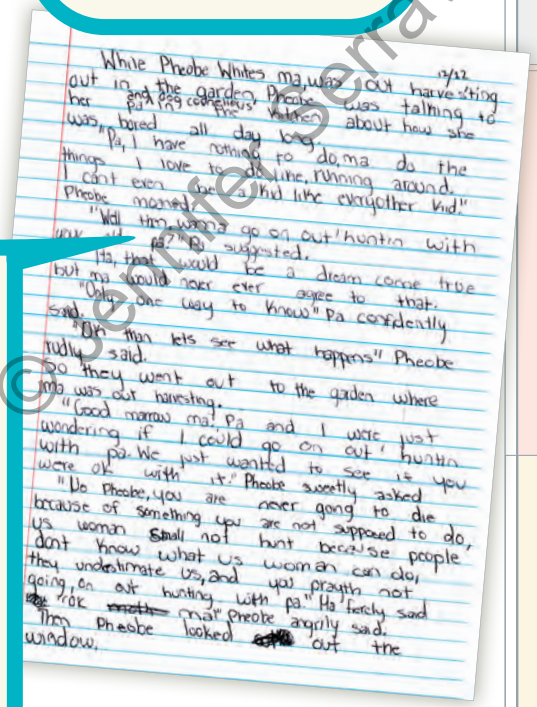
6.34 Character I for Historic

Strategy Read other narratives tha about. Note the vocabulary and/or ma When creating dialogue in your piece, try to incorporate the same speech patterns and vocabulary to give your characters authenticity.

Using a Mentor Be sure to choose a mentor text with dialogue and where the dialogue clearly gives away the time period. For example, notice this selection from *Going to School in 1876* by Loeper.

> "I ain't afraid of her," Tommy says.
> "She's just a weak old lady," Billy add
> "She's no bigger than a post rail," say anyone!"
> The boys laugh together.
> "What are you boys carrying on abou new teacher. "Get to your seats and their heads with a stick. "I won't tole whale the daylight out of you!"
> (1984, 69)

A writer studying this passage may notice words like *ain't* as well as the comparison to a *post rail* or the teacher's threat to *whale the daylight* out of the children who misbehave.


While Phoebe Whites ma was out harvesting 12/12
and the garden Phoebe was talking to
her pa pig courteous the kitchen about how she
was bored all day beg, about how she
Pa, I have nothing to do, ma do the
things I love to do, like, running around.
I can't even be kind like everyother kind."
Phoebe moaned.
"Well then, maybe go on out hunting with
pa?" Pa suggested.
Ha, that would be a dream come true
but ma would never ever agree to that.
"Only one way to know" Pa confidently
said.
"Oh then lets see what happens" Phoebe
rudly said.
So they went out to the garden where
ma was out harvesting.
"Good morrow ma" Pa and I were just
wondering if I could go on out hunting
with pa. We just wanted to see if you
were ok with it." Phoebe sweetly asked
"No Phoebe, you are never going to die
because of something you are not supposed to do,
us woman small not hunt because people
dont know what us woman can do,
they underestimate us, and you prayth not
going on out hunting with pa." Ma fiercly said
"OK ~~mother~~ ma" Phoebe angrily said.
Then Phoebe looked out the
window.

In the **Margins** you'll find guidance about who the strategy is best for. I've included a typical grade-level range where I'd be most likely to teach this strategy, although children's levels of writing development will likely vary within and across grade levels, and this should be treated as a loose guideline. I've also included recommended steps of the writing process and possible genres. For more information on choosing the right strategy for each student, see pages 16–18.

A section titled **Using Mentors** offers suggestions of mentor texts that can show students examples of the craft technique in action. Feel free to use the ones I suggest, or choose some of your own favorites! For more information on mentor texts, see the section beginning on page 25.

Visuals are included for all lessons. Depending on the lesson, I've sometimes included an anchor chart, other times a personalized goal card meant to be left with the student. In other cases, I've offered an example of student work or even photographs of a student in the process of practicing the strategy. Teachers from all over the country have generously opened up their classrooms to pilot lessons and send in what they've made. For more information on charts and tools, please see pages 23–25.

Who is this for?

LEVELS
4–8

GENRES / TEXT TYPES
narrative nonfiction, historical fiction

PROCESSES
developing, revising

You'll find a **Hat Tip** on almost every page of this book. These are references to the roots of the ideas included in the strategies and/or the authors by whom the ideas were inspired.

Hat Tip: *Finding the Heart of Nonfiction: Teaching 7 Essential Craft Tools with Mentor Texts* (Heard 2013)

Engagement

Independence, Increasing Volume, and Developing a Writing Identity

◎ Why is this goal important?

Anyone who has written will tell you that writing can be hard, sometimes drudging work. As Dorothy Parker famously said, "I hate writing, but I love having written." Of course, not all feel that way, but I think as teachers we need to acknowledge that the act of writing itself is not immediately enjoyable for all children, and even successful professional writers sometimes find it hard to sit still and get words on the page.

To be successful at writing takes a huge amount of mental focus and discipline. You have to love, and be engaged with, some part of it. Perhaps it's the creativity and creation aspect that gets a writer excited. Maybe it's the act of writing to find out what will happen next, to write to discover, rather than to write to record. Or for others, it's about the excitement of having their writing read by others, by having an audience.

Writers also need to take initiative. They start writing projects even when they aren't told exactly what to write about, or what genre to write in. They have ways

to generate topics, they understand reasons for writing, and they understand the power their words can have (Calkins 1994; C. Anderson 2005).

The question is, is this a teachable goal? Can we teach children to have more energy for their writing? Can we teach them to connect with it, to feel engaged with it—not just in an "I'm doing what the teacher told me and behaving" way, but in a real "getting into the flow" way? Can we support children in regarding themselves as writers, understanding their own distinct writing styles, and working in a way that feels joyful? I think yes.

2.10 Silence the "It's No Good" Voice

Strategy Be aware of a voice in your head that keeps you from starting (or continuing) your writing. Write without stopping the pencil or pen. When you hear the voice urging you to stop, silence it. Redirect your energy back to the page.

Lesson Language (This sample language is geared toward students collecting in notebooks, but you could also adapt it to work with students who are hesitant to get their words down during the drafting phase of the writing process.) *Your first, most important audience is yourself, writes Ralph Fletcher (1996). The notebook can be a place where you can collect ideas without fear of others' judgment. You can write, freeform, knowing that some of what you write down is just the beginnings of something greater. Getting something down is far better than getting nothing down. You don't have to keep what you write, or turn it into anything grand. Just writing helps you to think, and you never know what might come out of you as you do!*

Using a Mentor Stephen King, in *On Writing: A Memoir of the Craft*, says, "You can, you should, and if you're brave enough to start, you will" (2000, 270).

Prompts

- Your writing is a safe place. Just get down whatever is on your mind.
- I can see you thinking. Don't edit; just get it down.
- Let's have a go at the page. Write without letting any doubt creep in.
- I'll sit beside you as you try this.
- You're on a roll! That's it, get the words down without worrying if they are perfect.

Who is this for?

LEVELS
K–8

GENRE / TEXT TYPE
any

PROCESSES
generating and collecting, drafting

Hat Tip: *Breathing In, Breathing Out: Keeping a Writer's Notebook* (Fletcher 1996)

Organization and Structure

◎ Why is this goal important?

One can think of organization and structure as the bones of the piece, or the framing of a building. Without bones, your body is a blob. Without a frame, the building collapses. A writer may have the ability to pick a topic and add in lots of details, but if the frame isn't there, if the piece isn't organized, the reader will become confused. Some of the lessons in this chapter help writers consider the overall structure of their piece, making sure the structure matches genre and meaning.

Another aspect of structure is the parts of the piece. To extend the building analogy, for a sturdy house, we make sure the foundation is strong, the walls are plumb, and the roof is built at the right pitch. In a piece of writing, writers need to learn how to craft strong leads, beginnings, and introductions; how to consider the length of their middle; and how to end with a sense of closure. When each part isn't strong, the overall meaning can be muddied or a reader may not feel interested enough to read on (in the case of leads) or may feel unsatisfied at the end (in the case of endings/conclusions/closure). So organization and structure is about more than just planning for the overall piece, it is also full of strategies to help writers strengthen the parts of their piece. Some of the strategies in this chapter could apply to both whole-text and part-text structure (for example, a "seesaw" structure where

a writer alternates back and forth between two topics, ideas, or moments can be used to structure a whole text or only a portion of a text).

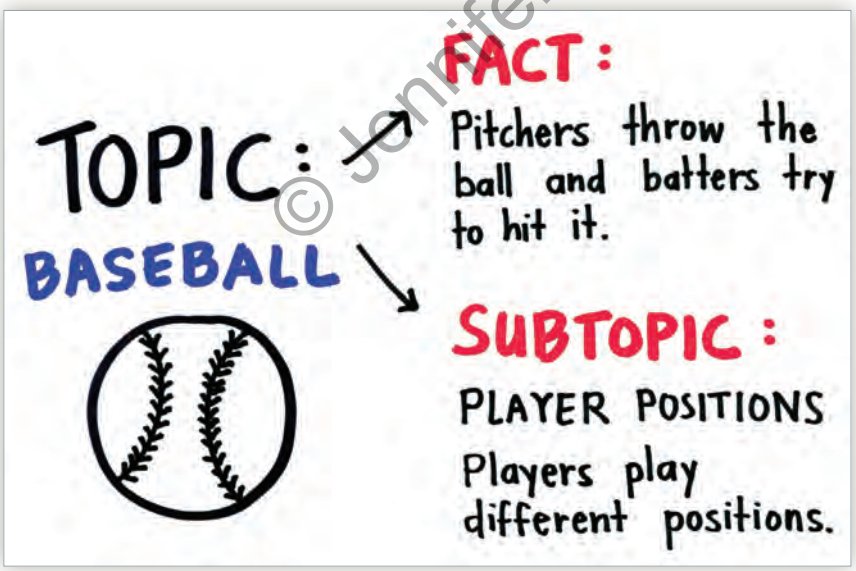
5.14 Parts of a Topic: Features and Characteristics

Strategy Picture your topic in your mind. Zoom in to parts of it, asking yourself, "What are the features of my topic? What are the characteristics of my topic?" Name subtopics (not facts!). Create a list of subtopics.

Lesson Language *For example, if I want to write about my dog, I can picture her in my mind. In my mind's eye, I can zoom in on her head. A fact would be "She has very floppy ears with very soft fur." But a subtopic would be "ears." If I name a subtopic, I can then go back to add many facts that expand upon my subtopic, "A bloodhound's ears are floppy. They hang so low that sometimes they drag in their water and food bowls. But they are more than just cute! A bloodhound is bred for it's great sense of smell, and the droopy ears help to waft scents up from the ground into the dog's nose." So, ears is one subtopic. Another might be about the color or appearance of the fur. Another might be about the size of the bloodhound.*

Prompts

- What's one part of your topic you think your reader would want to know about?
- That's a fact. What is a subtopic that fact might be a part of?
- It's almost like you're making a table of contents.
- Could you write a whole page about that? If not, it might be a fact rather than a subtopic.
- Think about features of your topic.



Who is this for?

LEVELS
1–8

GENRES / TEXT TYPES
informational/ nonfiction, opinion/ persuasive

PROCESS
developing

Hat Tip: *Finding the Heart of Nonfiction: Teaching 7 Essential Craft Tools with Mentor Texts* (Heard 2013)

Elaboration

Why is this goal important?

Elaboration is the specific information a writer uses to develop her topic. Elaboration includes but is not limited to: details, facts, anecdotes, dialogue, inner thinking, setting description, character description, statistics, reasons, information, and direct quotations from interview subjects. With strong use of purposeful detail, a piece of writing comes to life and the author's intended meaning is clear. With an absence of detail to develop the character, paint the world of the story, explain the content, or offer reasons and facts for the purpose of persuasion, the writing often falls flat or feels confusing to a reader.

Choosing this goal means you'll be helping writers to take the skeleton of the piece they have and flesh it out, adding more details to help the reader envision the story they are telling, understand the argument they are making, or comprehend the subject they are informing the reader about. However, more detail doesn't always mean better. As William Zinsser writes in *On Writing Well: The Classic Guide to Writing Nonfiction*: "Clutter is the disease of American writing. We are a society strangling in unnecessary words, circular constructions, pompous frills and meaningless jargon" (2001, 7). To say it another way, this chapter will help writers

to add more details, sure. But the strategies will also help children to improve the quality of those details by teaching them to write with more precision and care. Offering a variety of elaboration strategies will also help students to vary the types of details they may include in their piece, so that their drafts don't end up sounding one-note. Overall, we should aim to not just to say to children, "Add more details," but rather, "Think about what it is you're trying to say/show/tell. Now what details would best help you do that?" (Murray 1985; Anderson 2005).

6.38 Mentor Sentence

Strategy Find a sentence in a text that you admire for its power, cadence, or rhythm. Find a sentence in your own writing that you'd like to try revising. Tap out the beat of the mentor sentence or identify the types of words used in the order they are used. Try to revise your sentence with your ideas and words, but the mentor sentence's rhythm and syntax.

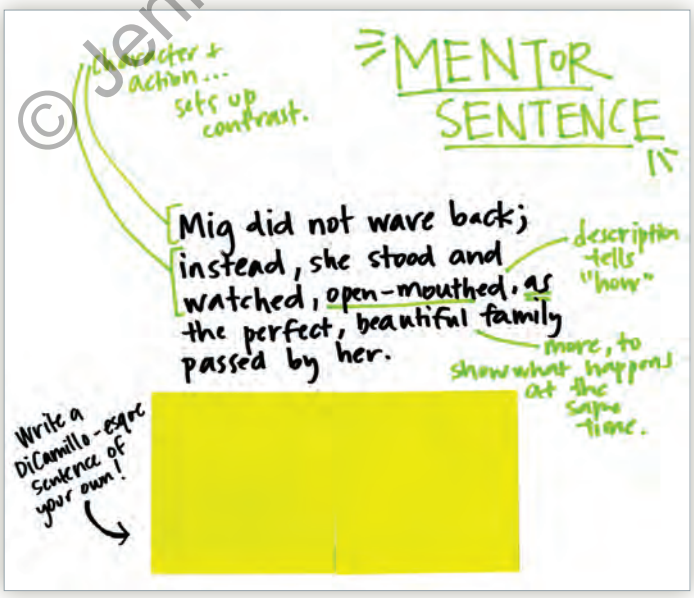
Lesson Language *I found a sentence in our read-aloud,* The Tale of Despereaux *(DiCamillo 2003), that packs such a punch it leaves me wishing I could write like this. I'm going to read it trying to identify the rhythm and parts.*

> Mig did not wave back; instead, she stood and watched, open-mouthed, as the perfect, beautiful family passed by her (132–33).

*The first part is a character and an action, then a semicolon, which means the next part could be its own sentence. It gives us two actions, a describing word (*open-mouthed*), then* as *and the actions of other characters. I think what I like about this sentence is that Kate DiCamillo just layers on more and more details to help form my mental picture. So now, let me take my sentence: "Jake was watching all the other swimmers and thinking he'd never win the race." If I rewrite my sentence to model it after Kate's, I might try: "Jake did not jump in the water yet; instead, he stood and thought, worried, as the probable champions walked before him." Do you see how that revision makes my writing have a different cadence, but also provides more details that help describe and help build my reader's mental image?*

Prompts

- What do you love about that sentence?
- Name the parts of that sentence.
- Let's tap out the beat of that sentence.
- Try rewriting your sentence to have that same beat.



Who is this for?

LEVELS
4–8

GENRE / TEXT TYPE
any

PROCESS
revising

Hat Tip: *The Power of Grammar: Unconventional Approaches to the Conventions of Language* (Ehrenworth and Vinton 2005)

Word Choice

Why is this goal important?

Making careful decisions about word choice is not just for the dictionary-loving, thesaurus-clutching writers among us. The words we choose have the power to communicate tone, clarify an intended meaning (or not), and give writing voice. Without carefully considering word choice, writing can end up vague, or flat, or as William Zinsser puts it, "If the nails are weak, your house will collapse. If your verbs are weak and your syntax is rickety, your sentences will fall apart" (2001, 19).

For some writers, word choice isn't something they need to give deliberate attention to. Their writing just comes out sounding full of voice and rich with clarity and specificity. For others, using the strategies in this chapter as exercises to practice revision or careful consideration of their writing on the word level will help elevate their writing or help it to be filled with more style. After all, when you think of a novel that just stayed with you, or a speech you can't get out of your mind, oftentimes it isn't the whole thing you remember as much as a few lines, or words used in surprising ways. Focusing on word choice as a goal will help your students' writing to be memorable as well.

Many of the strategies in this chapter lean on a student's understanding of grammar and how language works. Specifically, there are strategies about making your verbs more surprising, nouns more precise, or eliminating adverbs and

adjectives where they are unnecessary. Although understanding parts of speech is not a prerequisite to using these strategies, clueing children in to how sentences are structured and the "jobs" that words have within a sentence will help them to make wiser choices when it comes to word-level revisions. You can find support for developing grammar knowledge in the ninth chapter.

A warning, though, about all of the strategies in this chapter: As children attempt word revisions based on the sound of their language, playing with words, or swapping out words for ones they deem to be "better," be sure to encourage them to come back to the question, "What is it I'm trying to say?" to inform their revisions. Just like the time you teach exclamation points and every sentence ends with one! or three!!!, expect that less-experienced writers may litter their piece with sound words, hyperbole, or fancy verbs when sometimes, simple language is best. When they make changes, encourage them to consider the effects the changes have had: Do they help to set the mood or feeling of the piece? Does it help your reader feel like they are there? Does it build tension? Do they clarify? Make the reader laugh?

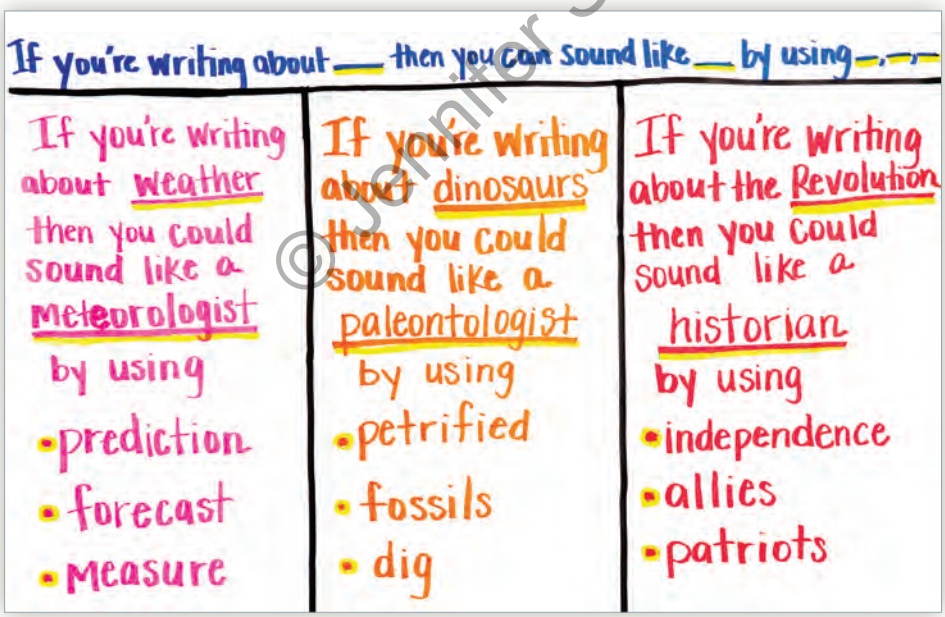
7.2 Write with Authority: Domain-Specific Vocabulary

Strategy As you're researching your topic, keep a list of the words other authors with authority use to teach about the topic. As you write your piece, be sure to use the domain-specific words so you sound authoritative as well.

Teaching Tip This strategy language could easily be tweaked to be a revision lesson by asking students to go back to their draft and underline words that aren't as specific to the topic as they could be. They could then return to their primary sources (if they did research) to learn what words should be there instead. Glossaries may be especially helpful places to look. Or you can teach them to think, "What would an expert call this?" and replace their general language with language that's more precise.

Prompts

- What word would an expert use?
- Let's check back to some of the words you came across when you were reading about your topic.
- Think about what you're teaching here. What word(s) would an expert use?
- What would an expert call that?
- Use the words of an expert.



Megan Hughes and Courtney Tilley

Who is this for?

LEVELS
1–8

GENRES / TEXT TYPES
informational/ nonfiction, opinion/ persuasive

PROCESSES
developing, drafting, revising

Hat Tip: *Finding the Heart of Nonfiction: Teaching 7 Essential Craft Tools with Mentor Texts* (Heard 2013)

Conventions

Spelling and Letter Formation

◎ Why is this goal important?

We teach students to consider purpose and audience as they write, so learning how words are spelled and spelling conventionally so that others can comprehend what has been written are important to making sure what they have to say is clear to their readers.

To start, students will likely use invented spelling, using letters they know to represent the sounds they hear. These early spellings are ripe opportunities for emergent writers to practice letter-sound correspondence and are an empowering way for them to get their thoughts and ideas down on the page (Routman 2005; Graves 1983; Snowball and Bolton 1999). Encouraging invented spelling is not sending the message "spelling doesn't matter," but rather, "you are a writer!"—even if the spelling isn't completely correct yet, as young writers are still learning the many rules of written English.

As beginning writers read more, engage in more spelling and phonics lessons, and generally develop more awareness of conventional spellings, they will start to

realize that some of the words they write aren't spelled accurately. Because they care about what they are writing, they are motivated to work on their spelling so they can write with more accuracy on the first go and edit their pieces for spelling accuracy as well. At this point, they will start relying not only on their ear—writing the sounds they hear in the words they want to write—but also on spelling rules and remembering how words are spelled from seeing them in print (Graves 1983). As students progress through the grades, they will learn more spelling rules and patterns, and they will also memorize exceptions.

8.11 Part-by-Part Spelling

Who is this for?

LEVELS
1–3

GENRE / TEXT TYPE
any

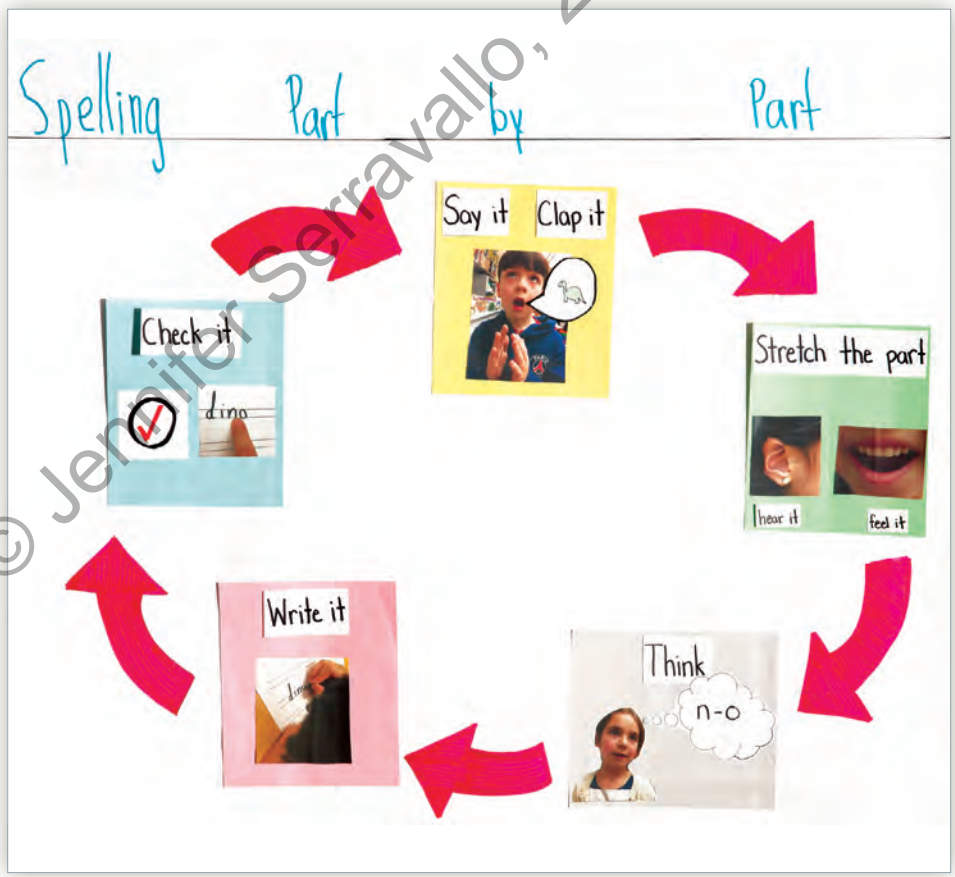
PROCESSES
generating and collecting, developing, drafting, editing

Hat Tip: *Spelling K–8: Planning and Teaching* (Snowball and Bolton 1999)

Strategy Say the word you want to write. Clap the syllables. Listen to the first syllable. Think about what group of letters spell that first part. Say the word again, part by part. Write down the letters for the next syllable. Continue until the whole word is written.

Prompts

- Say the word, part by part.
- Clap the syllables.
- What letters will spell that first part?
- Write that part down.
- What's the next syllable you hear?



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