

CHAPTER 1

Introduction

We wrote this new edition because the landscape of writing instruction has changed in the last 10 years. Writing research and theory have evolved, and the expectations for teachers have also grown. This new edition responds to those changes by incorporating new scientific research on writing, expanding the scope of instructional recommendations, and building on our recent work in schools.

Writing instruction remains critically important, and in our work in schools, we continue to see teachers experience challenges with the optimal way to teach beginning writers. Teachers report that they use a variety of strategies to teach handwriting (Asher, 2006; Graham et al., 2003; Graham, Harris, et al., 2008; Troia & Graham, 2017), spelling (Fresch, 2003; Graham, Morphy, et al., 2008), and composition (Cutler & Graham, 2008). The amount of time devoted to writing instruction and practice in classrooms also varies widely (Coker et al., 2016; Guo et al., 2023). One contributor to the variability in classroom instruction is the core literacy curricula used in schools. Many of these programs do not provide comprehensive support for all the components of evidence-based writing instruction (Gabas et al., 2023; Vander Hart et al., 2010).

We frequently encounter teachers who admit that they avoid teaching writing. Many feel guilty about neglecting writing instruction, but they are unsure how to move forward without better curricular support or intense profession learning opportunities. This new edition is designed to equip teachers with state-of-the-art foundational knowledge and instructional practices to meet students' writing needs. In the next section, we describe how the Science of Writing has informed this edition.

The Science of Writing

One of the most notable differences between the educational climate now and 10 years ago is the attention devoted to scientific studies. Teachers, administrators,

and even the general public have engaged with ideas from research and their impact on curriculum and instruction. In fact, the term *Science of Reading* has become one of the most common educational buzzwords. We warmly welcome the growing attention to high-quality research in reading. However, a focus on just the Science of Reading may not be enough to address the literacy needs of students.

To meet the complex literacy needs of students, the scope of the Science of Reading must expand. Recently, Young-Suk Kim and Catherine Snow (2025) advocated for expanding the Science of Reading in new directions. First, they recommended moving beyond a narrow conception of the Science of Reading and enlarging it to the Science of Reading and Writing. This change highlights the close relationship between reading and writing at a broad level and in terms of the component skills of each. In addition, they urged the field to attend to the Science of Teaching Reading and Writing. Much of the foundational research associated with the Science of Reading has explored the knowledge and processes that support reading. Without a doubt, this work is valuable for the field. But to improve instruction, we need dedicated attention to the complex processes involved in instruction—for both reading and writing. The Science of Teaching Reading and Writing would encourage researchers to explore issues that affect instruction. These issues might involve student-level factors related to learning such as language background or social and economic factors. Other central issues include teacher knowledge, motivation, and attitudes. We are strong proponents of widening the scope of the Science of Reading to include more attention to both writing and instruction.

While popular attention to the Science of Reading (and the Science of Writing!) may be new, the research itself has been around for decades. In the first edition of this book, we relied on that body of research to inform our recommendations. Much of that work remains highly applicable and important for teachers interested in strengthening their writing instruction.

One of the most useful summaries of primary-grade writing research is the Institute of Education Sciences (IES) Practice Guide (Graham, Bollinger, et al., 2012). Although the practice guide is over 10 years old, the recommendations remain relevant. The authors summarized their individual findings into four broad recommendations:

1. Provide daily time for students to write.
2. Teach students to use the writing process for a variety of purposes.
3. Teach students to become fluent with handwriting, spelling, sentence construction, typing, and word processing.
4. Create an engaged community of writers. (Graham, Bollinger, et al., 2012, p. 1)

For each specific recommendation, the authors describe the strength of the supporting research. The strongest research is typically well-designed experimental

and quasi-experimental studies. Other types of studies do not provide evidence that is as strong, but the authors of the practice guide also considered that work when crafting their recommendations.

In this new edition, we discuss more recent advances in both writing theory and instructional practices. Some of these include more comprehensive theoretical models for early writing. These models are drawn on a wider range of social and cognitive forces, and they also describe more explicit links between writing and reading. In instructional research, we have updated each chapter with more recent findings. Our own recent work on sentence-writing instruction informed the revisions to Chapter 5 on sentence writing and the addition of Chapter 6 on making sentences better. Additionally, we added new information about strategy instruction for young writers in Chapter 8 on composing.

As we noted in the previous edition, writing research is a powerful tool for instruction. However, there are still many unanswered questions that teachers will ask, including:

- When should teachers begin composing instruction?
- When and how should students use invented spelling?
- How much practice do students need to learn the central features of an opinion essay?
- How much support should students get when writing?
- How should writing instruction be framed with advances in technology?
- How do teachers meet the needs of students with writing needs, including multilingual learners and students with disabilities?

When faced with questions that the research could not answer, we followed the example of the authors of the IES Practice Guide and drew on our experience as teachers and researchers. Our recommendations leverage many evidence-based practices. As a result, we have confidence in their efficacy and believe that teachers (and their students) can benefit from them. We encourage teachers to use evidence-based instructional practices in ways that match the needs of the students of a variety of grades and writing abilities.

Framework for Writing Instruction

In the first edition of this book, we used the Common Core State Standards (CCSS) as a framework for instruction (National Governors Association [NGA] Center for Best Practices & Council of Chief State School Officers [CCSSO], 2010). At that time, the CCSS were widely adopted, and many teachers were wondering how to provide instruction to help students meet those end-of-year standards. Some states have since moved away from the CCSS. Others are in the process of doing so.

Despite this trend, most state English language arts standards still match the CCSS wholly or in part (EdGate, 2025).

Instead of explicitly referencing the CCSS in this new edition, we refer to state standards because of the variability in standards across states. We also acknowledge that there may be even greater variability in the future. But in this book, we cannot provide different materials and recommendations tailored for each set of standards. Our goal is to offer recommendations based on the Science of Writing. While we refer to them as state standards, we use the CCSS as instructional targets. You may need to adjust some of the materials to align with your own state's standards if they differ.

Our goal in the second edition remains the same as in the first. It is to provide the best possible guidance about how to teach writing in the primary grades. Throughout the book, we draw on the scientific study of writing and writing instruction to recommend evidence-based practices in writing instruction.

Curriculum

When talking with primary-grade teachers about writing, two questions nearly always come up. What writing curriculum should our school purchase? What curriculum would you recommend? These questions are always difficult because we have never found a single curriculum that provides research-based instruction in all writing areas or that meets all students' instructional needs. As a result, we refrain from making specific recommendations about commercial curricula. We believe that teachers need to know how to recognize the strengths and weaknesses of any curriculum and then add and subtract components as necessary. Effective writing instruction requires both teacher knowledge and curricular materials.

This book is not meant to be a complete writing curriculum either. Instead, we have provided resources designed to help teachers evaluate the breadth and depth of their existing curricula. Furthermore, we have offered a range of materials and methods that could be used to supplement an existing writing program or to create one. This book was written to provide insight and materials required for high-quality writing instruction. It is our hope that after teachers read this book, they will be both better informed and more effective writing teachers.

Common Instructional Elements

Readers are sure to notice common elements across the instructional chapters. This was done intentionally because we include instructional approaches that have been effective across domains. Our common instructional approach is the gradual release of responsibility, which involves explicit instruction (including modeling) and scaffolding for students (Pearson & Gallagher, 1983). The first step in

teaching all skills includes the process of explicit instruction. Teachers are clear and direct about what students are learning to do, when they should do it, and how to do it. Next, teachers show students how to do the target process by modeling. When modeling, teachers engage in a think-aloud, where they describe their thought processes for students. Doing so allows students to see how experts (the teachers) think as they work. A teacher think-aloud gives students access to the “behind-the-scenes” work that happens. After teachers provide explicit instruction and modeling, they then slowly give students opportunities to engage in the tasks. This process could begin by having students participate in small groups or pairs so that they can receive support from the teacher and peers. Eventually, students work individually. This scaffolding is designed to offer students guidance and support as they learn new skills and processes.

Another common instructional element in this book is differentiation to support students who may need additional supports and for students who may benefit from activities to extend their writing. Survey research suggests that instructional adaptations, such as extra encouragement, extra time, or reteaching, are often implemented but may not meet the needs of all students (Graham, Morphy, et al., 2008; Graham et al., 2016). We have heard from teachers that they lack resources to be able to adapt instruction, whether that be materials or time. In first grade, we have found that teachers do make adaptations when sufficient supports are embedded into a sentence-writing curriculum (Ritchey et al., 2024). In this edition, most of the suggestions for differentiation address ways to modify the writing task or the writing process. These suggestions are designed to help teachers modify the lessons both within a grade and across grades.

Similarly, we offer suggestions about assessment. Understandably, teachers are concerned with students’ end-of-the-year progress in writing. This kind of assessment is often called summative. In this book, nearly all our suggestions for assessment are for formative assessment. Formative assessment is designed to provide feedback about student learning to guide instruction. We believe that this is crucial because it offers teachers guidance on how their instruction is meeting the lesson objectives. Furthermore, formative assessment data can help teachers identify which students would benefit from increased support or greater challenge.

In the instructional chapters, we provide formative assessments that teachers can use to make instructional decisions. Based on students’ performance, teachers can decide to move to the next instructional phase or to review by providing additional instruction and opportunities for practice.

Content and Organization of This Book

In this second edition, our goals are to use the body of scientific research to provide teachers with the best advice possible about writing instruction. In Chapter

2, we review recent theory and research on early writing development with a focus on composing. Young children engage in a very complex process when learning to write. In this chapter, we describe how the development of skills and knowledge contributes to students' compositional success.

Chapter 3 provides a discussion of a central writing skill: handwriting. We review important components of handwriting instruction and provide guidance on instructional strategies for handwriting. In this edition, we include information on cursive instruction given the recent attention to bringing cursive instruction back to schools.

Spelling instruction is the Chapter 4 topic. After a summary of the research on spelling development and instruction, we discuss strategies to teach both words with regular spellings (in ways that complement reading instruction) and words with irregular spellings. Ways to practice words are also highlighted.

We have devoted two chapters to teaching students to write sentences given how important sentence construction is to all other writing. The focus for Chapter 5 is teaching foundational skills for sentence writing. We describe instructional strategies for teaching students to generate sentences, including compound and complex sentences and other sentence types, such as questions and imperatives. In Chapter 6, we offer suggestions on how teachers can help students write better sentences using revising and editing strategies.

In Chapter 7, we discuss instruction in writing paragraphs. We explain how paragraphs are unique and require attention. There is also a discussion of how teachers can approach paragraph instruction, including the methods for assessment and differentiation.

There are three chapters dedicated to instruction in composing. Chapter 8 provides a broad overview of recent research on genre-specific composing. Then, in Chapter 9, we describe how to teach students to plan and draft their texts, and Chapter 10 is about evaluating, revising, and editing extended compositions. Teachers can apply the instructional methods described for planning, drafting, revising, and editing across the genres that they teach.

In Chapter 11, we explain methods that teachers can use to accommodate students with writing difficulties, including students with disabilities and multilingual learners. We discuss common difficulties, including problems with handwriting, spelling, and composing, and supports for students. Many of the strategies described in this chapter were developed for students with disabilities, but the approaches are effective with a wide range of students. Last, we describe how tiered instruction may be implemented to support students who are experiencing difficulty.

Finally, in Chapter 12 we consider common challenges to successful writing instruction and offer suggestions for overcoming them. Then we provide a suggested schedule for writing instruction and consider how teachers can make time for writing by integrating it into other academic areas.

Currently, educators face challenges associated with student achievement. Disruptions in schooling caused by the COVID-19 pandemic resulted in lost instructional time for millions of students, which impacted writing achievement (Skar et al., 2022). Educators at all levels are faced with underprepared students who need high-quality writing instruction. Now more than ever, we need effective writing instruction. We revised this book to provide educators with state-of-the-art instructional recommendations based on the Science of Writing.