

Writing Mini-Lessons

Learning to write more, writing more
complex sentences and writing about
multiple sub-topics



Students in Groups I and J
on the WwATC



About these cards:

These cards are designed to support you to implement writing mini-lessons with conventional writers. They aren't the only things you can do as mini-lessons - but these are designed to give you some structure to get started.

I suggest that you print them and work through them with your student(s). You will probably need to use each card more than once as the student(s) develop the skills addressed on the card. You can, of course, add your own lessons in as you become used to the format, based on what your student(s) need.

Student(s) at this level should be able to put together most of their sentences independently and should need minimal co-construction, except when you are introducing a new concept.

For student(s) who are learning to write more with coherence and cohesion, we run mini-lessons on a wide range of topics. These include ideas and language, spelling, end punctuation, capital letters, editor's checklist and diversifying sentence types. Once the student has finished writing, teacher-student conferences tend to focus on language as student(s) should be spelling intelligibly at this stage. If a word is intelligible but not correct, you can say "can I show you how I would write this word?" - and then if the student agrees, you would write it on a post-it note or a separate piece of paper.

As always, have fun writing!

Jane Farrell

The Goal:

The student is learning to a) Compose a message (b) independently (c) that is understood by the intended audience and (d) achieves a meaningful goal.

(Erickson & Koppenhaver, 2013)

Basic Components of Writing Instruction for Conventional Writers

Part 1

Mini-lesson
from an adult
(modelled
writing) on an
aspect of
writing

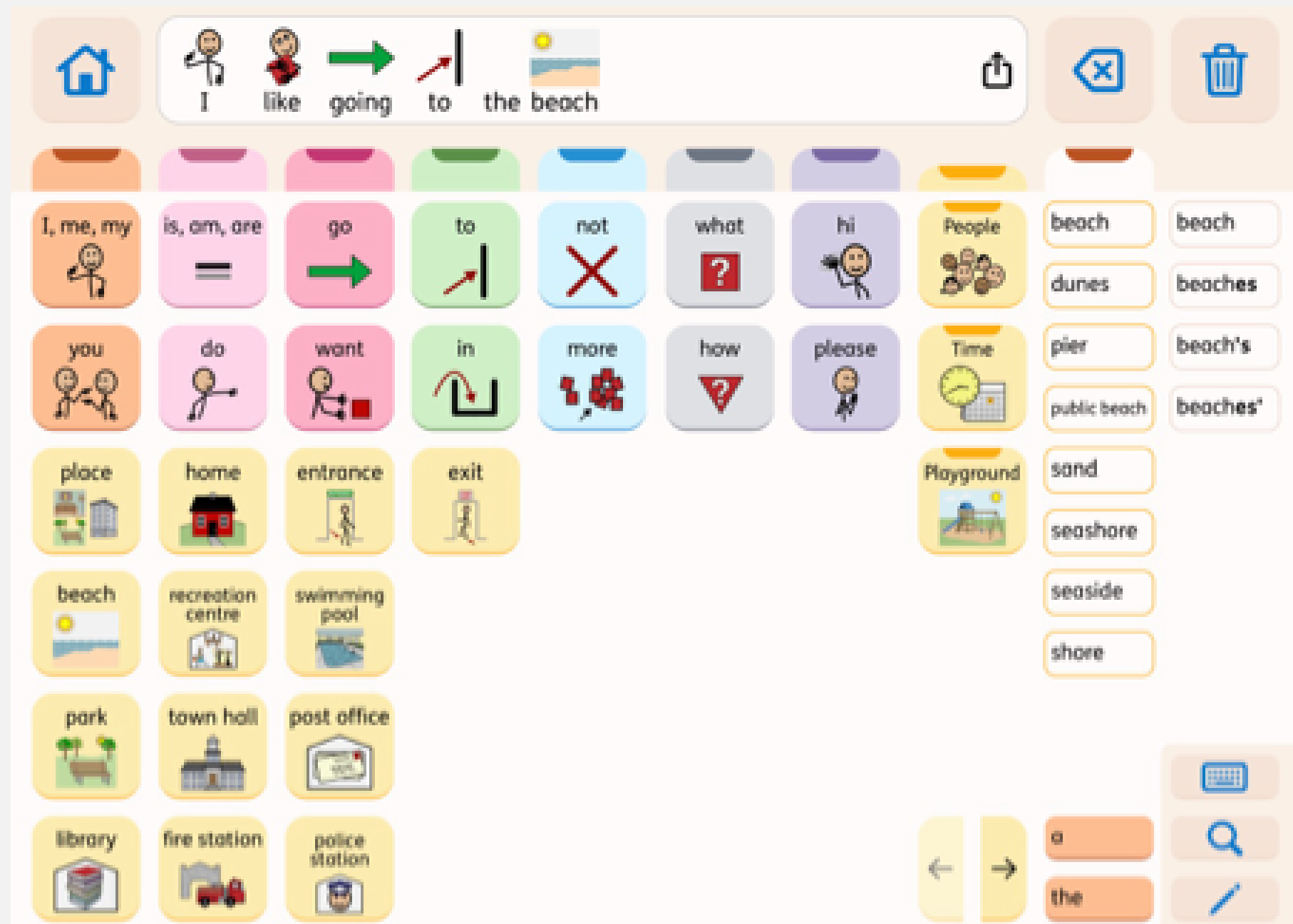
Part 2

Student writes
(Student-
teacher
conference
before student
writes if needed)

Part 3

Teacher-student
conference to review
writing.
Student shares
writing with others at
least once a week.

Remember to use AAC in your “Think Aloud”



Making language visible will help all your students.

For student(s) who struggle to use little words in their writing, and for student(s) who are struggling to generate ideas and language in writing, using AAC to show them language is an invaluable tool - and will reduce their cognitive load.

Writing Mini-Lesson 01

Expanding Writing and Increasing Complexity: Writing More with Meaning

Once student(s) can write simple, expanded and complex sentences intelligibly, then we teach them how to write more with meaning and organisation.

At this stage, students are usually going to start writing across multiple days, as their writing gets longer and more complex. You are going to model this in your mini-lessons too.

Mini-Lessons:

Day 1

Write a two to three sentences about a factual event: e.g. "Last Friday we had sports day. We ran races, we played games and we had lots of fun. I loved sports day."

Day 2

Add to it the next day e.g. "Some of our class ran in the races. John ran a short, fast race. Mike ran a long race. Sarah ran with an egg. They all won ribbons!"

Day 3

The following day expand some more about the topic.

Have the students write on the same topic across three days too. Use the prompt "tell me more" to get them to write more.

Groups I and J

Writing Mini-Lesson 02

Expanding Writing and Increasing Complexity: Writing More with Meaning and Organisation

Once student(s) can write simple, expanded and complex sentences intelligibly, then we teach them how to write more with meaning and organisation.

At this stage, students are usually going to start writing across multiple days, as their writing gets longer and more complex. You are going to model this in your mini-lessons too.

Mini-Lessons:

Day 1

Use a book you have already used in class. Write a 2 - 3 sentence summary of the beginning of the book e.g. "Orcas are mammals. They look like big dolphins, but they are black and white. They are the largest type of dolphin."

Day 2

Add to it the next day, writing sentences about the middle of the book. "Orcas are also called killer whales. They hunt in groups and are good hunters who eat other animals. They have teeth to eat other animals with."

Day 3

The following day expand some more about the book.

Have the students write on the same topic across three days too. Use the prompt "tell me more" to get them to write more.

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Writing Mini-Lesson 03

Expanding Writing and Increasing Complexity: Writing More with Meaning and Organisation

Once student(s) can write simple, expanded and complex sentences intelligibly, then we teach them how to write more with meaning and organisation.

At this stage, students are usually going to start writing across multiple days, as their writing gets longer and more complex. You are going to model this in your mini-lessons too.

Mini-Lessons:

Day 1

Read the beginning of a new book (fiction) aloud. Write a one to two sentence summary of the part you have read. Now ask the students to do the same. You might use a book in a familiar series e.g. Pig the Pug, to give the students some background knowledge to help them.

Day 2

Ask the students to write the next part of the book as a group, aim for 2 - 3 sentences again. You can act as scribe.

Day 3

In your mini-lesson, finish the story using 2 - 3 sentences. Now, ask the students to finish the story on their own, using 2 - 3 sentences.

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Writing Mini-Lesson 04

Writing Complex Sentences: Because-But-So

This is another mini-lesson focusing on complex sentences, but in a more “complex” way! This idea is from the The Writing Revolution (Hochman & Wexler, 2017).



**Mummies teach
us about our
past...**

This lesson is about using conjunctions to write single sentences that are more complex. Hochman and Wexler (2017) also suggest it helps them think more analytically and helps their reading comprehension, as they are likely to come across similar sentences in more complex texts.

Mini-Lesson:

1. Pick a topic that you and the students know about. You might use a text from comprehension instruction, or a topic from STEM.
2. In your mini-lesson write three sentences with the same sentence stem. The sentence stem for this topic is “Mummies teach us about our past...”
3. Now, complete the sentence stem using three different conjunctions. e.g. “Mummies teach us about our past because they are very old.” “Mummies teach us about our past but not everything about it.” “Mummies teach us about our past so we know more about how people used to live.”
4. Remove your completed sentences but leave one of the sentence stems. Ask the students to write, using the same sentence stem. See the addendum on Because-But-So for more tips.

Writing Mini-Lesson 05

Expanding Writing and Increasing Complexity: Titles

Titles are part of publishing, so we are going to do some mini-lessons focused on titles.

You are going to start adding titles to your mini-lesson writing and using a think-aloud to model the process for deciding about a title.

Mini-Lesson:

1. Pick a topic and then think aloud about the title in advance. For example: "I'm going to write about the butterfly book we've been reading in science. The book is about the butterfly life cycle, but I'm just going to write about the caterpillar. Since I'm going to write about a caterpillar, I'll call my piece of writing "Caterpillars". I need to use a capital C for that."
2. Write your sentences and read them out. Then say "I came up with the title first. Now let's look at it again and see if it needs changing"
3. Leave the title as it is – but do the same mini lesson on another day and change the title.
4. Other mini-lessons to work on titles:
 - Use a book from comprehension instruction and get the class to problem solve a new title
 - Write an informational piece together and have the students suggest and vote on titles
 - Get students to find old pieces of writing and add titles to them

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Writing Mini-Lesson 06

Expanding Writing and Increasing Complexity: Publishing

Publishing is the reason for writing - we write to share our thoughts, ideas, imagination and knowledge with others.

This series of lessons focuses on publishing - make sure you have an intended publishing platform organised e.g. class newsletter before you start these lessons.

Mini-Lesson Day 1:

1. In your mini-lesson, tell your students “Sometimes we write something special that we want to share with others. We might publish it in a book or online. I’ve written three things that I think are really good. I’m going to pick one to publish. I’m going to edit it and print it and put it in the classroom library.” Now, read the three pieces and decide which to publish. Think aloud as you discuss them and pick one.
2. Students also pick a piece to publish from their writing book.

Mini-Lesson Day 2:

1. Revise and edit your piece of writing (use the current Editor’s Checklist). Make sure you think aloud as you revise and edit.
2. Students revise their piece.

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Writing Mini-Lesson 06 cont.

Expanding Writing and Increasing Complexity: Publishing

Mini-Lesson Day 3:

1. In your mini-lesson, model thinking of a title. Come up with a couple of options and then pick one.
2. Students also come up with a title for their writing.

Mini-Lesson Day 4:

1. Illustrate your writing! Find a suitable image, or do an illustration.
2. Students illustrate their piece.

Mini-Lesson Day 5:

1. If publishing to the classroom library, make a cover page. For all types of publishing make an about the author page or blurb,
2. Students also make a cover page (if needed) and an about the author blurb.
3. Finish by printing all the writing and publishing it.

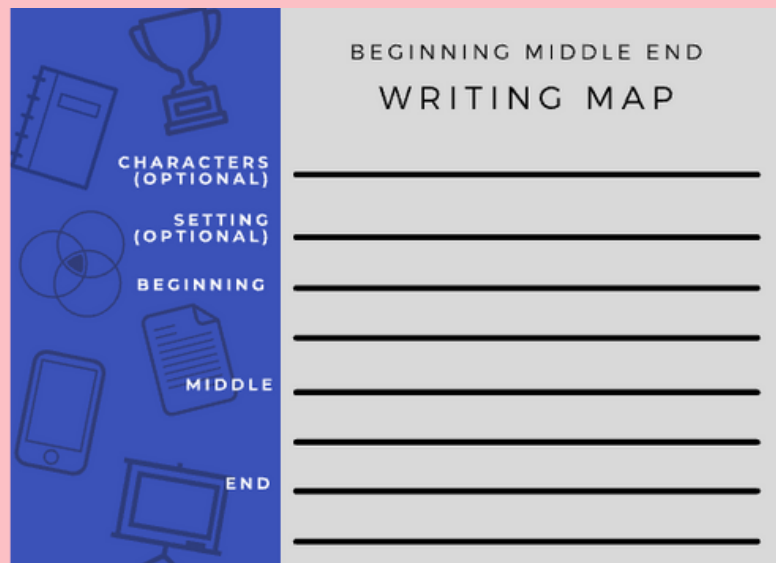
Groups I and J

Writing Mini-Lesson 07

Expanding Writing and Increasing Complexity: Writing Maps for Narrative Pieces

When writing a longer narrative, fiction or fact, beginning-middle-end is a very useful structure for teaching students to write more with meaning and organisation.

Mini-Lesson:



BEGINNING MIDDLE END WRITING MAP	
CHARACTERS (OPTIONAL)	
SETTING (OPTIONAL)	
BEGINNING	
MIDDLE	
END	

**[Click here to
download writing
map](#)**

1. Select a topic that has a beginning middle and end e.g. personal experience, a book you've read, a video you've watched, class activity.
2. Model using the writing map to plan your writing. Put down the relevant details. If needed, you can also use the 5Ws for each of the components if students need that extra structure.
3. Once you have finished the planning, then write three sentences for each part - 3 for the beginning, 3 for the middle and 3 for the end.
4. As you write make sure you talk about capital letters, full stops and spelling - and what happens at the beginning, middle and end.
5. Have the student(s) check your writing with the editor's checklist.
6. Students write next of course!

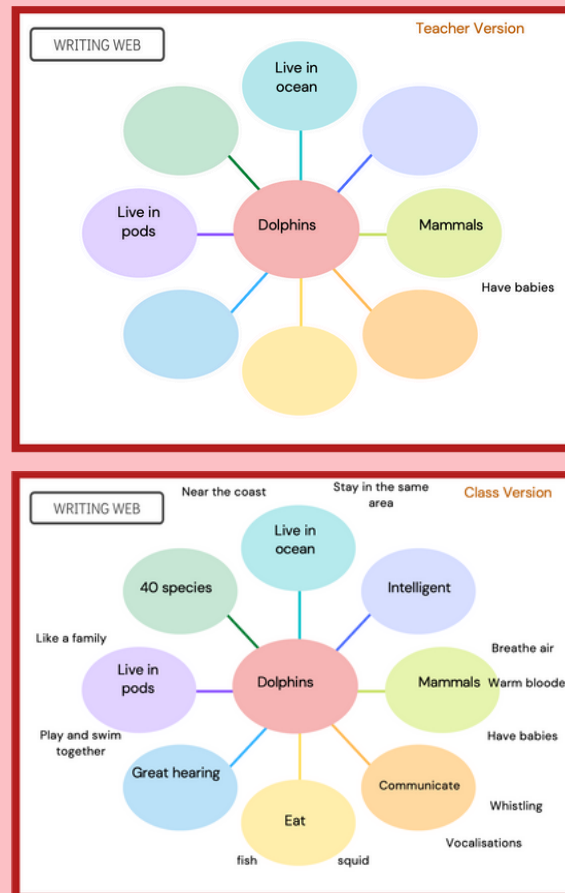
Writing Mini-Lesson 08

Expanding Writing and Increasing Complexity: Writing Webs for Informational Pieces

When writing a longer informational piece, a writing web is a very useful structure for teaching students to write more with meaning and organisation.

Mini-Lesson:

1. Select a topic that has multiple sub-topics. Sub-topics are also called elements or paragraphs in different writing texts.. Possible sub-topics are a person you know well, a holiday such as Christmas, an informational text you've read, a topic you've studied in STEM.
2. Model using the writing web to plan your writing.
3. Now, get the students to expand the writing web with their own ideas and information. Add them to the writing web.
4. The next day pick three of the sub-topics and write three sentences for each.
5. As you write make sure you talk about capital letters, full stops and spelling - and what you are going to include in your writing.
6. Have the student(s) check your writing with the editor's checklist.
7. Students write next of course!



**Click here to
download the
writing web**

Addendum: Because-But-So

Because-but-so isn't simple - and generally students (and staff!) need a lot of practice. Here's some tips to help it be more successful.

- Make sure you pick a topic with sufficient information to be able to do the full process.
- Generate your sentence stem and then practice using it yourself ahead of the lesson - it's easy to get it wrong!
- Whenever you set a sentence stem for because-but-so, always try them out yourself before asking students to use them. They don't always work as well as you think they will!
- Some students might write all three sentences in one writing session, others might do one per day. You know your students best to decide which student will need to take this more slowly.
- Many of your students will be more familiar with "so" as an emphasis e.g. Mummies are so old. You may need to explain to them that "so" can also be used to introduce a phrase.
- If you have a topic but it doesn't lend itself to all three sentences, then you can just model two of them and ask students to write two.

Because-But-So for Groups I and J

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