

a buddy or her, or who is ready to share in an Author's Circle (Villaume & Brabham, 2002). At any point, Karen encourages students to use "buddy reading," so they can give each other feedback on their work (see Figure 8.3). Like Tonya's and Stefan's students, Karen's students write about topics they are researching in science and social studies, as well as fiction and poetry, as they learn to write across the curriculum.

Many teachers encourage buddy reading and collaborative writing, which can be particularly helpful for students who may have ideas to contribute but may not yet have the language skills, motivation, or confidence. Both ESL students and struggling readers are supported in their work and encouraged to develop their abilities when they work in pairs with English speakers who can learn about other cultures and languages from their buddies.

As well as tools and time, students need models, so that they know what good writing looks and sounds like (Calkins, 1994; Harwayne, 1992, 2000; McElveen & Dierking, 2001). Hearing and reading books read orally helps students think like writers and write with an audience in mind. Through literature, they can begin to see how authors hold the reader's attention and use conventions, and they can begin to use this knowledge in their own writing.

You might encourage your students to try *literary borrowing* (Lancia, 1997). For example, Jesse, a third grader, had read R. L. Stine's (2002) book, in which he uses "THE END" in the final sentence (e.g., "*It doesn't really matter in . . . THE END*"). Jesse borrowed this technique, concluding his nonfiction report on volcanoes with "*Volcanoes are very cool but when they erupt, it's . . . THE END.*" This example shows how reading all types of literature can have a positive impact on student writing.

Direct Instruction in Composing and Conventions of Writing

Experienced teachers of writing know that writers need direct, systematic instruction in writing, as well as time to write (Routman, 1996). They also need opportunities for enough instruction, guidance, and practice to allow them to become accomplished (Shanahan, 1997). Good writing teachers balance writing process and product as they celebrate and encourage individuality, creativity, meaning, standard form, and the conventions of language.

You can incorporate direct instruction in composing, and the conventions of grammar, spelling, form, and handwriting into writing workshop (Peterson, 2000). For example, teach terms such as *purpose*, *audience*, *form*, *voice*, *noun*, *verb*, *adjective*, and *voice*, which give students a common vocabulary for discussing and improving their writing (Bromley, 1998, 2002). Talking about sentence construction, grammar, and usage

makes sense to students when they are writing for a specific audience that is real (Routman, 1996). You can also use “fix-the-error exercises” to teach specific grammar skills, with examples from real literature that students know (Kane, 1997). Teach minilessons using your own writing to show, for example, how quotations, commas, and periods should be used.

Like Tonya and Stefan, Karen begins writing workshop with a lesson on an aspect of writing, such as organization, run-on sentences, adjectives, verbs, or punctuation. She prefers the term *focus lesson* (Routman, 1996), because she believes the term *minilesson* may trivialize the direct instruction she provides in skills. Recently, she taught a focus lesson on common and proper nouns, after she noticed the overuse of pronouns in several students’ stories. Part of the lesson included revising the work of a draft volunteered by a student.

To extend her students’ writing beyond topics they choose themselves, Karen uses a *genre study*, in which students immerse themselves in a particular kind of literature and then write in this form (Calkins, 1994). For example, during recent writing workshops, and in conjunction with a social studies unit, Karen’s students read nonfiction books about animals, gathered information from a CD-ROM encyclopedia, took an electronic field trip to a zoo, then created their own informative report about an animal. They compiled these reports into a book, which students shared with a first-grade class. Karen encourages students to co-author at least one story or report because she believes collaboration is a catalyst for learning.

Diane is a special education teacher whose students need direct instruction and modeling to support their writing. To teach persuasive writing, Diane first shared a paragraph she wrote to her husband, to convince him to try her favorite sport, roller blading. Next, she had students choose a hobby and someone to whom to write. Then, the students analyzed Diane’s paragraph and identified the persuasive writing frame she used:

Persuasive Writing

Introduction (Position or Purpose)

Facts and Reasons

- 1.
- 2.
- 3.

Conclusion (Restate Position)

Students planned their writing by using the frame, composed rough drafts, and self-checked to revise and edit (see Figure 8.4). Last, Diane used a volunteer’s rough draft to model revising and editing, before students revised and edited their own work.

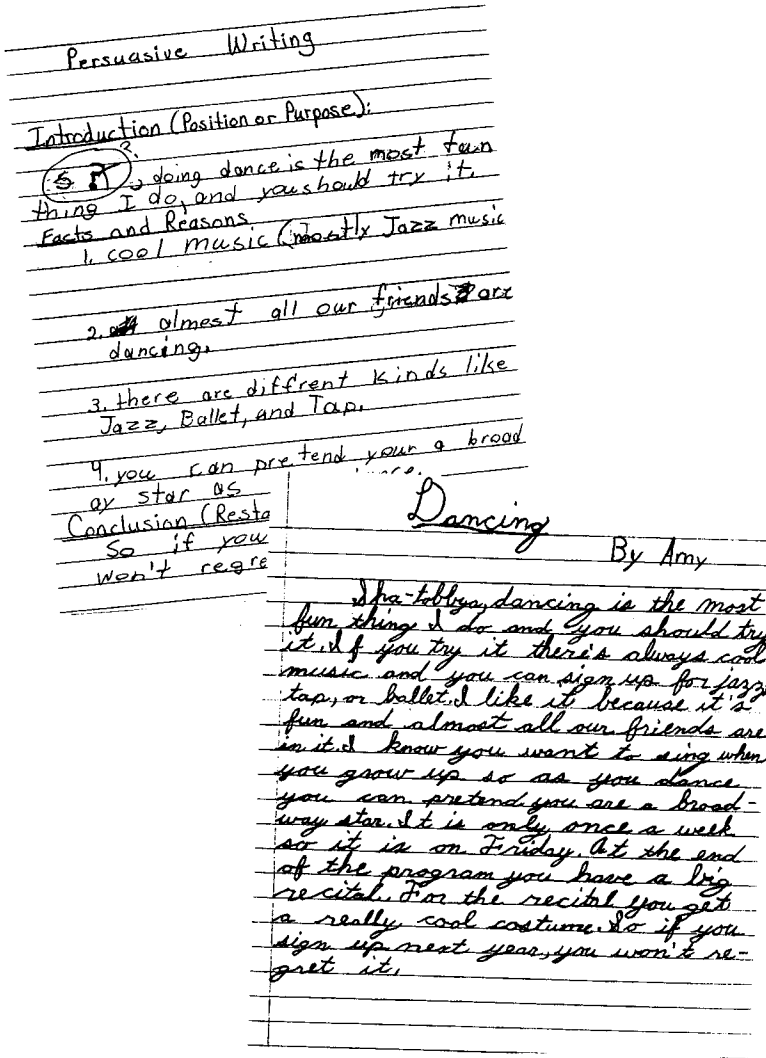


FIGURE 8.4. A paragraph frame serves as a plan for persuasive writing.

Besides conferencing with students yourself, you can use peer conferences to give students a real and immediate audience for their work. Often, when students read their work to a peer, they discover what to revise. When you have students work in pairs or small groups to give each other feedback on writing, you can use PQS (P—Praise, Q—Question, S—Suggest) (Bromley, 1998). To help frame constructive feedback, have students respond with a sentence for each category.

What about spelling and handwriting? Many teachers teach spelling and handwriting together. Others encourage invented spelling on first drafts, so students can focus on fluency and creativity. Then, they require standard spelling in the revising and editing steps. Some teachers have set standards for neatness in their students' written work, refusing to accept a *sloppy copy*; rather, they use *rough draft*, believing sloppy copy sends the wrong message. Still other teachers have students regularly self-assess their own handwriting. In many of these classrooms, a variety of tools (e.g., colored pencils, pens, white-out, etc.) are available for student use, including the computer. Word-processing programs, grammar checkers, and spell checkers help many students achieve legibility, standard form, and accepted usage.

Choice and Authenticity in Writing for a Variety of Purposes and Audiences

Writing for a variety of purposes (to persuade, inform, entertain, and narrate) and audiences (those in other states or countries, peers, parents, teachers, and self) builds fluency, competence, and independence. Giving students choices in what they write builds competence as well, especially for reluctant writers, because it gives them a reason to write and builds ownership for the task and product. For many students, technology is an intriguing way to provide choice and authentic opportunities for writing for a variety of purposes and audiences.

Electronic literacy has changed what it means to be literate. Leu (1997) believes that both teachers and students should think of themselves as *becoming literate*, rather than *being literate*, as they learn to use the navigational strategies and critical thinking necessary for electronic literacy. Wepner and Tao (2002) identify ways that classroom teachers' responsibilities are changing as a result of technology. They urge teachers to be flexible and open to collaboration with others to support change and creative in using technology.

Today, students use computers to do research for written reports and presentations. Teachers use computers to gather information and prepare lessons. Both students and teachers engage in inquiry-based learning (Owens, Hester, & Teale, 2002) use CDROM encyclopedias, and primary sources on the World-Wide Web, such as historical documents or secondary sources such as museum or observatory websites. Viewing and evaluating hypertext (pictures, animation, and sounds) is necessary as students learn to search for information, interpret, and analyze it, and think critically about the validity of sources. Use a site such as library.ucla.edu/libraries/college/instruct/critical.htm to help students use criteria in evaluating web resources.

Research in K–6 classrooms indicates that teachers report an increase in their students' motivation to write when their work is published on the Internet (Karchmer, 2001). When students write for the Internet, as well as skills in viewing and analyzing, they build skills in keyboarding, word processing, and navigating with browsers and search engines. Some examples follow for using the computer to develop student writers:

- Many teachers establish electronic key pal exchanges with classes in other states or countries. Some exchanges are social and others are related to science or social studies.
- Classes take electronic field trips to places around the world, to extend learning in a content area. During these field trips, students can ask questions of experts and get answers that might not yet appear anywhere in print.
- Many teachers and students participate in collaborative projects with other schools. For example, you can create a virtual tour of a local historical landmark with electronic graphics and post it on the Historical Landmark site at *hilites@gsn.org*.
- Younger elementary school children, as well as older students, create classroom or school web pages, or their own personal web pages using web-based tools.
- Desktop publishing allows students to create professional-looking classroom newsletters that they can format and decorate with clip art.
- Students can publish their own original writing on *e-zines*, electronic magazines that include opportunities to write poetry, book reviews, and stories; enter contests; chat with others; and submit original artwork.
- A variety of Internet sites offer students choice in what they compose (see Table 8.1). These websites meet several criteria: appearance, ease of use, content, and K–8 suitability.

Writing to Construct Meaning across the Curriculum in a Variety of Forms

Arline, a fifth-grade teacher, believes it is important for teachers to be writers themselves. She keeps a personal journal, uses e-mail, and writes curriculum, lesson plans, and grant proposals for her classroom and school. She believes, as do Vacca and Vacca (2002), that writing regularly is a powerful strategy for learning subject matter. She says:

“From my own writing, I’ve learned that writing is a process of constructing meaning. I never realize what I know until I start writing.

TABLE 8.1. Websites for Writers

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1. The Internet Public Library Youth Division—www.ipl.org/youth/HomePage2.html
In the “Reading Zone” at “Computers and the Internet,” kids can view other kids’ websites, post their own, and find links to online stories, favorite books, and authors.
 2. Kids’ Fun Online by Scholastic—www.scholastic.com/kids/cards/
At “Card Factory,” kids can write text and click-and-drag clip art to create and send their own unique online cards. Or, at www.scholastic.com/titles/kids can read tips from writers, find out about writers and illustrators’ lives and post book reviews.
 3. The Children’s Book Forum—faldo.atmos.uiuc.edu/BOOKREVIEW/
This “Internet Community Project” invites parents, kids, and teachers to submit reviews of children’s books.
 4. MidLink Magazine—longwood.cs.ucf.edu/~midlink/
This electronic magazine for middle grades publishes kids’ reviews of their favorite books.
 5. Kidlink—www.kidlink.org/index.html
This site is in English and 20 other languages, so kids from around the world can have discussions on Kidcafe, or be involved in Kidproj, which offers short- and long-term projects, and Kidforum listerves for discussions of specific topics.
 6. Keypals Club—www.mightymedia.com/keypals/
A place for kids to locate and correspond with other kids or classes around the world. Teachers can start a project with another class or just help kids create new friendships with kids on the other side of the world.
 7. Blue Mountain Arts—free.bluemountain.com/cdb/K/
In a section especially for kids, kids can design, send, and receive their own cards for all occasions.
 8. Stone Soup—www.stonesoup.com/
This international online magazine contains stories, poems, book reviews and artwork by kids.
 9. Little Planet Times—www.littleplanet.com/
This interactive, online newspaper publishes letters to the editor, movie reviews, stories, and creative ideas for and by kids.
 10. Young Writers Clubhouse—www.realkids.com/club.shtml
This site publishes *Global Wave*, a monthly, online magazine of writing by kids that includes story suggestions, stories to finish, book reviews, and more.
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Then I make connections and come up with ideas that I didn't have before. When I understood the power of writing for me, I began to realize what it could do for my students. I make writing a conscious part of science, social studies, and math now. My students write in journals at different times of the day, for a lot of different reasons. I've found that it's pretty amazing what my students can relate about their thinking when they write. It's a totally personal, quiet time in our classroom when students write their insights about a unit we are studying or connect between math and social studies, or relate it to the world."

Arline and other teachers have discovered that when students do expository writing in a variety of forms in the content areas, they construct new meaning and demonstrate their science and social studies knowledge, too. Expository writing is writing to explain or share information. For example, after reading a story about the Cheyenne Indians, Arline asked groups to write what they had learned on a partially constructed web (see Figure 8.5). Arline's main categories were in bold print, and the student wrote what he remembered. Students added information to the web as they learned more about the tribe. Near the end of the unit, a student created the acrostic poem in Figure 8.5, showing what he had learned about the Cheyenne Indians' respect for the environment and their undeserved fate.

Expository writing across the curriculum takes many forms. In first grade, Jane linked math, social studies, and language arts in a unit called *Quilt Connections*. After students had read and heard many stories about quilts, researched other cultures' quilts in the library and on the Internet, visited a museum exhibit, and learned about shapes, equal parts, and fractions, a final activity involved creation of a classroom quilt. The finished quilt, made of special fabrics and designs contributed by each student, along with a journal, was taken home each day by a different student. Students and parents writing about the quilt in the journal gave parents an opportunity to be involved in their child's classroom learning.

Many teachers use graphic organizers to support student research and organize their ideas for expository writing (Irwin-DeVitis, Bromley, & Modlo, 1999) (see Figure 8.6). For example, in a second-grade study of Mexico, Rebecca's students read and gathered information using Venn diagrams (to show similarities and differences between two things) and data charts (to gather information from several sources). As part of a sixth-grade unit on Immigration, Michelle wanted her students to take the perspective of a character, or focus on particular relationships among characters. So she had them use character maps and character relationship maps (see Figure 8.7) to plan their expository writing about the feel-