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Adolescents with Autism: Writing for Success!

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Learner Outcomes

- 1) List three barriers to good writing experienced by adolescents with autism.
- 2) Describe three types of writing that adolescents with autism need to develop.
- 3) Describe three strategies to improve writing skills.

Why is Writing is So Difficult?

- Requires highest levels of linguistic abilities.
- Requires consideration of an audience that is not present.
- Requires executive function.
- Requires revision.
- Requires coordination of motor, language, and planning centers of the brain.
- Requires a motor output.



“Good writers.....

- Brainstorm ideas...
- Then think about it and write it.....
- Look it over to see how to make it right...
- Then they do a final copy and go over that...
- And then, if it's still not right, they do it again.”



-Successful fifth grade writer
-Graham & Harris (2005, p. 8)

Successful Writers

- Generate and organize ideas
- Read and evaluate their written text
- Edit and revise their text
- Monitor their writing process



Graham, Schwartz, & MacArthur (1993)

Struggling Writers

- Less likely to understand the writing process.
- When asked how to write successfully, fifth graders with learning disabilities stated:
 - “Write big to fill up the paper.”
 - “Make it neat and check the spelling.”
 - Graham & Harris (2005, p. 8)





Struggling Writers

- Know less about writing strategies than peers who are successful writers (Englert, Raphael, Fear, & Anderson, 1988)
- Spend less time planning (Graham, Harris, MacArthur, & Schwartz, 1991; McCutchen, 1995).
- Produce far less writing than their peers (Graham, Harris, MacArthur, & Schwartz, 1991).
- Make fewer revisions (Fitzgerald, 1987; MacArthur, Graham, & Harris 2004).
- Do not consider their audience (Flower, 1979; Sperling, 1996).

Struggling Writers

- Over-estimate the quality of their written products (Graham & Harris, 1993).
- Can improve their writing through instruction of specific writing strategies (DeLaPaz, Swanson, & Graham, 1998; Graham & Harris, 1996; Harris & Graham, 1999; Zimmerman & Reisemberg, 1997).
- Need detailed and explicit teaching to improve their writing (Brown & Campione, 1990).





Evidence: Writing Outcomes for Adolescents with Autism

- Adolescents with autism have difficulty learning to write (Gabig, 2008; Myles, Huggins, Rome-Lake, Barnhill, & Griswold, 2013).
- A sentence combining technique was successful in producing increased adjective use in three adolescents with autism (Rousseau, Krantz, Poulson, Kitson & McClannahan, 1994).
- Computerized assisted instruction (CAI) helped three children with autism to construct better written sentences (Yamamoto & Miya, 1999). Few other studies to date have demonstrated the efficacy of CAI for improving written language in adolescents with autism (Pennington, 2010).
- Self-regulated strategy development (SRSD) helped adolescents with autism improve persuasive writing, and gains were generalized to expository writing, including increased action words, describing words, and revisions (Delano, 2007a, b).
- SRSD also helped a ten year old with ASD to improve story writing in terms of the number of story elements incorporated and overall writing quality (Asaro & Saddler, 2009).

Evidence: Writing Outcomes for Adolescents with Autism



- Adolescents with HFA produced written narratives that with poor use of narrative elements, poor text structure, little character development, a lack of perspective on the inner worlds of their characters (Brown, 2013).
- Adolescents with HFS produced persuasive essays with less syntactic complexity, lexical diversity, and poorer overall persuasive quality than their TD peers (Brown, 2013).



Evidence: Writing Outcomes for Adolescents with Autism

- Written narratives of adults with autism were less well developed than those of neurotypical adults (Brown, 2014).
- Written narratives of adolescents with autism were less well developed than their oral narratives (Davis & Brandel, 2012).
- Oral narratives of children with autism were strings of unconnected events and lacked socially meaningful elements (Goldman, 2008).
- Creating narratives is dependent upon theory-of-mind (perspective-taking) abilities (Colle, Baron-Cohen, Wheelwright, & Van der Lely, 2008).

A Writing Strategy



- Know how to write for a desired goal.
 - Step-by-step procedures for writing a certain kind of text.
- Plan how to finish writing the text.
 - Break it down into a series of manageable tasks.
 - Deal with one task at a time.
- Find the drive to finish.
 - Define the motivating forces to stay on task.
 - Use external motivation as necessary.

Graham & Harris (2005)

Benefits of a Strategy-Based Approach

- Specifies how to complete the writing assignment.
 - Helps with organizing and sequencing the task.
- Clarifies the mental operations needed for writing.
 - Discussing ideas and how to write them helps teachers know how to help the child, and helps the child clarify how to write.
 - Mapping ideas or writing them down helps the writer be more organized and intentional.
- Teaches the writer new methods for composing text.
 - New tools for planning, revising, and regulating the writing process.



Benefits of a Strategy-Based Approach

- Encourages use of a computer for writing and revising.
 - Can add, change, move or delete text without tedious recopying on paper.
- Enhances the writer's knowledge of the writing process and their own abilities as writers.



Graham & Harris (2005)

How To Teach Writing Strategies

- Individuals with LLD require more intensive instruction to master writing strategies than neurotypical learners (Reeve & Brown, 1985; Wong, 1994).
- Teachers need to:
 - Give easy, frequent explanations about writing strategies and tasks.
 - Teach any pre-requisite skills to use the strategy effectively.
 - Model and re-model how to apply the strategy.
 - Develop mnemonic devices and charts to help students remember the steps in the strategic writing process.
 - Provide external feedback and support as the student practices the strategy.
 - Give the student enough time to write; do not grade based on time needed to write.
 - Teach the procedures so that they can purposefully produce text and regulate their behavior.
 - Address problems that they writer may be having with the strategy.

Self-Regulated Strategy Development Model (SRSD)

- Students are directly taught strategies for:
 - Planning
 - Writing
 - Revising
 - Regulating
 - Controlling undesirable behaviors (impulsivity, etc.)
 - Staying motivated to finish writing tasks
- Evidence-based strategy: Based on studies that showed that students with LLD have difficulty in each of these area (Harris, Graham, & Deshler, 1998).
- Evidence-based: Over 25 studies have shown efficacy of this method in teaching students with LLD (Graham & Harris, 2003).



Four Critical Characteristics of SRSD



- Teachers or therapists must stay positive about the strategy, its effectiveness, and the student's ability to learn to write better.
- Students are viewed as active collaborators who work with the teacher, therapist, or peers during writing.
- Individualized instruction so that each student gets the specific support needed write more effectively.
- Instruction is done in step-wise fashion without regard for time. Student should move through stages at own pace, being sure to master each stage before moving on.

Stages of SRSD

To understand and apply writing strategies in a self-regulated manner, the student learns to:

- **Develop background knowledge** of the topic and the writing task.
- **Discuss** writing performance and new strategies for improvement.
- Observe as the therapist **models** how to use a new strategy using self-talk and self-instructions.
- **Memorize** the steps of a new strategy.
- Accept **support** from others to improve self-regulation during the writing process.
- **Independently use** the strategy in writing tasks.



Writing Strategies

- PLEASE: A Paragraph-Writing Strategy
- COPS: Reviewing a Draft
- PLANS: A Goal-Setting Strategy
- STOP and LIST: A Goal-Setting, Brainstorming, Organizing Strategy
- Peer-revising Strategy
- CDO Revising Strategy
- Text Summarizing Strategy



PLEASE

- **P**ick—the topic, audience, and type of paragraph.
- **L**ist—the ideas to include in the paragraph.
- **E**valuate—the list for completeness and relevancy of ideas.
- **A**ctivate—Activate, or begin by composing the topic sentence.
- **S**upply--Using the list, turn the ideas in to other sentences that support the topic sentence.
- **E**nd—Write the concluding sentence, and evaluate your work.

(Welch, 1992)

COPS

- **C**apitalization: proper nouns; first words in sentences.
- **O**verall appearance
- **P**unctuation: periods, commas, semi-colons
- **S**pelling: review and look up any words that are questionable



(Graham & Harris, 2005)

PLANS

- **Step 1—PLAN your paper**
 - **P**ick goals
 - **L**ist ways to meet these goals
 - **A**nd make
 - **N**otes
 - **S**equence notes
- **Step 2—Write and say more.**
- **Step 3—Check to be sure your goals were met.**



Graham, MacArthur, Schwartz, & Page-Voth (1992)

STOP and LIST

- **STOP**—Stop and Think Of Purposes
- **LIST**—List Ideas and Sequence Them



Troia & Graham (2002)

Troia, Graham, & Harris (1999)



Peer Revising

- **REVISE**
 - Listen and read along as the writer reads her paper.
 - Listener tells what the paper was about and what he liked best.
 - Listener re-reads the paper and makes notes about clarity, details expressed, etc.
 - Listener provides suggestions for revisions.
- **EDIT**
 - Check for errors in spelling, punctuation, capitalization, and sentence structure.
 - Mark the paper and give back to the writer.

Graves (1983)

CDO Revising

- **C**ompare—Read the sentence.
- **D**iagnose—Select an evaluation card that describes your analysis of the sentence.
- **O**perate—Select a tactic card and revise the sentence.



Graham (1997)

Text Summarizing

- Writing a summary of what is written
 - Facilitates memory of content
 - Exercises language comprehension and production
- Learning to write a good summary
 - Teaches writer how to think and write with....
 - Precision
 - Conciseness
- Writer must make good decisions about what to eliminate from his text, what to keep, and how to condense the rest.
- Writing-summary strategy was validated with fourth-sixth graders with LLD (Nelson, Smith & Dodd, 1992).

Summary-Writing Strategy



- Think to self: What is the main idea? Write it down.
- Think to self: What important things did the writer say about the main idea. Write them down.
- Re-read to be sure you understood the main idea and what were the most important points. Check your thinking.
- Think to self: What is the main idea or topic I am going to write about. Write a topic sentence for the summary.
- Think to self: How should I order my ideas? Put numbers next to the ideas that you want to write about first, second, etc.



Summary-Writing Strategy

- Think to self: Did I leave out any important information? Is there anything I wrote that I can take out?
- Write a summary about what was read.
- Read your summary. Think to self: "Is there anything that is not clear?" Rewrite the parts that are not clear.
- Ask a peer to read your summary and tell you if there is anything that is not clear. Rewrite the summary if necessary.

Nelson, Smith, & Dodd (1992)

Genre-Specific Writing Strategies

- Story writing (Narration)
- Persuasive writing
- Writing explanations
- Writing compare/contrast papers
- Report writing

Story Writing



- Vocabulary Strategy
 - Think of a story idea. Write it at the top of the planning sheet.
 - Brainstorm action words for the story. Write them in a column on the left of the planning sheet.
 - Brainstorm describing words for the story. Write them in a column on the right of the planning sheet.
 - Write the story, using some or all of the words generated. The goal is to write a good story, not to use all the words!
 - Read draft and identify areas to be changed.
 - Revise the trouble spots to make the story better. Review your choice of words to be sure the story says what you want it to say.

Harris & Graham (1985)

Story Writing

- Story Grammar Strategy
 - Think of a story to share.
 - Let your mind be free.
 - Write down the story parts reminder
 - W-W-W (Who is the main character? When does the story take place? Where does the story take place?)
 - WHAT = 2
 - What does the main character want to do? What do the other characters want to do?
 - What happens when the main character tries to do it? To the other characters?
 - HOW = 2
 - How does the story end?
 - How does the main character feel? How do the other characters feel?
 - Write story
 - Revise

Danoff, Harris, & Graham (1993)

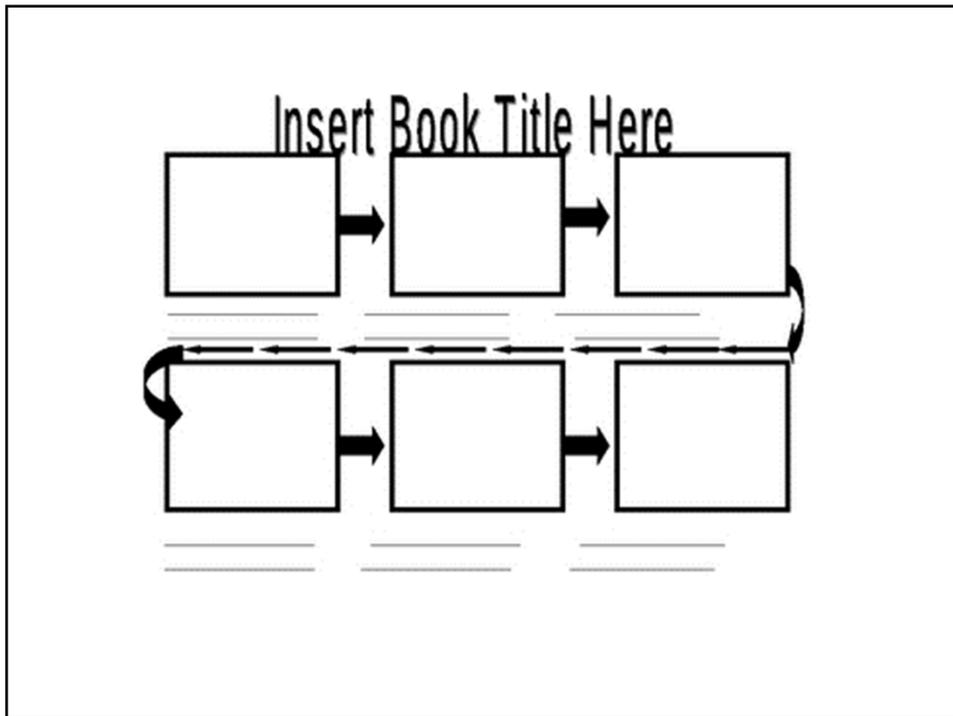
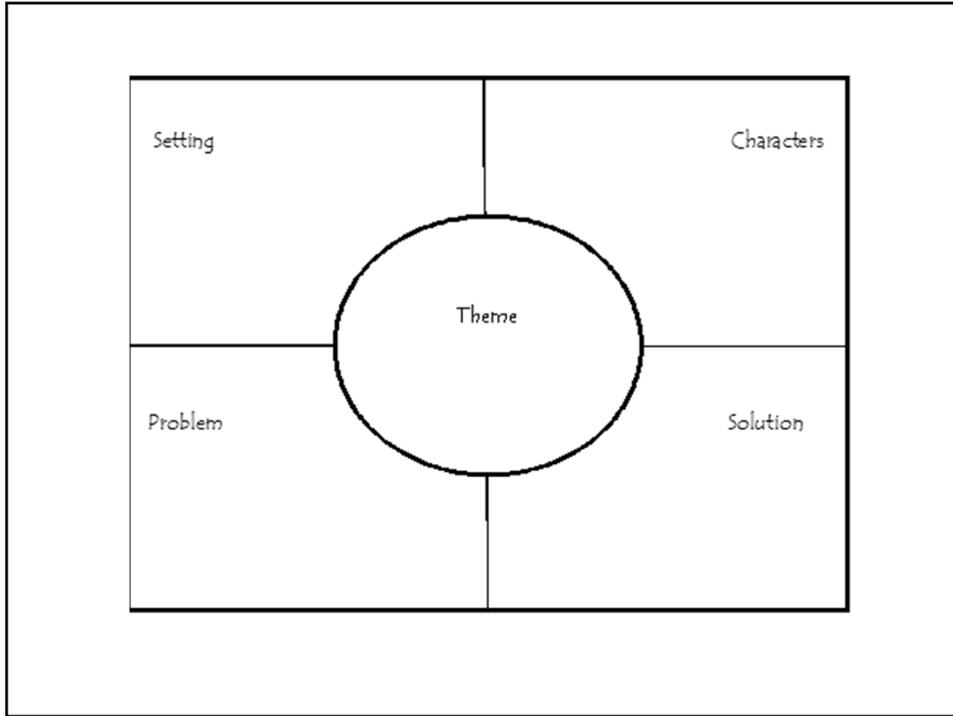
Who, What, When and Where

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Name _____ Date _____ Period _____

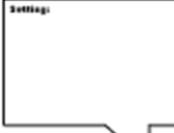
Fish Bones

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Name: _____ Date: _____ Period: _____

Story Web

Setting: 

Characters: 

Title: 

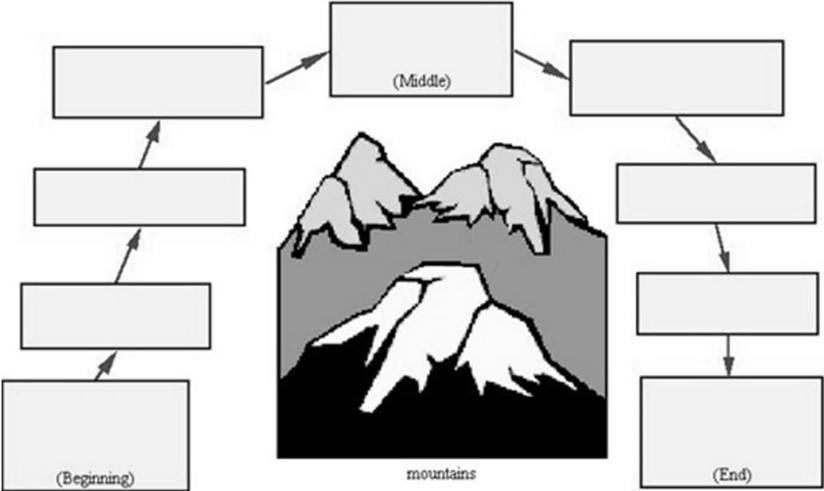
Author: 

Conflict: 

Resolution: 

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My Story Mountain
Fill in a sentence or sentences in each box to diagram your story from Beginning to end.

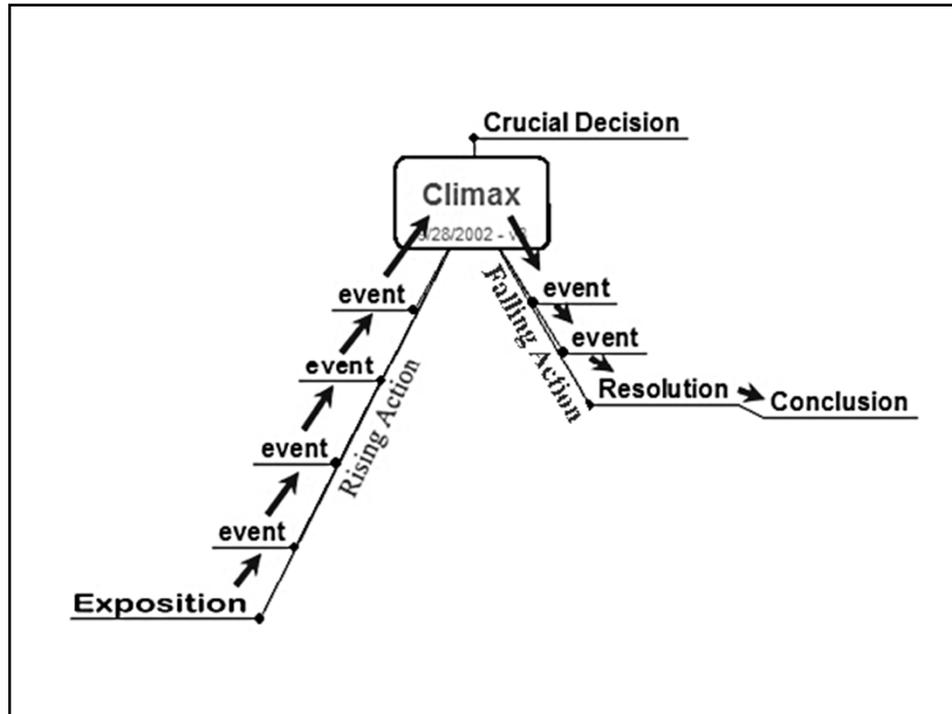


(Beginning)

(Middle)

(End)

mountains



Persuasive Writing

- Three steps to writing a persuasive essay
 - Identify the audience and the goal of the paper
 - Who will read my paper?
 - What do I want the reader to believe after reading it?
 - Develop a plan (**TREE**)
 - **T**opic sentence (thesis statement)
 - **R**easons that support the thesis
 - **E**xamine the reasons (will the reader believe this?)
 - **E**nd strong (Did the reader get my point?)
 - Write
 - Revise

Sexton, Harris, & Graham (1998)

Writing Explanations

- Define your audience.
- Define your goal in writing the explanation.
- Brainstorm and write down what you know.
- Organize/group your ideas. Sequence the ideas as they will be presented in the explanation.
- Write
- Have a peer or adult read the explanation and tell you what is clear/not clear.
- Revise

Compare and Contrast Papers

- Identify your audience.
- Identify the goal of the paper.
 - Compare/contrast factual information?
 - Compare/contrast ideas/opinions?
- Brainstorm and write down what you know about the topic.
- Organize and sequence your ideas.
 - For the C/C paper, be sure to organize by what is alike or different with regard to the two things/ideas being considered in the paper.

Compare and Contrast Papers

- Review your paper to be sure you:
 - Stated what two things are being considered.
 - Wrote about the parameters upon which the two things were being compared or contrasted.
 - Told how the two things are alike.
 - Told how they are different.
 - Used key words clearly.
- Identify areas of text to revise.
- Rewrite as necessary.
- Give to a peer or adult for feedback.

Report Writing

- The nature of the writing task is expository.
- Brainstorm ideas.
- Organize and store ideas on a map/web.
- Reflect on what you do not know; look up the information and add it to your map/web.
- Sequence the information so you know what order to write about it in the report.
- Write the report.
- Revise and edit, as with other genres of writing. Check map/web to be sure you covered everything.

Other Essential Strategies

- Self-monitoring
- Goal setting

Self-Monitoring

- Students need to learn to monitor their own writing in order to self-correct and improve the text. Most of the time this involves learning to write *more*.
- Counting number of words.
 - First to final drafts
- Counting number of complete sentences.
- Assessing use of a strategy:
 - Be sure all steps were followed.
- Assessing story writing:
 - Check the story planner to be sure all story elements are in place.
- Assessing persuasive writing:
 - Be sure there is a thesis statement (topic), reasons that support the belief statement, refutations of any beliefs that are opposed to the writer's belief, examples, and an ending.;

Goal Setting

- Review goals set at the inception of the writing project.
- Assess each goal to see if it was completed or not.
- If not, determine how whether the goal is still important, and if so, how to complete it.

Summary: Tips for Instructing Writing in Adolescents with Autism

- Given the language comprehension and production demands of written language, use a strategy-based approach.
- Reduce motor fatigue by scribing for the writer to allow for better thought and language generation.
- To improve creativity, consider an alternating sentence format approach.



Summary: Tips for Instructing Writing in Adolescents with Autism

- Write often. Schedule it.
- Consider short breaks.
- Give ample time to complete written work. One good product trumps ten poor ones.
- Provide helpful feedback and suggestions.
- Write them down or diagram them, as necessary.
- Discuss character's feelings to help the writer take their perspective into account.
- Provide necessary supports.
- Reinforce growth in writing.



Presenter Contact Information

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Bibliography

- Attached to the presentation in a separate PDF document, for your convenience.