

This document provides a summary of Recommendation 2b from the WWC practice guide *Teaching Elementary School Students to Be Effective Writers*. Full reference is on the last page.

CONTENT: **Writing**  
GRADE LEVEL(S): **K–5**  
LEVEL OF EVIDENCE: **Strong**

## Recommendation

# Teach students to write for a variety of purposes.

Developing the ability to write for a variety of purposes provides students with the necessary skills for success in school and adulthood. Once students understand the different genres and purposes of writing, they are more likely to think critically about which type of writing they should use for each writing activity and audience.

## How to carry out the recommendation

1. Help students understand the different purposes of writing.

### Strategies from the example

- Emphasize the purpose of writing and features of each type of writing.
- Relate each genre to real-life examples.

### South Carolina standards alignment

**ELA:** K-2.W.MCC.1, K-2.W.MCC.2, K-2.W.MCC.3, K-2.W.RC.6, 3-5.W.MCC.1, 3-5.W.MCC.2, 3-5.W.MCC.3, 3-5.W.RC.6

**TEACHER:** INST.TCK.1, INST.TCK.2, INST.TCK.3, PLAN.SW.2

Students need to understand the different genres of writing to choose the best genre for their writing task. Teachers should emphasize the purpose (e.g., describing, narrating, informing, and persuading/analyzing) and features of each genre while relating the genre to real-world scenarios. See the table below for further details about the purposes of writing and examples of genres used to achieve those purposes.

Purpose	Explanation	Examples of Genres
<b>Describe</b>	to describe something, such as a person, place, process, or experience, in vivid detail	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• descriptions (e.g., people, places, or events)</li> <li>• character sketches</li> <li>• nature writing</li> <li>• brochures (personal, travel, and so on)</li> </ul>
<b>Narrate</b>	to tell a story of an experience, event, or sequence of events while holding the reader's interest	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• diary entries (real or fictional)</li> <li>• folktales, fairy tales, fables</li> <li>• short stories</li> <li>• poems</li> <li>• eyewitness accounts</li> </ul>
<b>Inform</b>	to examine previously learned information or provide new information	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• summaries of new or previously learned information</li> <li>• instructions or directions</li> <li>• letters</li> <li>• newspaper articles</li> <li>• science reports</li> </ul>
<b>Persuade/analyze</b>	to give an opinion in an attempt to convince the reader that this point of view is valid or to persuade the reader to take a specific action (writing to express an opinion or make an argument has a similar purpose); to analyze ideas in text, for example, by considering their veracity or comparing them to one another	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• persuasive essays</li> <li>• editorials</li> <li>• compare-and-contrast essays</li> <li>• reviews (e.g., of books and movies)</li> <li>• literary analysis</li> </ul>

## 2. Expand students' concept of audience.

### Strategies from the examples

- Have students write for a variety of audiences.
- Allow students to choose an audience.
- Teach the word choices and tone appropriate for each audience.

### South Carolina standards alignment

**ELA:** K-2.W.MCC.1, K-2.W.MCC.2, K-2.W.MCC.3, K-2.W.RC.6, 3-5.W.MCC.1, 3-5.W.MCC.2, 3-5.W.MCC.3, 3-5.W.RC.6

**TEACHER:** INST.TH.1, INST.TH.2

To support students in understanding the role of audience in writing, teachers should design lessons where students can write for various audiences. Doing so will break students out of the mindset that writing is an isolated task completed in school for the teacher to read. To aid with an expanded view of audience, teachers can generate lists of potential audiences and allow students to choose different audiences during writing activities. Teachers should also focus on teaching students how to adjust tone and word choice for particular audiences. For example, writing a description to someone who has knowledge of a particular topic would look different than writing a description of that same topic to someone who has little or no knowledge of the topic.

## 3. Teach students to emulate the features of good writing.

### Strategies from the examples

- Have students analyze exemplary texts.
- Read text aloud and explain and discuss how the text demonstrates characteristics of effective writing.
- Stop to highlight key features.
- Ask students to emulate the feature of exemplary writing.

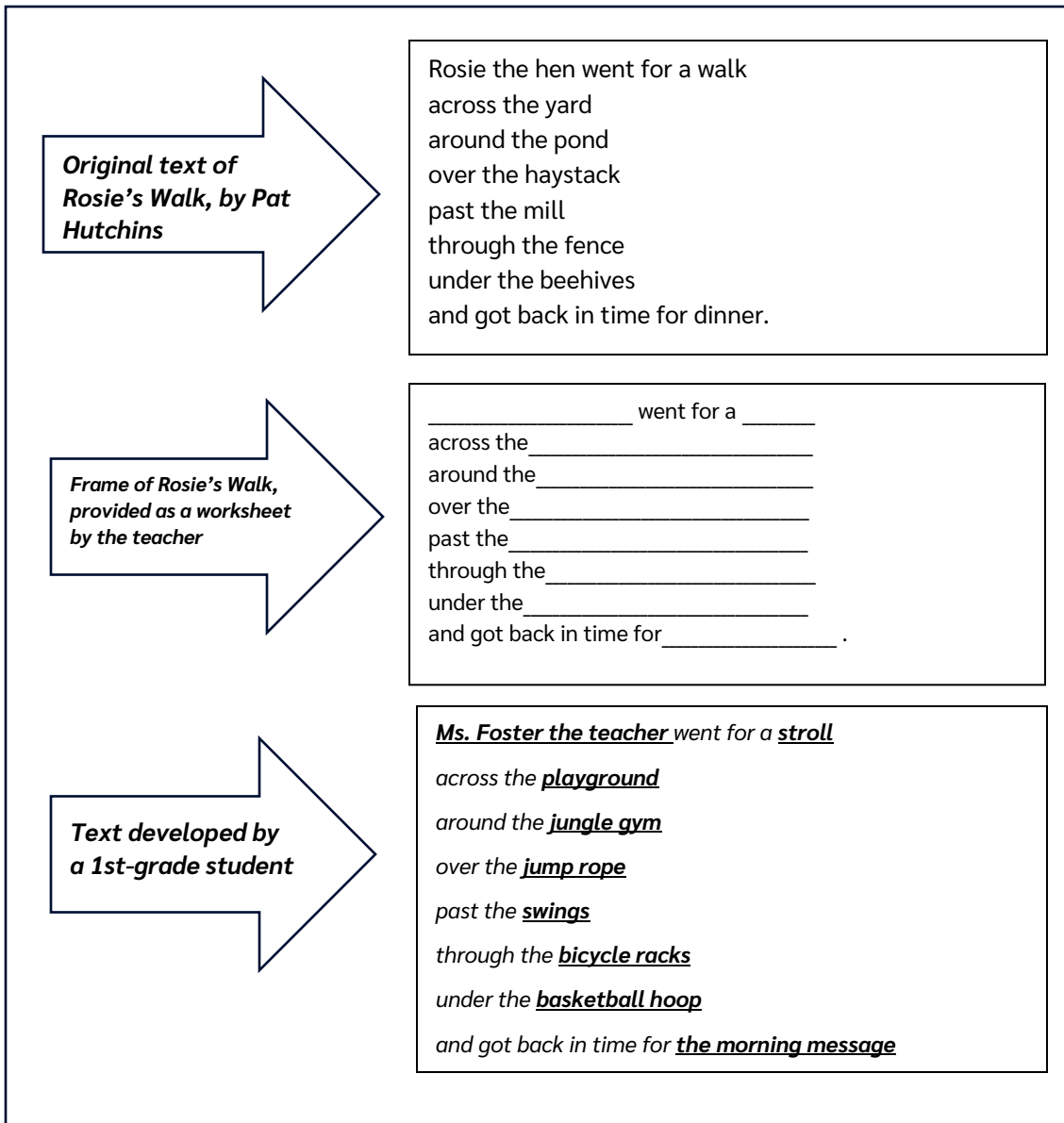
### South Carolina standards alignment

**ELA:** K-2.W.MCC.1, K-2.W.MCC.2, K-2.W.MCC.3, K-2.W.RC.6, 3-5.W.MCC.1, 3-5.W.MCC.2, 3-5.W.MCC.3, 3-5.W.RC.6

**TEACHER:** INST.PS.1, PLAN.SW.2

Teachers should expose students to a variety of exemplary texts. Analyzing exemplary texts with students can enhance their writing styles. In choosing texts, make selections that support instructional goals, are grade-level appropriate, and provide exemplars of what students are being asked to do in writing activities. The exemplary texts should be read aloud by teachers or students. Teachers should explain and students should discuss how each text demonstrates characteristics of effective writing in that particular genre. Be sure to stop frequently to highlight key features of the text that support the instructional goals of the lesson. Use activities that ask the student to emulate the features of exemplary text. See below for examples of activities that can be used with students at different levels to emulate good writing.

**Story emulation of *Rosie's Walk* with 1<sup>st</sup>-grade students**



Original text of “Where I’m From,” by George Ella Lyon	Text developed by a 6th-grade classroom
<p>I am from clothespins, from Clorox and carbon-tetrachloride. I am from the dirt under the back porch. (Black, glistening, it tasted like beets.) I am from the forsythia bush the Dutch elm whose long-gone limbs I remember as if they were my own.</p> <p>I’m from fudge and eyeglasses, from Imogene and Alafair. I’m from the know-it-alls and the pass-it-ons, from Perk up! and Pipe down! I’m from He restoreth my soul with a cottonball lamb and ten verses I can say myself.</p> <p>I’m from Artemus and Billie’s Branch, fried corn and strong coffee. From the finger my grandfather lost to the auger, the eye my father shut to keep his sight.</p> <p>Under my bed was a dress box spilling old pictures, a sift of lost faces to drift beneath my dreams. I am from those moments— snapped before I budded— leaf-fall from the family tree.</p>	<p>I am from elastic strain, from the focus and the epicenter. I am from the destructive surface waves that run through the 40–200 kilometer fault zones.</p> <p>I am from the “Ring of Fire,” the tectonic and lithospheric plates.</p> <p>I can cause tsunamis and fires.</p> <p>I am from convergent, divergent, and transform plate boundaries.</p> <p>I am from seismographs that determine my strength.</p> <p>I am from speedy but weak p-waves, from slow and hardy s-waves, but I do not reach.</p> <p>Seismic waves are caused by me. Who am I? An earthquake.</p>

#### 4. Teach students techniques for writing effectively for different purposes.

##### Strategies from the examples

- Explicitly teach the techniques specific to each purpose.
- Describe each technique.
- Model its use.

- Gradually release responsibility to the student.

**South Carolina standards alignment**

**ELA:** K-2.W.MCC.1, K-2.W.MCC.2, K-2.W.MCC.3, K-2.W.RC.6, 3-5.W.MCC.1, 3-5.W.MCC.2, 3-5.W.MCC.3, 3-5.W.RC.6

**TEACHER:** INST.PS.1, PLAN.SW.2

Teachers must explicitly teach the techniques specific to each purpose of writing. To do so, describe each technique, model its use, and gradually release more responsibility to students. See table below for examples of specific techniques for each of the four purposes of writing (i.e., describe, narrate, inform, and persuade/analyze) and the grade levels for which they are appropriate.

Purpose	Specific Technique	How students can use the technique	Grade Range
<b>Describe</b>	Sensory details	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Use their five senses, as applicable:               <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• What did you see? How did it <i>look</i>?</li> <li>• What sounds did you <i>hear</i>?</li> <li>• What did you <i>touch</i>? How did it <i>feel</i>?</li> <li>• What could you <i>smell</i>?</li> <li>• What did you <i>taste</i>?</li> </ul> </li> </ul>	K–3
<b>Narrate</b>	Story grammar	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Consider the following questions when developing their story:               <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <i>Who</i> are the main characters?</li> <li>• <i>When</i> does the story take place?</li> <li>• <i>Where</i> does the story take place?</li> <li>• <i>What</i> do the main characters want to do?</li> <li>• <i>What</i> happens when the main characters try to do it?</li> <li>• <i>How</i> does the story end?</li> <li>• <i>How</i> does the main character feel?</li> </ul> </li> </ul>	1–3
		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• In older grades, expand the strategy in the following ways:               <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Tell the story from the point of view of a character other than the main character.</li> <li>• Add an interesting or surprising twist to the story.</li> </ul> </li> </ul>	4–6
<b>Inform</b>	Report writing	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Complete a K-W-L chart:               <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• What I <b>K</b>now</li> </ul> </li> </ul>	2–6

		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• What I <b>W</b>ant to know</li> <li>• What I <b>L</b>earned</li> <li>• In the K-W-L chart, gather appropriate information:             <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Brainstorm. (What do I know about the topic?)</li> <li>• Extend brainstorming. (What do I want to know about the topic? What other information would be helpful to learn about the topic?)</li> <li>• Gather additional information and add to the chart. (What have I learned? Did I list anything during brainstorming that was inaccurate and needs to be crossed off the chart?)</li> </ul> </li> <li>• Review the K-W-L chart and circle the most important ideas to include in the report.</li> <li>• Develop an outline, showing which ideas will be included in the report and the order in which they will be presented.</li> <li>• Continue planning while writing, gathering new information, and adding to the outline as needed.</li> <li>• Be sure to implement each aspect of the plan as they write.</li> </ul>	
Persuade / analyze	STOP	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Before they write, STOP and:             <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>S</b>uspend judgment.</li> <li>• <b>T</b>ake sides.</li> <li>• <b>O</b>rganize ideas.</li> <li>• <b>P</b>lan to adjust as they write.</li> </ul> </li> </ul>	4–6
	DARE	DARE to check their paper to be sure they have: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>D</b>eveloped their thesis.</li> <li>• <b>A</b>dded ideas to support their ideas.</li> <li>• <b>R</b>ejected arguments on the other side.</li> <li>• <b>E</b>nded with a strong conclusion.</li> </ul>	
	TREE	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• As they write:             <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>T</b>ell what they believe. (State a topic sentence.)</li> <li>• Provide three or more <b>R</b>easons. (Why do I believe this?)</li> <li>• <b>E</b>nd it. (Wrap it up right.)</li> <li>• <b>E</b>xamine. (Do I have all my parts?)</li> </ul> </li> </ul>	2–3
		In older grades, expand the strategy as follows: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Replace the Examine step with Explain reasons. (Say more about each reason.)</li> </ul>	4–6

## Potential roadblocks and how to address them

Roadblock	Suggested Approach
<i>Students initially use the strategies/ techniques of writing after they are taught; however, over time they tend to stop.</i>	Once students begin independently applying strategies and techniques, teachers need to monitor their progress. As students develop skills with a specific component of the writing process (planning, drafting, sharing, evaluating, revising, editing, publishing), they may no longer need to rely on particular strategies. However, if a student has stopped using a strategy but is still struggling with a specific component of the writing process, the teacher should intervene and take necessary action, such as targeted one-on-one or small-group instruction.
<i>Teachers need to prepare students to take state assessments, which tend to focus on only a few genres.</i>	Writing for one genre often requires students to use skills they have learned for writing in another genre. For example, even when writing a persuasive essay, including a narrative example may be necessary to support an argument. Therefore, despite the specific prompts on a state assessment, students need to be prepared to write for multiple purposes. Teachers can point out particular skills they are learning that might be useful for the types of writing required for the state assessment.

*Reference:* Graham, S., Bollinger, A., Booth Olson, C., D’Aoust, C., MacArthur, C., McCutchen, D., & Olinghouse, N. (2012). *Teaching elementary school students to be effective writers* (NCEE 2012-4058). Washington, DC: U.S. Department of Education, Institute of Education Sciences, National Center for Education Evaluation and Regional Assistance. Retrieved from <https://ies.ed.gov/ncee/wwc/PracticeGuide/17>