

January 1989

## A Reading-Writing Sequence for Young Authors

Arden Ruth Post

Follow this and additional works at: <https://scholarworks.gvsu.edu/mrj>

---

### Recommended Citation

Post, Arden Ruth (1989) "A Reading-Writing Sequence for Young Authors," *Michigan Reading Journal*: Vol. 22: Iss. 2, Article 6.

Available at: <https://scholarworks.gvsu.edu/mrj/vol22/iss2/6>

This work is brought to you for free and open access by ScholarWorks@GVSU. It has been accepted for inclusion in Michigan Reading Journal by an authorized editor of ScholarWorks@GVSU. For more information, please contact [scholarworks@gvsu.edu](mailto:scholarworks@gvsu.edu).

# A Reading-Writing Sequence for Young Authors

by Dr. Arden Ruth Post

The purpose of this article is to present four current theoretical emphases from the field of reading and educational psychology and to translate them into a specific teaching procedure. Learning theory which serves as a basis for the practices in which teachers engage, is a necessary component of teaching. The problem often arises when teachers look for the practical implications, asking, "What you say sounds good, but how can I apply that to my classroom?" It is in response to these very real and practical concerns that I have begun to develop a series of language arts lessons that move easily and soundly from the theoretical to the practical.

This article presents one reading-writing sequence which incorporates sound theory and translates it into practice. First, I will explain four emphases from current literature in reading and educational psychology. The practical application which follows is a reading-writing sequence easily adaptable to elementary and middle school classrooms.

## Current Emphases in Reading, Writing and Learning

Reading is one component of the communication process. We have only to open most current language arts textbooks to find some attempt on the part of publishers to integrate the language arts. Language arts have come to be viewed more broadly than a series of subjects taught in elementary classrooms. Language arts are now viewed as a communication process which involves listening, speaking, reading, and writing.

Underlying all of these components is thinking. A model of the language arts as a communication process might look like this:

listening	reading
speaking	writing
thinking	

Therefore, reading should not be thought of or treated as a separate domain of learning or a separate subject in the curriculum. It should be taught as a component of communication and integrated with speaking, listening, and writing (Hennings, 1986; Personke and Johnson, 1987; Stoodt, 1988).

A second emphasis specifically addresses the writing component of the communication process. As was the case with the reading component, we have only to examine most language arts textbooks as well as independent researchers to note the heavy emphasis on pre-writing activities and preparation. Teachers are not to assign a topic for students to write and await its completion. Instead we are encouraged to "set the stage", "get the juices flowing," enable students to obtain ideas. The emphasis on pre-writing supports the model of communication because reading, listening, and speaking are natural precursors to the act of writing. Three components of the communication process trigger the fourth (Graser, 1983; Hennings, 1986; Hoskisson and Tompkins, 1987).

A third emphasis which has received much attention in the literature and in teacher-training materials is the process approach to writing. Graves and others tell



us that writing is a process which occurs over time. It is not a "one-shot deal." Furthermore, the process, the act of writing and rewriting and thinking, is important in its own right, not only, nor necessarily for, the finished product. The writing process may be thought of as a series of steps which move from pre-writing, to drafting a beginning, to revising, and finally publishing (Calkins, 1986; Graves, 1983; Hennings, 1986; Vacca, Vacca, and Gove, 1987).

A fourth emphasis comes more generally from the field of educational psychology: motivation and interest are a significant factor in any learning situation (Biehler and Snowman, 1986; Sprinthall, 1987; Wolfolk, 1987). This rather obvious fact has received renewed attention in the research literature and in the preparation of future teachers. Experienced teachers constantly look for ways to increase interest and motivation.

Children find a lesson interesting and motivating when they are active participants, when there are a variety of tasks, and when it moves in increments they can handle. The following lesson sequence captures children's interest by beginning with a book which the teacher reads and chooses with a particular class in mind. The sequence moves to pre-writing activities in which the children are active participants: drawing, writing, and sharing. From sentence building we move to paragraph writing, and encouraging even the most reluctant writer by the small, guided steps. Revising and publishing include much interaction with other students and the teacher. The culmination, which is sharing, provides an opportunity to present one's efforts to the public.

### A Reading-Writing Sequence

A reading-writing sequence is simply a series of steps that lead students into and through a writing process by beginning with reading (see Figure 1). In the sequence explained here, the teacher is the reader. However, children could easily read in groups or independently. Reading serves as a pre-writing activity, engaging children in thinking and building background ideas. The next step is **rehearsing ideas**. In this particular sequence there are two idea

rehearsal components: **pictorializing** and **pre-composing**.

Either during the reading or following the reading, children are asked to pictorialize - sketch, draw, or color - some aspect of the story. When this is completed, children should have some time to share with a partner by simply explaining their drawings to each other. The teacher may want to encourage children to go a step further and tell why they drew the object the way they did.

After the pictorializing is completed, the teacher leads the class in a pre-composing activity by engaging in sentence building through the use of a pyramid on a triangle (see Figure 2). A set of directions, in which the teacher explains and models, can be the following:

### Teacher Directions to Class

1. In the top of the pyramid put a noun (the name of the object you drew). For example, **kite**.
2. Underneath the noun (the name of the object) put a word to describe it (an adjective) and repeat the noun. For example, **red kite**.
3. On the third line repeat the two words you have for line two. Then, add an action word (a verb) that tells what the object is doing. For example, red kite **flies**.
4. For the fourth line repeat the three words for number 3 and add a word that tells **how**, **when**, or **where** the first three words were doing what they did (an adverb). You may omit this step if it doesn't make sense. For example, red kite flies **high**.
5. Now add a short phrase beginning with to, in, at, or on, (a prepositional phrase) that tells something more about your sentence. Again, you may leave this out if it doesn't seem to make sense. For example, red kite flies high **in the sky**.
6. Finally, add any other words which you think are needed to make your sentence complete. For example, **The** red kite flies high in the sky.



**Figure 1**  
**A READING AND WRITING SEQUENCE**

**Reading**

**Rehearsing Ideas** (before and during writing)

Pictorializing

Precomposing

Drafting a beginning

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

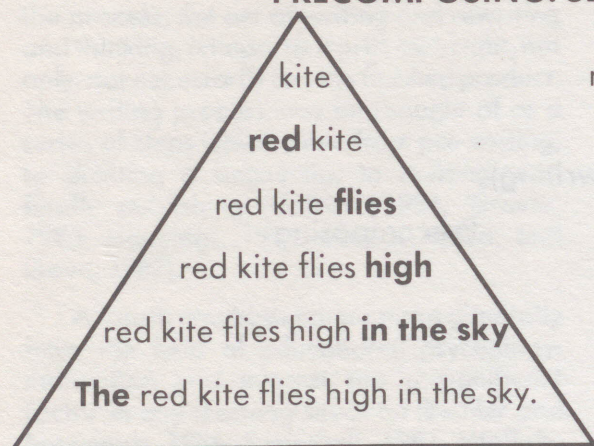
Revising

Publishing

Sharing



**Figure 2**  
**PRECOMPOSING: SENTENCE BUILDING**



noun (name of object)

adj. (describing word)

verb (action word)

adv. (how, when, where)

prep. phrase (to, at, in, on)

other

**Figure 3**  
**DRAFTING A BEGINNING**

\_\_\_\_\_

(title)

The red kite flies high in the sky.

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_



7. Let's share our sentences with our neighbors while I walk around the room to help anyone who has a question.

While the above sequence may be fairly easy for the upper elementary children to follow, the teacher may want to do several sentence building activities with the whole class first, especially for younger children and for children who are not familiar with parts of speech.

The sequence now moves into its third step where the sentence that was completed on the bottom of the pyramid becomes the topic sentence for a paragraph. The student is now engaged in **drafting a beginning** (see Figure 3). (S)he is told to write the sentence on the first line and add three or four sentences which tell more about the first sentence. Again, the teacher may want to do this step with the whole class before directing students to do their own. When students have had ample time to add their additional sentences, they can be told to read over the paragraph several times and then to come up with a concluding sentence. One variation might be to exchange paragraphs before adding the concluding sentence and allow a neighbor to either voice some ideas for a concluding sentence or actually to write the concluding sentence. The original author can discuss with the neighbor whether his/her thoughts were captured in the concluding sentence.

At this point the teacher may wish to have some paragraphs shared with the whole class or in small groups before the revising stage. Classmates can be asked to brainstorm ideas for describing words, more exciting verbs, etc., to help each other begin the revision process. The next step then becomes **revising**. It might be well to put the paragraphs away in a writing folder at this point and return to them tomorrow. A fresh look may indicate ideas for revision. Word and sentence revisions as well as mechanical corrections can be made.

Ideally, the teacher should confer briefly with each child about the paragraph and revisions. Teacher conferences should teach students about self-correction and work toward independence in revising. For the times a teacher cannot confer individually and must read, correct, and return the

papers, a silent dot (a small ink mark) under a word or punctuation needing attention can signal the need for revision better than large red marks covering a paper. Using this method the teacher puts a small mark or line under an area needing revision. Letters or symbols can indicate the particular correction needs.

For example,

The red kite flies high in the sky,

.s

.p

The dot indicates the needed revision; the **s** indicates spelling; the **p** indicates punctuation.

Following revision the paper is ready to be published. **Publishing** means making a copy for public viewing on which the revisions are made and an attractive copy is produced. It does not necessarily mean perfect spelling for young children whose invented spelling should be encouraged and permitted for display. The final paragraphs may leave room at the bottom for pictorializing again. Students may wish to reproduce their original drawings or to modify and elaborate upon them based on the information in the paragraphs.

Not all writing becomes published, only that which is to be displayed, to become part of a book, or otherwise to be presented to an audience. Children's writing folders may contain several pieces which remain in the state the paragraphs would be in after revision. Corrections have been made and conferences have been held, but the piece is not rewritten for a perfect copy.

**Sharing** published paragraphs and illustrations with the whole class is the culmination of the reading-writing sequence. It is even more exciting if another class, school officials, parents or other outside guests are present. Because of the time involved in individual presentations, visitors may be divided into groups, each of which will hear from a few children.

Variations to this reading-writing sequence are many. Steps may be added or subtracted. Different writing activities can be substituted and a variety of genres of children's literature can be read. For example, following the reading of poetry, students can pictorialize a poem and then write their own.



One variation of the single paragraph form is to allow each supporting sentence to become the topic sentence for a new paragraph. Instead of writing the supporting sentences in a paragraph following the topic sentence, they are written side by side on three separate lines underneath the topic sentence (see Figure 4). Sentences are added on lines beneath each supporting sentence to form three paragraphs. A concluding sentence is added to the final paragraph. This type of expansion writing forms a transition from single paragraphs to longer pieces.

### Conclusion

The four emphases at the beginning of this article are exemplified in the reading-writing sequence in the following manner:

1. Reading, writing, listening, and speaking - the four components of the communication process - are present throughout the sequence.
2. There are several pre-writing activities: reading, pictorializing, precomposing, as well as speaking and listening.
3. Writing is viewed as a process: it occurs over time and has steps to the final product. Precomposing, the sentence building, leads to drafting a beginning, followed by revising, publishing, and sharing. The writing process is viewed as an important learning experience in itself, not only for the final product. Reading, speaking, listening, and writing interact as students share with each other along the way.
4. Finally, motivation and interest are aroused and sustained during the sequence because of the variety of activities, the natural build-up to writing, the interaction with other students, and the integration of reading, writing, listening, and speaking.

The best test of any teaching activity is the classroom! I've seen this sequence motivate and interest children (and adults!) of all ages. Why not give it a try in your classroom? It's theoretically sound and immensely practical!

### References

- Biehler, Robert F. and Snowman, Jack (1986). **Psychology applied to teaching**. Boston, MA: Houghton Mifflin.
- Calkins, Lucy McCormick (1986). **The art of teaching writing**. Portsmouth, NH: Heinemann Educational Books.
- Graser, Elsa R. (1983). **Teaching writing: A process approach; a survey of research**. Dubuque, IA: Kendall/Hunt Publishing Co.
- Graves, Donald H. (1983). **Writing: Teachers and children at work**. Exeter, NH: Heinemann Educational Books.
- Hennings, Dorothy Grant (1986). **Communication in action: Teaching language arts**. Boston, MA: Houghton Mifflin.
- Hoskisson, Kenneth and Tompkins, Gail E. (1987). **Language arts content and teaching strategies**. Columbus, OH: Merrill Publishing Co.
- Personke, Carl R. and Johnson, Dale D. (1987). **Language arts instruction and the beginning teacher**. Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice Hall, Inc.
- Sprinthall, Norman A. and Sprinthall, Richard C. (1987). **Educational psychology: A developmental approach**. New York, NY: Random House.
- Stoodt, Barbara D. (1988). **Teaching language arts**. New York, NY: Harper and Row.
- Vacca, Jo Anne L., Vacca, Richard T. and Gove, Mary K. (1987). **Reading and learning to read**. Boston, MA: Little, Brown and Co.
- Woolfolk, Anita (1987). **Educational psychology**. Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice-Hall Inc.

*Dr. Arden Ruth Post is a professor in the Education Department at Calvin College, Grand Rapids.*



Figure 4

---

(title)

The red kite flies high in the sky.

(topic sentence)

1. \_\_\_\_\_ 2. \_\_\_\_\_ 3. \_\_\_\_\_  
(three supporting sentences)

1a \_\_\_\_\_ 2a \_\_\_\_\_ 3a \_\_\_\_\_

1b \_\_\_\_\_ 2b \_\_\_\_\_ 3b \_\_\_\_\_

1c \_\_\_\_\_ 2c \_\_\_\_\_ 3c \_\_\_\_\_

---

(concluding sentence)