

Winter 2016

# *The Collins Writing Exchange*

Ideas, Tips, and Resources on Writing from [Collins Education Associates](#)

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## *Featured Writing Assignment*

### **Spotlight on Informative/Explanatory Writing**

Today's standards place an emphasis on informative writing that reflects its importance in our everyday lives. In school, informative/explanatory writing is important in all subject areas as it involves instructing, summarizing, describing, clarifying, or giving information in a variety of ways to the reader.

To help your students develop the specific organizational and writing skills needed for effective informational writing, choose one of these assignments. Each lesson is a fully developed plan with prewriting activities and graphic organizers.

**Primary (K-3):** [Writing an Expert's Alphabet Book](#)

**Intermediate (3-6):** [Describing a Family Member](#)

**Middle School:** [Collecting and Interpreting Data](#)

**High School:** [Similar, but Different: Comparing and Contrasting When the Differences Are Subtle](#)

#### Special Note:

Want to see a Collins Associate demonstrate these and other lessons in your school's classrooms? See the [In-District Consulting and Coaching](#) page of our website.

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## *FAQ: Collins Associates Answer Frequently Asked Questions*

### **How Can the Collins Portfolio Also Function as a Tool for Teaching, Learning, and Assessment?**

Teachers have long used portfolios as a means for collecting student work and managing their writing programs. But writing demands have increased for both teachers and students.

Collins Portfolio™



In her workshop Prove It! Using Student Portfolios as Evidence of Proficiency, Collins Associate Cheryl McDonough stresses that a well-designed portfolio can and

should do more. See Cheryl's answer to the question: "[How can the Collins Portfolio also function as a tool for teaching, learning, and assessment?](#)"

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### *Classroom Techniques That Work*

## **Active, Engaging Strategies for Building Math Vocabulary**

Fluency with mathematical terms is a crucial element in both problem solving and conceptual understanding. But as Collins Associate Bill Atwood reminds us, "Math vocabulary terms are not generally used outside the classroom. The only time students are going to get practice using these words is in the classroom, so they need to use them a lot!"

Atwood's DVD, *Math Words in Motion*, shows teachers how to build 267 math vocabulary terms with their K-8 students using quick, kinesthetic gestures and easy-to-use games that allow students to have fun and become fluent in the language of math.



*Math Words in Motion* video

Preview a video clip of [Math Words in Motion](#), and [order online](#).

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### *Convention Wisdom*

## **Apostrophes Can Cause Writers Headaches**

The role of apostrophes in our written language seems pretty straight forward: they are used primarily to show possession and missing letters in contractions. Yet missing and unnecessary apostrophes cause writers a lot of grief beyond just the *its* vs. *it's* problem. In the sentences below there are five missing or unnecessary apostrophes. Can you find them?

Jan's and Joy's father said that in the 1990's, teachers gave many more A's than Bs on compositions. It's not that students writing was superior in earlier decades. Obviously, not everyones writing was better. Today's standards are higher, he said.

See the [answer key](#) to check on how you did with this pesky piece of punctuation.

Download a Tip Sheet on apostrophes that you can share with your students! Select the appropriate level below for an excerpt from our *Essential Conventions* Teacher Resource Guide:

**Level P (grades 2-3):** [Singular and Plural Possessive Nouns](#)

**Level A (grades 4-6):** [Specialized Rules: Apostrophes](#)

**Level B (grades 6-9):** [Apostrophes: Specialized Rules](#)

**Level C (grades 9-12):** [Apostrophes: Specialized Rules](#)

### Special Note:

Looking for more tips on navigating the rules of writing? See *Check Mate*, the student guide for essential conventions. Order the [Essential Conventions Teacher Resource Guide](#) (\$25 for the electronic version; \$30 for the hard copy) on our website. Or download a [free Sampler of the Teacher Resource Guide](#), and try it out with your students.

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## Quick Links

# Free Resources: Compare and Contrast Matrices

Identifying similarities and differences is fundamental to human thought. But for many students, comparing and contrasting systematically is difficult.

A key to doing so effectively is identifying characteristics to be compared. Graphic organizers can provide a valuable, concrete way for determining similarities and differences. Download our easy-to-use [compare and contrast matrices](#) to help your students be more systematic in approaching this essential thinking process.

### Comparing and Contrasting Matrix

Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Date: \_\_\_\_\_

Type: _____	Item 1	Item 2	How Similar or Different?
Characteristic 1			

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## Survey Says

# How Are We Doing?

In this issue we are introducing a new feature called *Survey Says*. Each issue will include a **very brief** survey on an issue of relevance to our readers. Survey results will be shared via email with those who take the survey.

*The Collins Writing Exchange* launched in the spring of 2014 and the growth in readership since is very gratifying. We're looking for your feedback to make it as accessible and useful to you as possible. Please take a moment to complete our survey on the frequency and length of the newsletter.

## Take-a-Minute Survey

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## Upcoming Events

# New Hampshire, New Jersey, and More

Start the new year by attending a Collins Writing public workshop!

- **January 29:** [Math Words in Motion: Building Math Vocabulary](#) (grades 2-8), [SERESC](#), Bedford, NH, Instructor: Bill Atwood
- **March 14:** [More Writing, Less Grading! A Manageable Approach to Writing Across the Curriculum](#) (grades K-5), [Morris Union Jointure Commission](#), New Providence, NJ, Instructor: Kristine Gibson
- **April 12:** [More Writing, Less Grading! A Manageable Approach to Writing Across the Curriculum](#) (grades 6-12), [Morris Union Jointure Commission](#), New Providence, NJ, Instructor: Kristine Gibson



[View the schedule](#) for details and registration information on these and other

upcoming events. New offerings are added regularly, so if you don't see something in your area, check back soon.

*Special Note:*

You can *host a Collins Institute* at your school or district, open it up to outside participation, and underwrite some or all of the costs of the workshop for your teachers.

Would you like to speak to a Collins Associate about offering a professional development session in your school or district? [Email us](#) or call us at 800-932-4477 to learn about options or pricing or to set up a FREE phone consultation. We offer highly competitive rates and will customize the training to suit your school's needs!

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*About Our Newsletter*

## **Helpful Resources for Busy Educators**

We truly appreciate your interest in our e-newsletter and hope you will share it with others. Please forward *The Collins Writing Exchange* to your colleagues who might be interested.

For those of you who had this issue forwarded to you, [join our mailing list](#) and receive future issues directly. *The Exchange* is issued six times a year.

Missed a previous issue? Read it now.

[Fall 2015](#) ~ [Back-to-School 2015](#) ~ [Summer 2015](#) ~ [Spring 2015](#) ~ [Late Winter 2015](#) ~ [Winter 2014](#) ~ [Fall 2014](#) ~ [August-September 2014](#) ~ [Spring/Summer 2014](#)

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