



Research-Based Writing Supported by 28 Years of Proven Results

Spring 2016

# *The Collins Writing Exchange*

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

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## *Featured Writing Assignment*

### **Writing a Letter to Next Year's Teacher**

This assignment is a Collins favorite beginning in first grade! It's valuable because it requires students to reflect, analyze, and explain. This type of task can be done any time of the year, but it's particularly effective in the spring when students can reflect on the progress they have made over the course of an entire school year.

Year-end reflections are important for all ages of students. Engage your students with this powerful writing assignment. It's a full lesson plan with a graphic organizer and suggested Focus Correction Areas (FCAs). Choose the lesson for your grade level:

[Primary](#)   [Upper Elementary](#)   [Middle School](#)   [High School](#)

#### *Special Note:*

Would you like to see a Collins Associate demonstrate these and other lessons in your school's classrooms? Contact us at [info@collinsed.com](mailto:info@collinsed.com) or 800-932-4477.

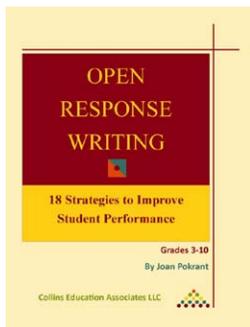
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## *FAQ: Featuring Collins Associate Joan Pokrant*

### **How Can I Improve Students' Answers on Constructed Response Questions?**

"No surprises!" That, in a nutshell, is Collins Associate Joan Pokrant's answer to the many questions she gets about preparing students for constructed response questions in high-stakes assessments.

Author of *Open Response Writing*, Pokrant does not advocate "teaching to the test." Instead, she suggests routine, everyday practices that help students become comfortable with a wide variety of writing prompts. See her complete answer to "[How Can I Improve Students' Answers on Constructed Response Questions?](#)" and get a [template](#) for designing effective prompts.



By Joan Pokrant

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### *Writing in Science*

## **Logbooks: An Appealing Alternative to Lab Reports**

Maintaining a logbook can be a key learning strategy for science students of all ages, says Dr. Judith Sumner. According to Sumner, a Collins Associate who specializes in science writing, logbooks can be an effective and efficient alternative to traditional lab reports.

Instead of stacks of lab reports waiting to be graded, the teacher can easily review and periodically assess each student's logbook. The logbook contains a running record of observations, laboratory data, post-lab reflections, flowcharts, and other notes.

*Monday*

*75 radish seeds are split into three groups with vinegar and water. Each seed was about 1/8 inch. I don't know the species name. I left the seeds in the science lab. It was pretty warm. I'll try to check them next week.*

See Dr. Sumner's [guidelines for establishing a scientific logbook](#) as well as two contrasting entries that your students can critique.

### *Special Note:*

*Dr. Judith Sumner is available to work with your school or district on science writing, science curriculum design, and implementing Next Generation Science Standards. Contact us at 800-932-4477.*

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### *Worth Noting*

## **Strategic Feedback on Writing Saves Teachers Time and Benefits Students**

Many teachers burn themselves out trying to give students feedback on everything in their writing. It is almost always more effective to be strategic (that is, more selective) in giving students feedback on their writing. Strategic feedback, when combined with more frequent writing, gives teachers a clear snapshot of student understanding and progress *during* the learning process.

More frequent writing and more strategic feedback are the recommendations of Cris Tovani in her *Educational Leadership* article, "[How I Learned to Be Strategic about Writing Comments](#)." Collins Writing teachers will learn many suggestions for effective use of frequent Type One and Type Two writing in Tovani's article, as well as a powerful rationale for using FCAs with more formal assignments.

Special Note:

"How I Learned to Be Strategic About Writing Comments" by Cris Tovani was reproduced with permission of Educational Leadership.

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*Convention Wisdom*

## One-Minute Writing Clinic: Apostrophes!

For such a simple little symbol, the apostrophe seems to stir up a lot of trouble. It gives students fits, texters won't use it, GPS doesn't recognize it, and Scrabble doesn't allow it. There is even an active organization, the Apostrophe Protection Society, dedicated to preserving the correct use of this often-abused punctuation mark.

It doesn't seem that this little squiggle could wreak such havoc since it essentially does only three things:

- It indicates possession.
- It stands for substituted letters or numbers.
- It is used to form the plural of certain letters and numbers.

Despite the apostrophe's short "to-do" list, it can be tricky to use correctly. In the sentences below, apostrophes are used, abused, and missing. Can you find the eight apostrophe fixes needed?

*Its the Baby Boomers mantra that the 1960's were the golden years of music. Even though the MTV Generation's and Millennial Generation's favorite music is mostly recorded on CD's rather than vinyl, most everyones favorite music has been influenced by the artist's work of the 1960's and 1970s.*

Did you find all eight? See our [answer key](#) to check your answers.



You can also download a PDF from our *Essential Convention's* Teacher Resource Guide with reminders about specialized apostrophe rules for your students:

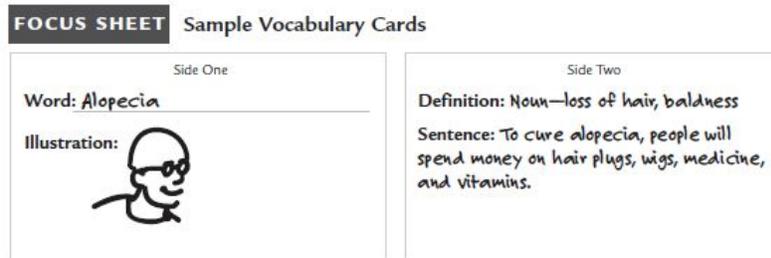
- [Level P \(grades 2-3\)](#)
- [Level A \(grades 4-6\)](#)
- [Level B \(grades 6-9\)](#)
- [Level C \(grades 9-12\)](#)

Are you looking for more tips on navigating the rules of writing? See *Check Mate*, the student guide for apostrophes and other essential conventions, or order the [Essential Conventions Teacher Resource Guide](#) (\$25 for the PDF version; \$30 for the hard copy) from our web store. You can also download a free Sampler of the Teacher Resource Guide, and try it out with your students.

- [Teacher Resource Guide Level P \(grades 2-3\) Sampler](#)
- [Teacher Resource Guide Level A \(grades 4-6\) Sampler](#)
- [Teacher Resource Guide Level B \(grades 6-9\) Sampler](#)
- [Teacher Resource Guide Level C \(grades 9-12\) Sampler](#)

# Vocabulary Card Template

Students develop new vocabulary through multiple encounters with terms and opportunities to use and apply them. An effective strategy for students to learn new terms is to create vocabulary cards for both domain-specific and general academic vocabulary.



The vocabulary cards recommended by Robert Marzano and Debra Pickering in their book *Building Academic Vocabulary* have four elements: the term; a non-linguistic representation for the meaning of the term; a student-friendly definition; and a sentence with the term used in a meaningful way. Download our easy-to-use [vocabulary card template](#), which includes the Marzano/Pickering features, and have students start building their vocabulary now!

## Upcoming Events

### Vermont, Ohio, Pennsylvania, AMLE, and More

- **July 11-15, 2016:** [Designing an Effective Writing Program to Meet the Challenges of the Common Core](#), grades K-8, Instructor: Bill Atwood, Bennington, VT
- **August 2, 2016:** [More Writing, Less Grading! An Introduction to the Collins Writing Program](#), grades K-5, Instructor: Kristine Gibson, Orrville, OH
- **August 26, 2016:** [Improving Student Performance Through Writing and Thinking Across the Curriculum](#), grades 4-12, Instructor: John Collins, Pittsburgh, PA

We will also be presenting at AMLE, the Association for Middle Level Education, in Austin, TX, in October. [View AMLE and more events here](#). New offerings are added regularly, so if you don't see something in your area, check back soon.



A reminder: You can host a [Collins Institute](#) in 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](#) 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.

## 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 plus occasional *Post Scripts*.

Missed a previous issue? Read it now.

[Late Winter Post Script 2016](#) ~ [Late Winter 2016](#) ~ [Winter Post Script 2016](#) ~ [Winter 2016](#) ~ [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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