

# Collins Writing Exchange

Ideas, Tips, and Resources on Writing from Collins Education Associates

## A Note to Our Readers

### The Importance of Modeling

*"But of all of the strategies I have learned over the years, there is one that stands far above the rest when it comes to improving my students' writing: The teacher should model writing—and think out loud while writing—in front of the class."*

Kelly Gallagher, Author  
*Write Like This*, 2011

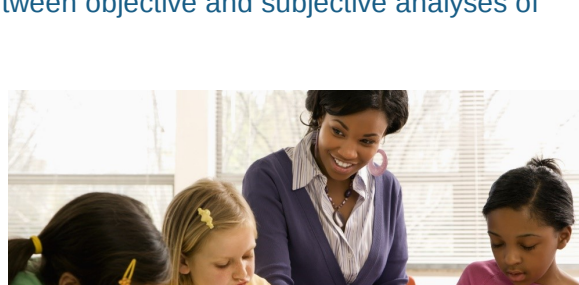
We all learn the most valuable life skills by watching others—whether it's learning to swing a tennis racket, drive a car, or perform brain surgery! And the same goes for writing. Students need to see examples of good writing, and they need to watch good writers in action. Direct teacher modeling is a critical part of this process.

What does this kind of modeling look like in the writing classroom? Consider a minilesson that begins with "Watch me as I write." Proceed by talking through your thinking as you translate ideas from your thoughts onto the paper. Show students how you pause to think, reread what you've written, or consider a better way to phrase an idea. It's important for students to see not just the words you write but also your approach to getting them on paper.

This strategy is as helpful for content area teachers as it is for writing teachers. For example, science teachers might model how to develop or refute a hypothesis, structure a lab report, or detail the steps in the cell division process. Math teachers might model how to organize and develop a two-column proof. And art teachers might use modeling to differentiate between objective and subjective analyses of works of art.

Here are some questions you might ask to encourage students to reflect on their observations. All of these make great Type One prompts!

- What did you notice as I was writing?
- What did I do when I got stuck?
- What strategies did I use while writing (e.g., checking off ideas in a graphic organizer, rereading parts of my work, going back to the prompt to clarify focus, and so on)?



When we model our own thought processes during writing, we shed light on what we expect of students and brighten their paths to good writing.

## Featured Writing Assignment

### Writing About an Influential Person

Many teachers like to start the school year with personal narrative writing, such as the Who's Who? Mystery Classmate assignment for grades [K-2](#), [3-5](#), [6-8](#). The next logical step is to ask students to write about their relationship with another person. Try using the following assignment to get students thinking about an influential person who has impacted their life.

**Writing About**  
**An Influential Person in Your Life**

Subject \_\_\_\_\_ Class \_\_\_\_\_ Date \_\_\_\_\_

**Assignment Summary**

Every year, *Time* magazine publishes a list of the 100 most influential people in the world.

- [Primary](#)
- [Elementary](#)
- [Secondary](#)

Content area teachers, consider tweaking this assignment and asking students to write about an influential person in your discipline—a groundbreaking scientist, mathematician, political figure, artist, or author. Focus less on detailed research and more on how the person's major accomplishments have affected day-to-day life, your discipline, or the student personally.

## Strategies That Work

### Using Past Papers as Models

In addition to live teacher modeling, past student writing samples make excellent models for practicing and applying new writing skills and for troubleshooting problem areas. Over the next several newsletters, we will feature a selection of Collins Writing samples that you can use in your own classroom as you teach students how to develop, organize, revise, and edit their writing. And we'll include tips on how to use each paper in your instruction.

In between *Collins Exchange* newsletters, consider building up your own collection of student papers by flagging and saving standout papers that come across your desk, as well as papers that reflect a common error you would like to correct. Remember that one sample can be used in multiple ways, so a few key writing samples go a long way! [Click here for a refresher](#) on how to use past papers as an instructional tool.

Take a look at [Leah's writing](#) as she describes a role model who has had a great influence on her life. Think about how you might use her paper to teach and practice critical writing skills in your class.

**My role model**  
**By: Leah**

A lot of people inspire me and make me want to be like them. One of those people is my dad.

My dad is very hardworking, loving, motivating, and a million more awesome traits.

My dad is a very hard worker. My dad runs a lot of races, he puts in a lot of effort to prepare himself for the race. My dad always gives 100% in anything he does. My dad owns a gym and works very hard keeping things organized. My dad always does his very best at making sure things are

#### Tips for Using Leah's Paper with Your Students

- Provide students with a [copy of Leah's paper](#) as an example of a well-structured essay that addresses all parts of the prompt (describe an influential person in your life) effectively. Highlight where the author addresses each part of the prompt and how she organizes her paragraphs to develop each reason reflected in the introduction.
- For more advanced writers, explore and practice strategies that will make Leah's writing less formulaic, such as starting with a hook, incorporating vivid language or literary devices, or including a personal anecdote.
- There are several sentences in this piece that are missing commas, so ask students to find and fix the errors and identify the corresponding [Check Mate™](#) comma rule.
- For practice with varying sentence beginnings, ask students to select one paragraph and rewrite it using the sentence starter "My dad" no more than once. Teach and explore strategies, such as adding transition words or phrases, rearranging word order, or beginning with an adverb or prepositional phrase.

Looking for more student writing samples like this to build up your collection? Find 15 more authentic annotated samples at varying grade levels from kindergarten to twelfth grade in [Writing Roadmap](#).

## PD That Works

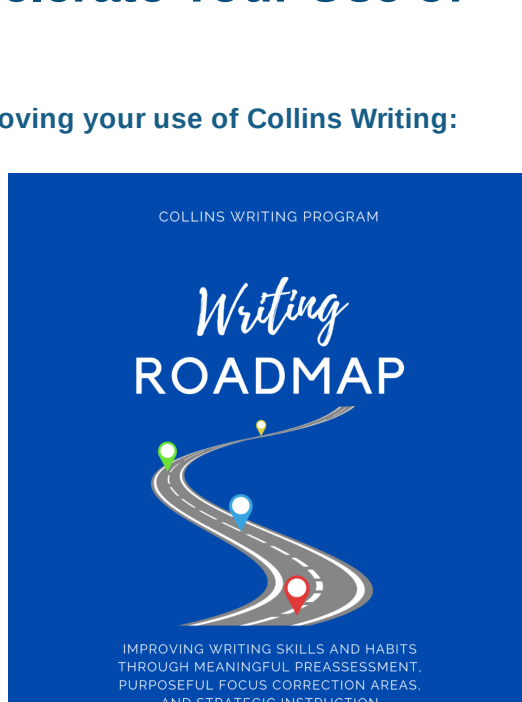
### Are You Ready to Accelerate Your Use of Collins Writing?

Check out these three options for improving your use of Collins Writing:

#### 1. Kick-start your teaching of writing by mapping out your instruction for the year with [Writing Roadmap](#).

Our newest digital resource includes everything teachers need to quickly diagnose student writing skills and habits and plan purposeful assignments and instruction for the entire school year.

Download the [single-user PDE](#), schedule live training with author [Kristine Gibson](#), or purchase the [Writing Roadmap](#) digital video module AND three-part instructional video module for asynchronous professional development available from [CIU 10 in Pennsylvania](#).



#### 2. Refresh your understanding of the [Five Types of Writing](#)<sup>SM</sup>. Brush up on your Collins IQ by taking our [QUICK QUIZ](#) or try a sample of our [quick self-assessment survey](#) to review Basic, Intermediate, and Advanced Collins implementation strategies.

#### 3. Enhance your teaching skills with Collins Writing professional development. Get started with our six-module online course, [Introduction to the development](#). Program, presented by [John Collins](#). Or, choose from our [other workshops and PD options](#). [Contact our main office](#) or your favorite Collins Associate to schedule training, which we will gladly customize to meet your needs.

## Quick Links

PD OPTIONS & WORKSHOPS

Everything you need to know about our PD options, workshops, institutes, and courses.

FREE RESOURCES

Ready-to-use Type Threes, Focus Correction Area lists, graphic organizers, and more!

ESSENTIAL CONVENTIONS

Check [Mate™](#) and other resources to tackle teachers' biggest writing pet peeves!

EXCHANGE ARCHIVE

All previous newsletters with FREE writing assignments in every edition!

Website

Public Schedule

Contact Us