



Collins Education Associates

# The Collins Writing Program

A Writing Across the Curriculum Program with Over 35 Years of **Proven Results**

## The Collins Writing Exchange

April 2, 2026 Issue #88



### The Magic of Mistakes

*"The greatest mistake you can make in life is to be continually fearing you will make one."*

*--Elbert Hubbard*

The **Five Types framework** is not about avoiding mistakes; it's about supporting students as they take chances and teachers as they embrace mistakes. Collins strategies reinforce that mistakes are essential to the learning process and the development of independent critical thinking. Mistakes are not evidence of failure; they are evidence of effortful learning where struggles, challenges, and missteps are recognized as essential cogs in the classroom machine. When students can recognize, acknowledge, and revise mistakes without fear, they are free to learn. A classroom where students dare to be wrong is a classroom where learning is possible. Creating a risk-free learning environment is the beginning of a community of learners - where each student feels safe to be wrong, share mistakes, and productively engage with the rest of the community.

In this climate, where everyone understands mistakes are an expected part of any lesson, assignment, or project, the group can benefit from peer sharing, collaboration, discussion, and feedback. Human beings learn the same way regardless of age - when a child is learning to walk, they stumble often; when learning to read, they struggle repeatedly; and when learning to problem-solve, they miscalculate frequently. When you see this, celebrate the mistake as evidence of learning!

Our tools provide the chance to shift to a culture where daring to take a risk is celebrated as part of the route to knowledge and where everyone is a winner.

### The Collins "Route to Knowledge"



#### First Stop - Type One Writing: A Risk-Free Brainstorm

Students are assessed for participation and effort only, which encourages risk-



#### Second Stop - Type Two Writing: A Quick Check-In

Students are assessed on content only; not conventions. This gives many

taking and judgement-free sharing--building confidence over time.

*When the term was first used decades ago, "brainstorming" was defined by four rules of the road:*

**1 - Criticism is ruled out/ Adverse judgment withheld.** The purpose of the brainstorming session is the generation of many, varied and unusual options. Type One writing is checked for **participation and productivity** within a specific number of minutes.

**2 - The wilder the idea, the better...**and since criticism is ruled out, wild and unusual ideas are shared. By removing the expectation of a correct answer, Type Ones encourage **creative, critical thinking**, which is key to students' understanding of content and application of skills.

**3 - Quantity is important.** The greater the number of ideas, the greater the likelihood of useful ideas. Type Ones use a **minimum line or item quota** to generate as many ideas as possible.

**4 - Collaboration is encouraged.** In addition to contributing ideas of their own, participants should suggest how the ideas of others can be turned into better ideas, or how two or more ideas can be joined into a new or different idea. The Collins "**below-the-line**" **activity** supports student-led learning as students share their responses and peers are encouraged to jot any they like "below the line" (in other words, below their own response).

*For a deep dive into the research behind brainstorming, check out this **white paper** by **Scott G. Isaksen** of the Creative Problem Solving Group.*



**Third Step -  
Type Three Writing:  
Criteria-Driven Response**

students who believe they cannot write well the confidence to show what they know in any content area without the stress of losing credit for the conventions of language that are not part of the content.

*Driving principles behind Type Two writing include:*

**\*\* Focus on thinking, not perfection.** Type Two Writing prioritizes **content and understanding over conventions**, allowing all students to demonstrate what they know without the pressure of "perfect" writing. This builds confidence and increases participation, especially for students who may hesitate to write.

**\*\* Retrieval practice strengthens learning.** Frequent Type Two responses require students to pull information from memory, reinforcing understanding and **improving long-term retention** of content across all subject areas.

**\*\*Immediate feedback drives improvement.** Because responses are short and focused, teachers can provide **quick, targeted feedback** on content, helping students correct misunderstandings and refine their thinking in real time.

**\*\*Access for all learners.** By removing the barrier of grading conventions, Type Two Writing creates an **equitable entry point** for all students to engage in content-area learning and show what they know, understand, and can do.

*Looking for Type Two prompt ideas?  
[Ten Great Type Twos](#)*



**Fourth Step -  
Type Four Writing:  
Type Three Elevated with Peer  
Editing**

Type Three writing allows students to make mistakes by focusing on a few key criteria rather than perfection. This encourages risk-taking and helps students see errors as part of the learning process.

*Three Mistake-Honoring Elements:*

**1 - One draft.** Students complete a single draft and revise directly on it, making their thinking and improvements visible to the teacher. This approach encourages meaningful revision—especially when students aren't focused on producing a perfect final copy. When working digitally, students can use the "track changes" tool to show their revisions. **Visible revision is valued and celebrated** as evidence of learning, while requiring only clean copies can discourage the productive, "messy" work that real revision requires.

**2 - FCAs (Focus Correction Areas).** These are specific grading criteria provided to students to drive class instruction, guide student writing, and focus teacher assessment. FCAs are normally limited to no more than three specific skills, and writing content should be prioritized and carefully balanced with organization, style, and mechanics. **Because only selected features are graded, students can take risks in other areas.**

**3 - Oral reading to edit.** Students read their papers out loud to themselves in a quiet voice and revise based on three guiding questions: 1. Did I do what I was supposed to? Does it sound right? Did I meet the requirements of the FCAs? "Fixes" are made right on the first draft, which is then submitted to the teacher for feedback and evaluation. This process gives students a chance to **catch and correct mistakes on their own** before submitting.

See our [blog](#) for more on the **WHYS of Type Three Writing**.

Type Four writing encourages healthy mistakes and teaches students how to address them by giving students the opportunity to receive and respond to peer feedback. Because revision is expected, students can take risks without the perceived stigma of being wrong.

*Key Type Four Elements for a Growth Mindset:*

**\*\* Peer editing.** Students sit shoulder-to-shoulder, read their partner's work aloud, and **revise together** using the same guiding questions as a Type Three. With a clear protocol, students become more effective peer editors.

**\*\* Revised copy.** Writers thoughtfully review feedback, **choosing which changes to make** as they revise, and submit this updated draft to the teacher.

Do your students need some help with revising and editing? **Download our Guide to Revising and Editing.**

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*Check out these Earth Day-inspired Type Three assignments for ready-to-use activities that celebrate deep thinking and creativity.*

[K-2 Poster](#)

[Gr. 3-5 Poster](#)

[Gr. 6-12 But Should We?](#)

[K-2 Making Observations](#)

[Gr. 3-10 Bumper Sticker](#)

Students who think that they CAN write, DO write.

*"Anyone who has never made a mistake has never tried anything new."  
--Albert Einstein*

**PD on the Fly!**

**No Time for a Whole Day PD?**  
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For One-on-One Support

**Speed Dating with an Expert**

*Schedule a 15-minute "date" with one of our experts and bring your questions! Choose CEO **Kristine Gibson** for all things Five Types of Writing; Math expert, **Bill Atwood**; or, if looking for more of a non-traditional companion, choose **Cheryl McDonough** to learn more about Collins in CTE, PBL, and/or WBL!*

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Follow us for fun and helpful tips, videos, and free assignments. Like, Share, and Comment to help us spread the word about all the great things we're doing at CEA—and to celebrate all the great things YOU are doing with writing across the curriculum!



**Measure What Matters** - a Graduate and Undergraduate course offered virtually through VTSU for the Summer/Fall. Keep an eye out for registration information in our next newsletter and on our website.

**The Collins Free for All:** Browse our online **FREE RESOURCES** and download assignments, templates, letters to parents, FCAs, and more!



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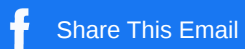
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