

Writing is simply a means for recording information. Who would think that this basic act would be so challenging for students day after day?

**TEACHER ACTION:** “Today, we’re going to write a persuasive essay.”

**STUDENT REACTION:** “What does ‘persuasive’ mean?”

**TEACHER ACTION:** “Let’s grab an iPad from the cart. Today, we are going to start writing our summary of the biographies we read.”

**STUDENT REACTION:** “Where do I start?”

Oftentimes, writing assignments are given with one basic quick model or demo of what is required – sometimes from a basic template form – and then students are asked to get started independently from there. It is the common scenario of, “On your mark, get set, go!”

And we know how that often turns out. Increased reliance on adult support . . . Not every student succeeds . . . Students not really knowing the “roadmap” of their writing task.

To solve these problems, teachers – both in general education and special education – are seeing the value of group writing lessons to explicitly teach each individual steps of the writing assignment, prior to students engaging in breakout, individual writing sessions.

For example, I co-teach group writing lessons on a regular basis in my mentoring and coaching program for educators. Here was the intro dialogue at the start of one of these group writing lessons:

“Today, we are going to do a group writing lesson. We are going to write about one of the biographies that you learned about and read about. It will have 5 parts. The end result will be a paragraph summary. Let’s review what a ‘biography’ is and post on the board a Learn About Tip to define the term ‘biography.’”

For students of any ability, we need to separate out formulating thoughts of “what to write” from sequencing and organising them. If all of these tasks are required of students at the same time, the cognitive load is too high. This, in turn, affects not only their desire to engage in writing tasks, but also the ability of the learners to sustain a writing session for a given period of time.

**PART 1:** Brainstorming a concept map with bullet points on what the students “learned about” & “read about” a biography of Beverly Cleary (an author of children’s and young adult’s fiction).

The students did the following:

- Formulate a bullet point about the topic
- Draw a circle in which to place their thought
- Add the bullet circle at the start of the phrase
- Illustrate an image to represent their thought
- Support the idea with a fact from the text
- Draw a line to the main idea once the bullet point was entered

# Generating A Concept Map

## CLASSROOM LESSON IN WRITING

### STEP 1

Students built the concept map – one idea at a time – drawing a circle “big enough for me (Phyl) to write in” and brainstorming a bullet point phrase, which was scribed. Student added the bullet point punctuation.

### STEP 2

The student author of the bullet point phrase illustrated an image to represent their idea.

### STEP 3

The student author of the bullet point phrase supported their idea with fact by finding it in the text or previous Read About lesson content.



### STEP 4

Once the map was complete, each student author shared their bullet point phrase, labeled or described their illustration to represent their idea, & drew a line to the topic target stating its correlation to the topic.

**EXAMPLE:** “In the biography of Beverly Cleary, we read that she moved a lot because her family needed money.”

## FORMULATION

### *The Steps of How to Teach Building a Concept Map*

**PART 2:** The class developed a list of words to use as referents for the main idea – in this case, the character, Beverly Cleary – to avoid the overuse of the character’s name in each sentence.

Examples the students formulated were:

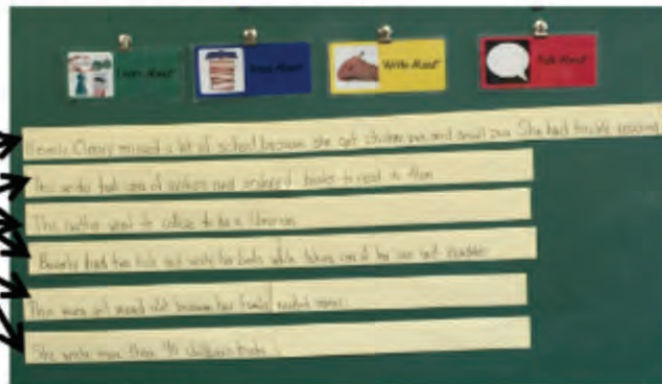
- This young girl
- This child
- This author

These words were sentence-starter options for students to use to expand each bullet point into a meaningful sentence.

**PART 3:** The sentences were generated one at a time by the students – in NO PARTICULAR ORDER – from the bullet points on the Write About Concept Map using the referent words. The sentences were scribed onto yellow sentence strips. As each sentence was formulated, it was place on the board.

# Expanding Bullet Points Into Meaningful Sentences

## FORMULATION



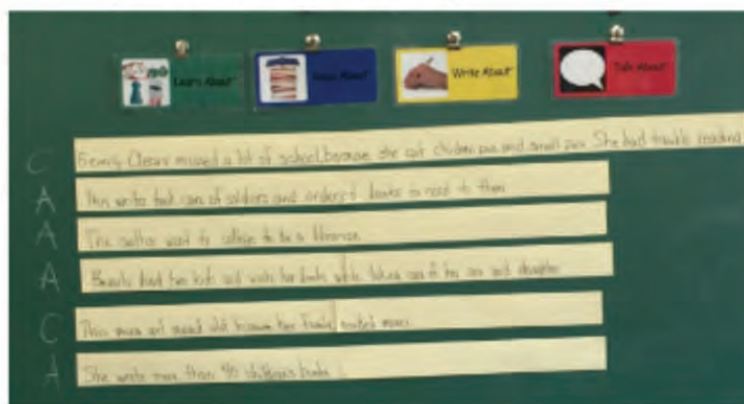
*Teaching How to Expand a Phrase into a Meaningful Sentence*

**PART 4:** Now that students have formulated their sentences from their bullet points, it was time to organise the sentences: those sentences that were about Beverly Cleary when she was a child – by marking the letter “C” next to the sentence – and those that represented her life as an adult, marked with the letter “A.”

# Categorizing Sentences

## ORGANIZATION

<b>WRITING KEY</b>
C = Childhood
A = Adulthood



*Using a Writing Key to Teach Content Organization*

In addition, the students numbered the sentences in sequence, as they wanted them to appear in their paragraph – first from the “child” category and next from the “adult” category.

**PART 5:** After that, the students physically placed the sentences they wrote for the biography summary on the Write About classroom board to organise and build – literally – the paragraph.



## Building The Summary Paragraph

**SEQUENCING**



### *Paragraph Development Through Step-by-Step Sequencing Instruction*

EACH student was engaged in this 45-minute writing lesson. EVERY student participated.

Students were now better prepared for their breakout writing sessions on different biographies that they would select using the strategies we taught them to breakdown their writing assignments.

And, by the way, this lesson format can be used over and over again in group writing lessons so that it is consistent and predictable for the learners – regardless of what they are writing about.

#### **SUCCESS FOR ALL!**

For more information on these research-based UDL strategies related to this information, please go to [AboutTHEPACT.com](http://AboutTHEPACT.com).

Warmest of regards,



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Since completing a fellowship at Johns Hopkins Kennedy-Krieger Institute in 1988, Phyl Macomber has become an award-winning keynote speaker, author, and education specialist. Phyl has consulted with and trained thousands of teaching staff and was featured in the international best seller, the Common Threads Trilogy book series, as one of the top 100 empowering women who is a passionate catalyst for systems change in education.

Phyl has been a guest on numerous radio shows to discuss simplifying instruction for students of all abilities. Phyl serves two ambassadorships - the first for the educational affairs organization, I AM Living Education Everyday and the second at Energime University, based in Manhattan, as the educational co-producer of the University's global youth program, Mission Earth Solutions. Her partnership with South Africa-based Leave No Girl Behind International is training young people in key leadership principles globally.

Phyl has created a 4-step simple system for how to teach anything to anyone, called T.H.E. P.A.C.T., which is outlined in Phyl's first book, The Power of T.H.E. P.A.C.T. Her research-based teaching strategies have been published in numerous articles featured in education publications since 2009 and are being successfully used across North America and in parts of Australia, Italy, Saudi Arabia, and Africa.