## Chapter 3

# Making It Work

## THE INSTRUCTIONAL SEQUENCE AND ORGANIZATION OF THE LESSONS

I feel supported by this approach and my students feel empowered and they get it! . . . Everything was written for me. I copied each lesson, I put all the materials in a binder, and I felt I was organized and ready to go teach writing. For me it was such a time saver that all materials were there and I had a choice of good and not-so-good papers. And it helped to explain how those papers could be better by applying a rubric that students could independently use. My third graders are thinkers. They think carefully about what they write and who will read their papers. Their ideas are more specific and developed and their papers are organized.

—MR. TRAGAS, third-grade teacher

We met Mr. Tragas at the beginning of Chapter 1 and learned about his instructional challenges. The above quote reflects his experience teaching the genre-based strategy instruction lessons. Our goal in writing this book is to provide teachers with as much support as possible in learning a new approach to teaching writing. In Chapter 2 we explained the principles and overall strategies used in the instructional approach. In this chapter we explain the instructional sequence that is followed in the lessons; we think of this sequence as a *strategy for teaching strategies.* Then we offer suggestions and advice drawn from questions that other teachers have raised. Finally, we explain the organization of the instructional units and teaching materials in Chapters 4–6.

### SEQUENCE OF INSTRUCTION: A STRATEGY FOR TEACHING STRATEGIES

Teaching students to use writing strategies requires planning. The SRSD model has shown the value of giving teachers a flexible sequence of instructional steps (Harris & Graham, 2009). The advantage to having a single instructional sequence is that it provides consistency for both teachers and students. Once teachers learn to use it, they can modify it to teach new genres fairly easily. The instructional sequence, or strategy for teaching strategies, in Figure 3.1 is an elaboration of the six steps included in SRSD. In Chapters 4–6, we apply the instructional sequence for different genres. There are a number of components to this instructional sequence, which are described below.
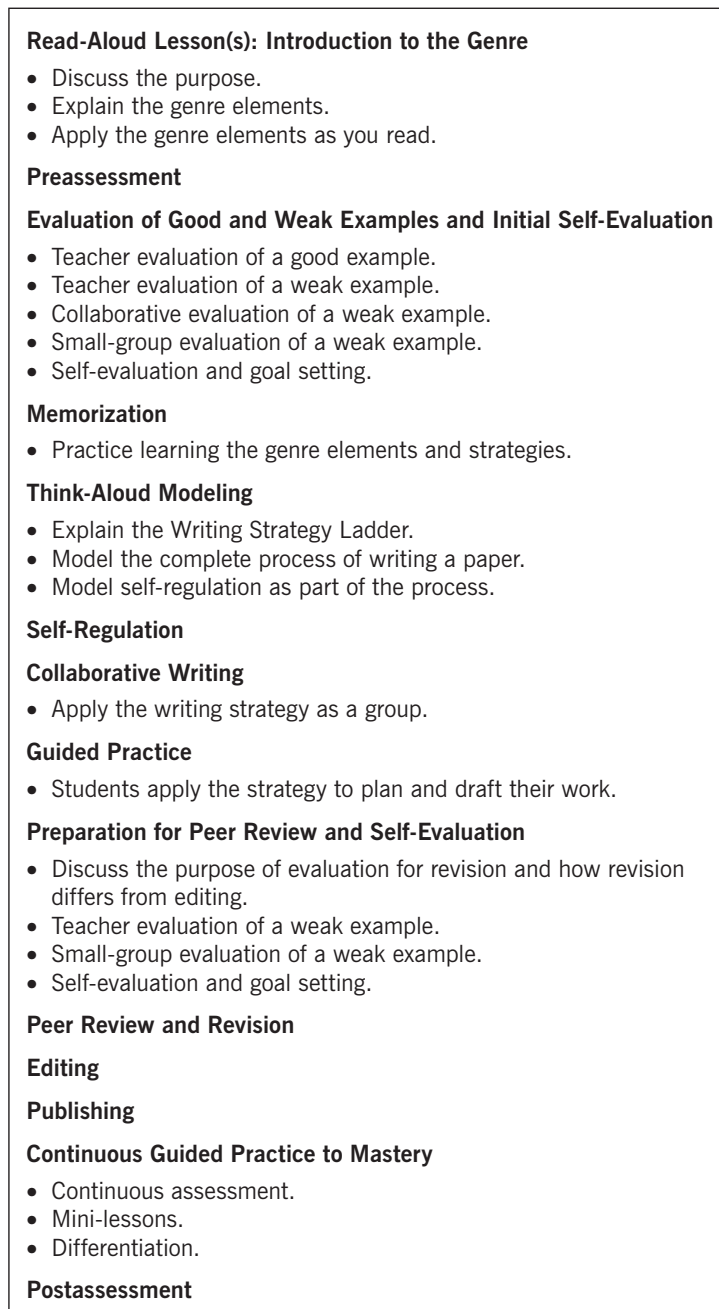
**Read-Aloud Lesson(s): Introduction to the Genre**

- Discuss the purpose.
- Explain the genre elements.
- Apply the genre elements as you read.

**Preassessment**

**Evaluation of Good and Weak Examples and Initial Self-Evaluation**

- Teacher evaluation of a good example.
- Teacher evaluation of a weak example.
- Collaborative evaluation of a weak example.
- Small-group evaluation of a weak example.
- Self-evaluation and goal setting.

**Memorization**

- Practice learning the genre elements and strategies.

**Think-Aloud Modeling**

- Explain the Writing Strategy Ladder.
- Model the complete process of writing a paper.
- Model self-regulation as part of the process.

**Self-Regulation**

**Collaborative Writing**

- Apply the writing strategy as a group.

**Guided Practice**

- Students apply the strategy to plan and draft their work.

**Preparation for Peer Review and Self-Evaluation**

- Discuss the purpose of evaluation for revision and how revision differs from editing.
- Teacher evaluation of a weak example.
- Small-group evaluation of a weak example.
- Self-evaluation and goal setting.

**Peer Review and Revision**

**Editing**

**Publishing**

**Continuous Guided Practice to Mastery**

- Continuous assessment.
- Mini-lessons.
- Differentiation.

**Postassessment**

**FIGURE 3.1.** Strategy for teaching strategies.

## Read-Aloud Lesson(s): Introduction to the Genre

- **Discuss the purpose.** As you prepare to read the book, briefly discuss the genre of the book (or other text) and its purpose. Ask students if they have ever read or written papers in this genre.

- **Explain the genre elements.** Display the genre elements for students and explain them. Discuss the importance of each in supporting the genre's purpose. Discuss what comes

DEVELOPING STRATEGIC WRITERS THROUGH GENRE INSTRUCTION

at the Beginning, Middle, and End in this genre. (Note: As you introduce new genres, discuss with students the ways that the content of each section changes depending on the author's purpose.)

- **Apply the genre elements as you read.** Stop regularly during the read-aloud to comment on the genre elements in the text. For example, when reading a story, stop and comment on the characters, setting, and problem. In some cases, you may take notes. After reading, use the elements to retell or summarize what you read. (Note: Repeat the read-aloud task many times before the teaching of the writing lessons; read-alouds can also continue during the writing lessons. The read-alouds can strengthen students' understanding of the elements of the genre and their reading comprehension.)

## Preassessment

- Ask students to write in response to a genre-specific prompt after reviewing the elements of that genre. To analyze your students' needs, you can evaluate the papers using the rubric that students will receive. Use this information to group students during small-group instruction, differentiation sessions, and peer review. You could also use this information to select mini-lessons that your students will find useful when writing in that genre.

## Evaluation of Good and Weak Examples and Initial Self-Evaluation

- **Teacher evaluation of a good example.** Read a paper that represents a very good *student* example and discuss your general impression of the paper with students. Review the genre elements and introduce the evaluation rubric. As you do this, point out the connection between the elements and the evaluation criteria. Also explain the information in the section called *Other Considerations* and discuss with students how it can affect the quality of a paper. Then identify the elements, underline them, and score them using the genre-based evaluation rubric. Proceed with the *Other Considerations* section of the rubric. Students may participate, but you should lead the process. This activity introduces the evaluation criteria and gives students a model of what they are trying to achieve.

- **Teacher evaluation of a weak example.** Read a weak example, discuss your general impression of the paper, identify the elements, and score the paper using the genre-based evaluation rubric. Students may participate in the identification of the elements, but you should model how to make comments and write suggestions for revisions.

- **Collaborative evaluation of a weak example.** Work with students in an interactive, collaborative way to evaluate a weak example. Ask students to identify the genre elements and offer their evaluations, as you record their ideas. Your goal is to scaffold the application of the evaluation process, to help students make suggestions for revisions, and to suggest revision goals for the writer of the weak example.

- **Small-group evaluation of a weak example.** Students apply the evaluation process to a weak paper in small groups and write suggestions to the writer.

- **Self-evaluation and goal setting.** Students read their own preassessment papers, evaluate them using the genre elements, and set goals for improvement on later papers. They do not actually revise this paper.

## Memorization

- **Practice learning the genre elements and strategies**. From this lesson forward, you will provide opportunities for students to review the elements and the writing strategy verbally and in writing. Memorization is a low-level task, but students will not be able to use the strategies independently if they cannot remember the genre elements and strategy steps.

## Think-Aloud Modeling

- Explain the Writing Strategy Ladder and the materials that are used for planning, drafting, evaluating, and revising.

- Model the complete process of writing a paper from planning through evaluating and revising. Write your plans and the paper itself on chart paper (or the board) so students can see your work. Think out loud throughout the process so students can see your thinking as you apply the steps of the strategy. Be sure to refer specifically to each step in the strategy as you do it. You will model the process *at your students' level*, producing a paper that would be good for them. You can plan some of your ideas in advance, but it is important that your think-aloud modeling seems live.

- Model self-regulation as part of the process. You should deliberately model having some difficulties and overcoming them. Use self-talk to show students how you set goals, monitor your progress, handle challenges, and congratulate yourself. At the end of the lesson, discuss the process you followed and ask students to tell you some of the things they heard you say. Take notes on their comments.

## Self-Regulation

- Review the statements you had noted at the end of the modeling session and discuss the meaning of self-talk with students. Introduce the self-regulation strategy Be Strategic! (see Handout 2.3) and explain and discuss each section. Discuss what students could say in each section. Students then develop their own self-talk and may revise their previous self-talk in later lessons. (Note: Self-regulation is supported throughout the instructional sequence. It is just emphasized as a separate lesson component here.)

## Collaborative Writing

- Apply the writing strategy as a group. In collaborative writing, you act as a guide during the application of the strategy, but students should come up with all the ideas and propose the sentences. You also serve as scribe, writing down the plans and text. Begin by asking students how to get started; refer them to the steps of the strategy and the genre elements throughout the process. Adjust your level of support to meet the students' needs. If they get stuck or confused, assume more leadership.

## Guided Practice

- Students apply the strategy to plan and draft their work. Teachers monitor students' work and provide support as needed. Teachers can conference briefly with students. It is important to give two types of feedback: feedback on how well they are using the strategy and feedback on their actual writing. The goal is for students to use the strategy and to see that it improves their writing.

## Preparation for Peer Review and Self-Evaluation

- **Discuss the purpose of evaluation for revision and how revision differs from editing.** Explain the importance of critical reading and its benefits in self-evaluation and peer review.
- **Teacher evaluation of a weak example**. Review the rubric and point out the connection between the elements, the GO, and the rubric. Think out loud as you identify the elements, score them, write suggestions to the writer, and develop goals for revision.
- **Small-group evaluation of a weak example**. Students apply the evaluation process to a weak paper in small groups.
- **Self-evaluation and goal setting**. Students read their papers, evaluate them using the genre elements, and set goals for revisions.

## Peer Review and Revision

- Review the importance of evaluation and revision. Explain the peer review procedures.
- Students meet with a partner or in small groups to review papers written by other students.
- Students revise their papers.

## Editing

- Identify an editing issue for students. Model how to correct it in a sample paper and provide collaborative and/or independent practice with that issue. Students then apply the SCIPS editing procedure and the new editing skill to their own papers.

## Publishing

- Students complete their revisions and publish their papers.

## Continuous Guided Practice to Mastery

- Students work on one or more new papers in the genre and apply the writing process. Teachers provide guidance as needed by individual students. The whole class may need additional modeling or mini-lessons on particular topics, or small groups may need more modeling and support.

- **Continuous assessment.** It is important to monitor and evaluate students' progress as they write more than one paper. Evaluation of students' writing will be done using the genre-specific rubric that was applied to the preassessment writing sample. The rubric may include additional goals that you add after the mini-lessons. These additions will appear in the section of the rubric called *Other Considerations.* The evaluation of the continuous assessments can guide additional instruction in the genre. Teachers can use the assessment results to decide which extra mini-lessons to teach and if any instruction should be repeated for specific students. For example, a teacher might decide that all students need a mini-lesson on how to introduce effectively the topic of their persuasive essays. Alternatively, a teacher might decide that a small group of students needs more work on including reasons in their persuasive essays. The teacher can then meet with them and provide a mini-lesson tailored to the needs of this group.

## Mini-Lessons

- At appropriate times during the sequence of lessons, conduct mini-lessons on writing features common to the specific genre. For example, for narratives you might teach lessons on vivid description or on the use of dialogue. Some mini-lessons are included in the lessons in this book, and teachers can develop others. Mini-lessons at the *continuous guided practice to mastery* stage could be more differentiated.

- After you teach a mini-lesson, make sure to add the new writing expectations/objectives to the rubric in the section called "Other Considerations." Students can then evaluate their work and set new goals for improvement.

## Differentiation

- During small-group activities, meet and conference with individuals or small groups of students (higher or lower performing).

## Postassessment

- We encourage teachers to give students a postassessment after completing all lessons and before they begin a new genre. Teachers can also compare performance on the

postassessment with performance on the preassessment to document how much progress was made during the instructional unit. This process can help teachers identify the instructional approaches that were the most (and least) effective for their students. The postassessment results can also help teachers reflect on the effectiveness of their instruction.

## SOME SUGGESTIONS AND ADVICE ON INSTRUCTION

During our professional development sessions and our pilot work for the development of the instructional lessons, we had interesting discussions with teachers about the components and principles of this approach. Their feedback, comments, and questions helped us be explicit in our explanations and in the presentation and content of the lessons. We think it is important to share the content of those conversations with you, too. As you try out the lessons in the book, you may want to return to this section to enhance your understanding of some of the fine points of teaching strategies or to resolve problems that occur. If you meet with colleagues in a professional learning community, you may find these suggestions worth discussing.

First, we offer advice related directly to the steps in the instructional sequence. Then we offer a few more general suggestions.

### Advice on Instructional Steps

#### Think-Aloud Modeling

As we discussed, modeling is more than a presentation of information. The point of think-aloud modeling is to show students how you think as you come up with ideas, organize them, and draft sentences. Many students think that writing is easy for good writers, so it is helpful for them to see that you sometimes *get stuck* and struggle. It is important that your modeling seems to be "live" rather than all worked out in advance. In Chapters 4 and 5 on story and persuasive writing we provide sample think-alouds and in all instructional chapters we provide completed materials that you can read in preparation for teaching. We suggest that you read these samples as illustrations and do a little bit of planning about the topic you will model. But during the modeling, we encourage you to refrain from using your notes. This makes it much more authentic for students.

Here are some important points about modeling. First, you should work at the level of your students; that is, you are modeling the use of the strategy to produce a paper that would be a good paper for your students. Second, you should refer to each step of the strategy before you do it, so that students clearly see how you use the Writing Strategy Ladder. Third, you should include self-regulation statements in your modeling; for example, after brainstorming, you might say, "Great, I came up with plenty of ideas. But it's hard to figure out what to say first. I can use my GO to help me organize them."

Think-aloud modeling can be challenging at first. Just remember that if you *get stuck* or it doesn't go entirely smoothly, that's good. Pause and reflect on the problem and how

to solve it. This is an important aspect of self-regulation. Students learn more from a model who struggles a bit and copes with that difficulty than from one who writes effortlessly.

## Collaborative Writing

In collaborative writing, you are guiding students to use the strategy, and they are coming up with all the ideas and the language. Remember to ask students to explain each strategy step before doing it. One common challenge is that you may not always be able to use all students' ideas, and students may get disappointed. This may be especially true when writing stories. You should acknowledge students' ideas and help them select specific ideas for the GO, using the perspective of the reader. You can also suggest that students could use their ideas later in their own stories.

Another challenge in collaborative writing is the drafting step. This step provides an opportunity for you to model good sentence writing. Ask students to suggest sentences and then adjust the sentences, as needed, as you write them. You may get two or three suggested sentences from students and discuss which one works best. However, this process can be difficult to manage with a whole class. One option is to work with the whole class to draft the Beginning of the paper and then have small groups or individuals work on drafting the Middle and End sections of the paper. Then return to the whole-class setting and have groups share their work while you write the sentences on the board and make adjustments as needed.

## Self-Regulation

Self-regulation is important for students' success both in academics and in later life. You should include self-regulation statements in your think-alouds. Each of our instructional chapters includes a discussion of the Be Strategic! components.

In addition, we suggest that after students complete a paper and go through self-evaluation and peer evaluation, they set goals for their next piece. They can record their goals in a journal to use for reflection later. This process may help them appreciate how they accomplished their goals or how they need to work to meet a challenging goal. You could also respond to these journals to support students as they attempt to apply self-regulation strategies. You could clarify a goal, assist students in developing a goal, and/or congratulate them for their honesty and ability to set a specific goal.

It is a good idea to model self-regulation strategies across your curriculum, showing how much you value them by using them yourself. For example, before the start of a lesson (e.g., in math), you could explain to students that in order to keep track of time, you will create an agenda (i.e., set goals). That way you will not forget something important, and you will be able to monitor the completion of your plan (i.e., detect progress). During your work, you can ask questions about your progress, cross out completed items on the agenda, and model for the students how you use a specific strategy to stay on track (motivate and self-reinforce). When you complete the task, you can think about what worked for you (reflect).

## Evaluation and Peer Review

One common issue in self-evaluation is that some students may tend to assign high scores to themselves. This tendency may seem to indicate that students just want to give themselves high grades, but it is more likely to indicate difficulty in self-evaluation. Objectively judging one's own performance is very challenging. Students will need to see you model this process in order to understand its value and how to apply the evaluation criteria. Also, they may benefit even more from practice evaluating papers written by others, with your guidance.

Students may also find it challenging to apply evaluation criteria honestly during peer review and may assign only high scores to their partners. Your encouragement, honesty, and leadership when you practice reviewing can help develop a community of learners who are willing to learn from one another. You could also use technology for students' peer evaluations if you are able to use computers for writing. There are a number of software programs that support anonymous peer reviews and allow students to work from their computers to give and receive feedback.

## Revision

Students need opportunities to practice making revisions after evaluation. As you will notice in the lessons, we encourage you to work with students to make at least one revision during your modeling. This guidance is necessary because revision is a difficult task. Even though students may be able to identify a specific element that needs to be revised, it is often challenging to make that change.

## Editing

This book does not include instructional methods for teaching skills and conventions. You could develop your own editing lessons based on the CCSS's guidelines and your students' needs or use other resources with which you are familiar. Our instructional approach does, however, include a way to integrate skills instruction with composing. During the editing stage, select a skill that your students need to develop, display papers with problems in that skill, model how to make corrections using a think-aloud, and collaboratively practice the process before students make corrections on their own papers.

## Integrating Reading and Writing

The lessons' success is based on the practice of reading books out loud during the reading time to discuss the purpose, elements of the genre, and the writers' craft. Those read-alouds work as mentor texts. In addition to introducing the main genre elements, they can be used to introduce a mini-lesson. For example, you might discuss how an author used dialogue to show characters' personalities before teaching a mini-lesson on dialogue.

For the read-alouds we recommend the use of high-quality texts. Suggestions of such texts are given in Chapters 4, 5, and 6. It is important that you read and identify the genre

elements before you meet with students. Identifying the elements may be challenging, and you should devote some time to prepare the material. As you prepare, you could use "sticky notes" to mark the genre elements in the text. Then during the read-aloud it will be easy to pause and discuss the elements that you have marked. This will help scaffold students' understanding and use time efficiently.

## Continuous Guided Practice to Mastery

Because the transition from guided writing to independent practice is based on mastery and not time, students should be asked to write more than one paper in each genre. One challenge in teaching strategies is deciding when all of your students have achieved sufficient mastery of a strategy to move on to a new strategy or genre. Our recommendation is to use a minimum standard in which all students can explain the main elements of the genre and the steps in the strategy and are able to create a plan and write a paper that includes all the critical genre elements. Fortunately, strategy instruction is flexible enough to permit differentiated instruction. While some students are mastering the basics, others can be developing techniques to improve their writing according to the evaluation criteria.

## Differentiation and Mini-Lessons

Differentiation of lessons is based on your evaluation of students' progress. The rubrics facilitate evaluation of students' written products, and your observations and conferences will provide information about how well students are using the strategies. You can differentiate instruction for small groups in two basic ways. First, you can model parts of the writing strategy for groups that need more practice with the basic strategy and genre elements. Second, you can provide additional mini-lessons for groups that are ready to expand their understanding of good writing in the genre. For example, in the instructional chapter on story writing, you could develop a mini-lesson on figurative language. In developing mini-lessons, consider introducing the lesson using a read-aloud that illustrates the feature or technique you will teach (e.g., a storybook with rich, figurative language). Also, plan to show students good and weak examples of papers using the feature, model how you would incorporate the feature by making changes, and give students opportunities to practice.

## Advice on General Principles for Using the Lessons

### Explicitness

The lessons are explicit and detailed in order to to support your teaching, not to inhibit your creativity or suppress your personality. The more you use your own ideas and writing for modeling, rather than examples from the lesson, the better. You should make the lessons your own, while also following all components within each lesson. You could write your own brief plan before teaching a lesson to assure that you address all sections.

## Time

You should make a plan to teach writing every day. For students to become successful writers, they need daily practice. Some of the lessons may take more than one class session. We advise you to consider ahead of time where to divide a lesson. For example, when modeling, it is important to complete the full planning stage so students can see how you transfer ideas to a GO. However, you might save the drafting process for the next day. We encourage you to divide lessons thoughtfully according to your own schedule. It is equally important to provide time for writing instruction and also adequate time for students' writing practice.

## Authentic Writing Purposes

In each chapter, we provide sample writing prompts, but you will probably want to develop additional ones. You can also be creative in the presentation of the topics and make the tasks authentic for your students in order to motivate them. In one of our professional development sessions, a teacher collaboratively wrote with students a letter to the principal asking for more recess time. The reasons were not convincing to the principal, who declined their request. It was difficult for students to understand why their reasons were not convincing because they did not understand the principal's perspective. The principal visited the classroom and explained which reasons were not convincing and clear, and why he, as the reader, rejected the request. The students were disappointed but also motivated to convince him! They worked with their teacher on a different letter requesting that Friday be designated a "dress-down" day when uniforms would not be required. This time, students carefully examined their reasons, and they even asked other students if they would be convinced after reading the specific reasons and evidence. They were truly motivated because the task was authentic. And, yes, their request convinced the principal (even if it was only for a month)!

## The Teacher as a Writer

It is important for students to see you as a writer and not only as their evaluator. They will value far more the materials and strategies you are teaching if they see you using them. Your participation can help strengthen the sense of community in your classroom.

## ORGANIZATION OF THE INSTRUCTIONAL CHAPTERS

This book includes three instructional chapters that address three writing purposes: to narrate, to persuade, and to inform (CCSSI, 2010). Students are taught how to write stories, opinion papers, and compare–contrast essays. Each chapter consists of eight writing lessons, materials for each lesson, completed activities for your reference, and extension activities for teaching related subgenres.

- All instructional chapters follow the same sequence of instruction and are based on the strategy for teaching strategies.
- All instructional chapters begin with an introduction about the genre and about the CCSS for grades 3–5, followed by an outline of the eight writing lessons.
- Each of the writing lessons begins with a short description of the lesson, a list of objectives, assessment information, notes providing suggestions or advice, and a list of materials needed for the lesson.
- Following the eight lessons, we include sections on Publishing Guidelines and Guidelines for Continuous Guided Practice to Mastery, along with additional mini-lessons and extension activities for teaching subgenres. Finally, we present a sample think-aloud appropriate to the genre.
- All reproducible materials (forms and handouts) for the lessons are found at the end of each chapter.

## CLOSING THOUGHTS

My students loved this, they loved writing stories, they loved writing their opinions, and it was fun to see what they said about their growth in their journals. The fact that they were actually engaged in the whole writing process, they were able to work together in groups and, you know, be writers and not depend on me was great. The lessons were enjoyable for them. They were enjoyable for me!

—Mrs. Stems, a fourth-grade teacher

Writing is challenging but also rewarding. We are certain that you and your students will find the lessons helpful and engaging. As you teach the three instructional units, you will have a lot of reasons to celebrate writing success with your community of writers! Let's begin!