

Equipped for the Future Convey Ideas in Writing Performance Continuum

PERFORMANCE LEVEL 1

Convey Ideas in Writing

How adults at Level 1 Convey Ideas in Writing:

- Determine the purpose for communicating.
- Organize and present information to serve the purpose.
- Pay attention to conventions of English language usage, including grammar, spelling, and sentence structure, to minimize barriers to reader's comprehension.
- Seek feedback and revise to enhance the effectiveness of the communication.

Level 1 Indicators

Use Key Knowledge, Skills, and Strategies

Adults performing at Level 1 can:

- Determine the purpose and audience for communicating in writing;
- Follow a highly structured, externally developed plan (or text model) to organize information about self and/or related to immediate needs in very simple structures such as lists or responses to prompts for everyday information;
- Write all letters of the alphabet and numbers and appropriately use simple, everyday, highly familiar words (personal names, signatures, addresses), numbers (dates, phone #s, addresses, prices, etc) and simple phrases to convey information with minimal attention to audience;
- Make a few simple content changes based on review and feedback from others and make a few simple edits of handwriting, spelling, punctuation and capitalization.

Show Fluency, Independence, and Ability to Perform in a Range of Settings

Adults performing at Level 1 can write individual words, simple phrases and a few very simple sentences slowly and with some effort and some errors. They can independently accomplish simple, well defined, and highly structured writing activities in a few comfortable and familiar settings.

Level 1 Examples of Proficient Performance

Adults performing at Level 1 can Convey Ideas in Writing to accomplish a variety of goals, such as:

- Writing a simple grocery list to guide decisions about what to buy
- Writing personal names and addresses in order to make an invitation list
- Writing product names and quantities to fill a purchase order
- Writing responses to personal information prompts in order to accurately fill out simplified applications, registration forms, work orders, etc.
- Writing a very brief and simple lost/found or "for sale" notice

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PERFORMANCE LEVEL 2

Convey Ideas in Writing

How adults at Level 2 Convey Ideas in Writing:

- Determine the purpose for communicating.
- Organize and present information to serve the purpose.
- Pay attention to conventions of English language usage, including grammar, spelling, and sentence structure, to minimize barriers to reader’s comprehension.
- Seek feedback and revise to enhance the effectiveness of the communication.

Level 2 Indicators

Use Key Knowledge, Skills, and Strategies

Adults performing at Level 2 can:

- Determine the purpose and audience for communicating in writing;
- Follow a highly structured, externally developed plan to organize ideas around a single familiar topic and produce a short but legible and comprehensible draft;
- Appropriately use mostly everyday, familiar vocabulary (such as words with personal significance and commonly-used adjectives, pronouns and prepositions) and simple sentence structures (such as simple and compound sentences and questions) in short paragraph form, lists, and responses to prompts with minimal use of detail or attention to audience;
- Make simple edits of grammar (simple present and future tenses, subject/verb agreement), beginning-sentence capitalization, spelling and punctuation (end periods, some commas).

Show Fluency, Independence, and Ability to Perform in a Range of Settings

Adults performing at Level 2 can write simple and a few compound sentences, sometimes in short paragraphs with some effort but with few errors to independently accomplish simple, well defined, and structured writing activities in a few comfortable and familiar settings.

Level 2 Examples of Proficient Performance

Adults performing at Level 2 can Convey Ideas in Writing to accomplish a variety of goals, such as:

- Writing a brief excuse letter for an absence from school
- Writing a short narrative about a community concern in order to identify and think about one’s own community issues
- Writing messages in simple greeting cards for friends
- Writing simple summaries of job benefits to share with a co-worker
- Writing a simple “While You Were Out” message in response to a phone call for a co-worker

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PERFORMANCE LEVEL 3

Convey Ideas in Writing

How adults at Level 3 Convey Ideas in Writing:

- Determine the purpose for communicating.
- Organize and present information to serve the purpose.
- Pay attention to conventions of English language usage, including grammar, spelling, and sentence structure, to minimize barriers to reader's comprehension.
- Seek feedback and revise to enhance the effectiveness of the communication.

Level 3 Indicators

Use Key Knowledge, Skills, and Strategies

Adults performing at Level 3 can:

- Determine the purpose and audience for communicating in writing;
- Use simple planning strategies to identify and organize a limited number of ideas to support a single purpose (to convey personal experience, meet a specific need, or respond to recent learning), and produce a legible and comprehensible draft;
- Appropriately use mostly familiar vocabulary (based on personal experience and learning) and basic text structure of simple steps/instructions/commands or a few short, well-linked paragraphs to convey ideas with several supporting details/examples reflecting some attention to audience;
- Use simple revision strategies to monitor effectiveness by re-reading and revising during the writing process and making revisions to a first and final draft based on review and feedback from others. Demonstrate beginning attention to clarity, descriptiveness, personal voice, and appropriateness of text for the intended audience;
- Make several simple edits of grammar (such as simple tense agreement), spelling, and punctuation (such as periods, capital letters, and some commas), sentence structure (such as compound and some complex sentences), language usage, and text structure using tools such as spelling word lists and simple editing checklists.

Show Fluency, Independence, and Ability to Perform in a Range of Settings

Adults performing at Level 3 can write simple narrative, informative, or expressive texts of a few short paragraphs and steps/instructions/commands with some effort but with few errors. They can independently accomplish well-defined and structured writing activities for varied audiences (self, family, workplace, teacher) in a range of comfortable and familiar settings.

Level 3 Examples of Proficient Performance

Adults performing at Level 3 can Convey Ideas in Writing to accomplish a variety of goals, such as:

- Writing a brief conversational letter to a friend
- Writing an easy-to-read information booklet for young children
- Writing simple step-by-step instructions for everyday activities
- Write a simple poem for a grandchild
- Writing simple directions to a house for a party
- Writing about a personal work experience to prepare for resume development
- Writing an entry in the "Problem Book" at work to alert your supervisor to a safety issue

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PERFORMANCE LEVEL 4

Convey Ideas in Writing

How adults at Level 4 Convey Ideas in Writing:

- Determine the purpose for communicating.
- Organize and present information to serve the purpose.
- Pay attention to conventions of English language usage, including grammar, spelling, and sentence structure, to minimize barriers to reader's comprehension.
- Seek feedback and revise to enhance the effectiveness of the communication.

Level 4 Indicators

Use Key Knowledge, Skills, and Strategies

Adults performing at Level 4 can:

- Determine the purpose and audience for communicating in writing;
- Use multiple planning and pre-writing strategies to identify and organize a limited number of ideas to support a single purpose (such as writing to inform, to get things done, to express feelings and ideas or to persuade others) and produce a legible and comprehensible draft;
- Appropriately use both everyday and specialized vocabulary and a limited variety of simple and complex sentence structures in multiple coherent steps or a few well-constructed and linked paragraphs to convey ideas, with several supporting facts/details/examples reflecting judgment regarding appropriate language and level of formality for the intended audience.
- Use several simple revision strategies to monitor one's own writing, make revisions based on review and feedback from others, and produce rough and final drafts. Demonstrate some attention to clarity, descriptiveness, personal voice and appropriateness of text for the intended audience;
- Make many edits of grammar (verb tense forms), spelling, sentence structure simple/compound/complex with appropriate capitalization and punctuation), language usage and text structure often with the help of tools such as simplified dictionaries, grammar checklists, and graphic organizers.

Show Fluency, Independence, and Ability to Perform in a Range of Settings

Adults performing at Level 4 can write coherent steps or a few well-constructed paragraphs easily and with few errors to independently accomplish well defined and structured writing activities for varied purposes (such for personal expression, to inform, to persuade or to complete a task) and audiences in a range of comfortable and familiar settings.

Level 4 Examples of Proficient Performance

Adults performing at Level 4 can Convey Ideas in Writing to accomplish a variety of goals, such as:

- Writing a brief letter to the editor, to clarify one's own opinion on a subject
- Writing a letter of appreciation or congratulations to a friend or relative
- Writing comprehensive directions for a favorite recipe
- Writing a response to a newspaper advice column to stimulate thinking about personal issues
- Writing a brief story about a personal event for the company
- Writing a short incident/accident report at work
- Writing an agenda for an upcoming 3-hour meeting

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PERFORMANCE LEVEL 5

Convey Ideas in Writing

How adults at Level 5 Convey Ideas in Writing:

- Determine the purpose for communicating.
- Organize and present information to serve the purpose.
- Pay attention to conventions of English language usage, including grammar, spelling, and sentence structure, to minimize barriers to reader's comprehension.
- Seek feedback and revise to enhance the effectiveness of the communication.

Level 5 Indicators

Use Key Knowledge, Skills, and Strategies

Adults performing at Level 5 can:

- Determine the purpose and audience for communicating in writing;
- Select from and use a good store of tools and strategies for overall planning and organization; outline, restate, summarize and categorize ideas and produce a legible and comprehensible draft;
- Appropriately use both everyday and specialized vocabulary including abstract nouns and idioms, and a variety of sentence structures, in medium-length, coherently-linked, and detailed text with appropriate tone, language, and level of formality and in modes of organization suitable for a variety of audiences;
- Use a variety of strategies to analyze and make simple revisions (such as for clarity, organization, and descriptiveness) and to solve a few more global problems posed by the writing text (such as changes in voice or tone to take into account the needs of the audience or re-sequencing of larger pieces of text based on feedback from others);
- Undertake multiple re-readings of text in order to edit for grammar, spelling, sentence structure, language usage, and text structure and use appropriate tools such as dictionaries and grammar guides.

Show Fluency, Independence, and Ability to Perform in a Range of Settings

Adults performing at Level 5 can write a variety of texts that include more complex sentence structures and multiple paragraphs easily and with few errors for a wide variety of purposes (such as different kinds of expressive, persuasive and informative purposes). They can independently accomplish structured and fairly complex writing in a variety of familiar and some novel settings.

Level 5 Examples of Proficient Performance

Adults performing at Level 5 can Convey Ideas in Writing to accomplish a variety of goals, such as:

- Writing a resume and accompanying cover letter in preparation for seeking employment
- Writing a letter of appreciation to a guest speaker
- Writing a summary of information about the pros and cons of joining a labor unions to help someone make a decision about joining
- Writing a detailed narrative accident/incident report for work
- Writing a memo to employees about a guest speaker presentation on safety in the workplace
- Writing a proposal/plan for a community group trip
- Writing a short story for a child depicting what life was like when you were growing up

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PERFORMANCE LEVEL 6

Convey Ideas in Writing

How adults at Level 6 Convey Ideas in Writing:

- Determine the purpose for communicating.
- Organize and present information to serve the purpose.
- Pay attention to conventions of English language usage, including grammar, spelling, and sentence structure, to minimize barriers to reader's comprehension.
- Seek feedback and revise to enhance the effectiveness of the communication.

Level 6 Indicators

Use Key Knowledge, Skills, and Strategies

Adults performing at Level 6 can:

- Determine the purpose and audience for communicating in writing;
- Select from and use a wide range of tools and strategies for overall planning and organization; reproduce, synthesize and draw sound conclusions from complex or extensive ideas; and produce a legible and comprehensible draft;
- Appropriately use extensive everyday and specialized vocabulary (including idiom, colloquialisms and cultural references as appropriate) and a variety of sentence structures (including those reflecting logical relations), in medium-length, well-sequenced, and detailed text with appropriate voice, tone, rhetorical forms, and style and in modes of organization suitable for a variety of audiences;
- Choose from a variety of strategies to make multiple simple and global revisions during the writing process. Effectively seek out, describe, and work through more global problems posed by the writing task (such as the need to re-sequence text for clarity, to add more details to make a logical argument, or to change the tone or style to accommodate the audience);
- Undertake multiple re-readings of text in order to make comprehensive edits for grammar, spelling, sentence structure, language usage, and text structure. Use appropriate editing tools as necessary.

Show Fluency, Independence, and Ability to Perform in a Range of Settings

Adults performing at Level 6 can write a variety of sentences in medium-length, detailed text and in a variety of rhetorical forms, easily and with few errors, to independently accomplish structured or unstructured complex writing activities in a variety of familiar and novel settings.

Level 6 Examples of Proficient Performance

Adults performing at Level 6 can Convey Ideas in Writing to accomplish a variety of goals, such as:

- Writing newspaper editorials that synthesize opposite stands on the same issue and develop a novel personal position on the issue
- Writing a reflective essay on personal history and experience in preparation for a presentation
- Writing an essay to self-evaluate learning
- Writing basic fire emergency and evacuation instructions for employees
- Writing a detailed incident report at work which includes cause and effect analysis
- Writing an informational brochure about your community organization

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- Writing information from a structured oral interview on a special form
- Writing a formal letter to request changes in work conditions, procedures, etc.

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Mapping of EFF Levels to NRS Educational Functioning Levels

The table below shows the results of our mapping of performance levels for the EFF Content Standard Convey Ideas in Writing to the NRS Educational Functioning Levels:

EFF Convey Ideas in Writing Performance Levels	<i>Can be used to define an exit point for the NRS ABE Educational Functioning Level . . .</i>	<i>Can be used to define an exit point for the NRS ESL Educational Functioning Level . . .</i>
Convey Ideas in Writing Performance Level 1	Beginning ABE Literacy	Beginning ESL
Convey Ideas in Writing Performance Level 2	Beginning Basic Education	Low Intermediate ESL
Convey Ideas in Writing Performance Level 3	Low Intermediate Basic Education	High Intermediate ESL
Convey Ideas in Writing Performance Level 4	High Intermediate Basic Education	Low Advanced ESL
Convey Ideas in Writing Performance Level 5	Low Adult Secondary Education	High Advanced ESL
Convey Ideas in Writing Performance Level 6	High Adult Secondary Education	

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How to read the EFF Convey Ideas in Writing Performance Continuum

The EFF Performance Continuum for Convey Ideas in Writing is a developmental description of performance on the Convey Ideas in Writing Standard. The continuum portrays development along four dimensions: the structure and depth of knowledge, and the fluency, independence and range of performance. The six EFF Levels described here are points along the continuum that serve as benchmarks for key stages in development and increasing ability to accomplish important activities in daily life that require adults to Convey Ideas in Writing.

The six levels of performance described in this document cover only a portion of the performance levels possible for Convey Ideas in Writing. There are aspects of writing development and performance that fall below the performance described in Level 1 and there are many levels of proficiency leading toward higher levels of expertise beyond the knowledge, skills, strategies, and performance descriptions at Level 6 on the Convey Ideas in Writing Performance Continuum.

The descriptions of performance at each level of the Convey Ideas in Writing Performance Continuum are anchored in analysis of data on adult learner performance. They were developed by analyzing data on use of the Convey Ideas in Writing Standard by adult learners in ABE programs (including adult literacy, adult English Speakers of Other Languages, family literacy, and adult secondary education). This empirical evidence of performance on the Convey Ideas in Writing Standard went through extensive analysis by research staff and was reviewed and amended by a panel of content experts. At each step in this process, cognitive science and writing theory and research were used to guide and refine the definition of performance criteria. The number of levels defined for the EFF Performance Continuum for Convey Ideas in Writing (six) was determined through analysis and review of data. Each level describes a qualitatively distinct stage in the development of proficiency on the standard. Each level builds on the previous levels. Thus, an adult who is able to perform at Level 3 also has mastered the performance on the standard described at Levels 1 and 2.

Each performance level on the Convey Ideas in Writing Performance Continuum is described on a single page in this document. Each page is divided into four sections:

Section 1 is the definition of the Standard. The performance-level description starts with the components of performance of the standard. These components define the content standard and they remain the same at each level of performance. This repetition serves as a reminder that the integrated skill process defined by the components of performance for each standard is constant across all levels, from novice to expert levels of performance. What changes from level to level is the growth and complexity of the underlying knowledge base and the resulting increases in fluency and independence in using the standard to accomplish an increasing range and variety of tasks.

This definition of the standard is a useful tool for communicating to adults and their teachers the essential features of the construct, or set of targeted abilities, for each standard. By making it

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clear how the skill process is defined (or “unmasking the construct,” as described by Gitomer & Bennett, 2002), adult learners are better able to articulate their own learning goals for improving proficiency and teachers are better able to focus learning and instructional activities that build toward the goal of increasing ability to use the standard to accomplish everyday activities. Here is how the standard is defined for all performance levels of Convey Ideas in Writing:

- Determine the purpose for communicating.
- Organize and present information to serve the purpose.
- Pay attention to conventions of English language usage, including grammar, spelling, and sentence structure, to minimize barriers to reader’s comprehension.
- Seek feedback and revise to enhance the effectiveness of the communication.

Section 2 is a list of key knowledge, skills and strategies that can be observed in proficient performance at that level. These are the primary indicators (or benchmarks) of the growth and organization of the knowledge base needed for proficient performance on the standard at each level. This list is thus of central importance for designing assessments to measure performance on the standard. Because the performance levels are designed primarily as guides for assessment and not as a curriculum framework, the list does not specify details of knowledge, skills, and strategies that might be studied and taught. Nonetheless, the list can serve as a way of identifying instructional objectives for each level and provides a guide for developing criteria for placement of learners in instructional levels.

Because this list of key knowledge, skills, and strategies focuses only on those features of performance that indicate qualitative changes in what a learner knows and can do, it can be used by curriculum developers and instructors to set instructional objectives for each level and to develop more detailed curricula or learning plans that will prepare learners to develop these abilities, meet the criteria, and move on to the next level in their development of expertise.

Section 3 defines the fluency, independence and ability to perform in a range of settings expected for proficient performance on the standard at each level. Together with the descriptions of key knowledge, skills, and strategies, these descriptions serve as the primary behavioral indicators (benchmarks) of proficient performance at each level. As such, section 3 descriptions also provide a basis for designing learning, instruction and assessment that is appropriate to that level.

Section 4 of the performance level descriptions provides a short list of examples of the writing purpose (writing activities) that can be accomplished by an adult who is performing at each level. Like Sections 2 and 3, the descriptions of writing activities in Section 4 are specific to each performance level. These examples of things that adults can accomplish in the real world at each level of performance are useful to adult learners and to their teachers as ways of making concrete the purpose and need for attaining increasing proficiency in writing. By making it clear what can be accomplished at each level, the descriptions of writing activities in Section 3 also provide motivation for higher levels of learning. The listing of real-world accomplishments also provides guidance for selecting and designing the content for instructional materials and assessments.

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Notes on the Research Base for the Convey Ideas in Writing Performance Continuum and Performance Levels

Writing is sometimes referred to as the “neglected ‘R’” because the emphasis on developing reading and math skills has often caused writing instruction to be overlooked. Yet, the National Commission on Writing in America’s Schools and Colleges has observed “writing today is not a frill for the few, but an essential skill for the many” (National College Board, April 2003). They point out the importance of preparing students in writing for success in the workplace, for retention in postsecondary education, and for full access to the benefits of information technology. Teaching writing helps learners develop awareness of audience and of effective communicative style and technique. Writing is a thinking process and as such it is a vital tool in helping learners in developing skills such as reading, math, speaking and listening. Although there is little research on the teaching of writing to adult basic education learners, there is a strong and solid research base for the teaching of writing in general, including the teaching of writing to adult remedial postsecondary students, a population not entirely unlike adult basic education learners. There is also a growing body of research on the teaching of writing to ESL learners. We offer this review of the research basis for the EFF standard Convey Ideas in Writing with the recommendation that serious consideration be given to including writing as one of the key standards for adult learning supported by the U.S. Department of Education.

Teachers of adult basic education often have not had access to training that might allow them to understand the differences between the teaching of writing skills (often referred to as language arts) alone and the teaching of writing as a cognitive problem solving and meaning making process that includes the teaching of skills within a broader framework. The Convey Ideas in Writing standard describes a developmental pathway that includes key aspects of the writing process shown by research to be important, including three cognitive writing processes: planning (deciding what to say and how to say it), text generation (turning plans into written text), and revision (improving existing text) (Hayes, 1996).

Each level of the standard describes key developmental benchmarks related to knowledge of the writing process and the development of writing skills and strategies. As adults move from being novice writers along the continuum toward becoming expert writers, their increasing capabilities enable them to interact with increasingly complex genres of writing to accomplish increasingly demanding writing activities (in an increasingly wide range of contexts). The descriptions of

- Key Knowledge, Skills, and Strategies;
- Fluency, Independence, and Ability to Perform in a Range of Settings; and
- Variety of Writing Purposes

that can be accomplished at each of the six performance levels on the Convey Ideas in Writing continuum are guides for learning and instruction for adults who are striving to improve their proficiency in writing.

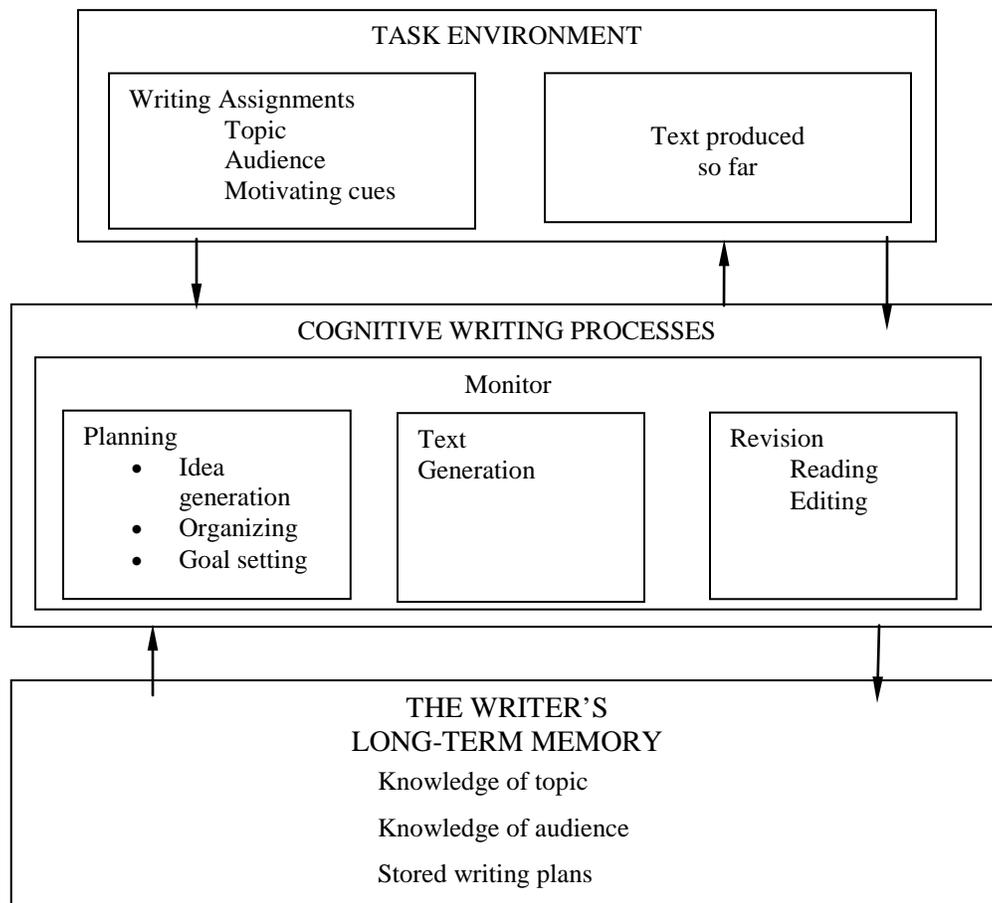
As with the other standards, the core definition of the standard applies to each level of the continuum. At each level, the skill process that is being described is one that begins with determining the writing purpose and ends with seeking feedback and revising to enhance the effectiveness of the communication. New skills and knowledge and higher levels of ability to

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apply planning and revision strategies are added as students move along the continuum and become more fluent and independent writers. These core elements of the EFF Performance Continuum — developmental descriptions of the capabilities of writers interacting with increasingly complex texts to accomplish increasingly demanding writing activities — align very well with evidence-based definitions of writing.

Support for the Continuum and Performance Levels in Research on the Writing Process

Compared to reading research, research on how people develop as writers is still in its infancy. Until as late as thirty years ago, many researchers and educators assumed that there was essentially one process of writing that served all writers for all their various purposes. Writers decided on what to write in advance and primarily worked alone. The attention of most research and education was directed toward how to evaluate the final products of writing. Starting in the 1970's, however, research on the cognitive process of writing and later on the sociocultural dimensions of writing has begun to create a foundation of research-based understanding of how individuals develop as writers (Indrisano & Squire, 2000). In 1980, Flower and Hayes first proposed a “working model” of the writing process based on a synthesis of the findings from existing empirical studies of composing practices.



The 1980 Hayes-Flower Model

“The Hayes-Flower Model (1980) Redrawn for Clarification,” in Hayes, 1996, p.3.

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As shown in the writing process model above, Flower and Hayes (1980) suggest three cognitive writing processes: planning (deciding what to say and how to say it), text generation (turning plans into written text), and revision (improving existing text). The flow of the skill process depicted in this model parallels the description of the integrated skill process defined in the components of performance of the EFF Standard Convey Ideas in Writing:

Determine the purpose for communicating.

Organize and present information to serve the purpose, context, and audience.

Pay attention to conventions of English language usage, including grammar, spelling, and sentence structure, to minimize barriers to reader's comprehension.

Seek feedback and revise to enhance the effectiveness of the communication.

Like the EFF Standard, the Hayes-Flower writing process model starts with definition of the writing purpose (with the "Writing Assignments" defined in terms of topic, audience, and motivating cues (reason for the communication) and continues through an iterative cycle of organizing and presenting information (planning and text generation in the Hayes-Flower model), drawing on prior knowledge of language structure and use (long-term memory in the Hayes-Flower model) and revision to enhance the effectiveness of the communication.

A key premise of the Hayes-Flower model is that writing is hierarchically organized and that it is, above all, a goal-directed, problem-solving process (Flower & Hayes, 1980). Whenever a person writes, he or she poses a problem to be solved on multiple levels. To solve the problem, the writer must set up sub-goals and solve sub-problems. For example, a woman writing a letter to her child's school must determine her goal for writing the letter and her sub-goals for making sure she has covered all the issues she wants to address. She also has to solve sub-problems related to how to form the letters on the page and how to spell unfamiliar words. She may do a little planning, begin to write, stop and plan a bit more, interrupt her planning to consult a dictionary, spend some time worrying about her handwriting, pause to talk to a friend about her child's problem, re-read and revise what she has written, and so forth. As writers gain experience, many of the lower-level processes (such as forming letters and spelling) become automatic and unconscious. Other processes require planning and skill no matter how experienced the writer is (Flower and Hayes, 1980; Dyson & Freedman, 1991 as cited in Gillespie, 2001)

As the writing process model developed by Hayes and Flower has evolved, it has become considerably more complex. More recent research has shown that the planning, text generation, and revision processes identified in the Hayes-Flower model (and reflected in the Convey Ideas in Writing components of performance) do not occur in any fixed order but proceed in an organized way that is largely determined by the individual writer's goals (Dyson & Freedman, 1991). At one moment writers can be observed to be writing, moving their ideas and their discourse forward; at the next they can be seen to be backtracking, re-reading, and digesting what has been written. Dyson and Freedman's description of these processes as recursive, with sub-processes such as planning and editing often interrupting each other, represented an important shift in the understanding of the writing process. Also, new detailed research on memory has led Hayes to extend and expand the role of working memory in his most recent

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revision of the writing process model (1996). We now understand that our short-term memory storage capacity is limited (Torrance & Jeffery, 1999) and, as result, any cognitive process that is not automated must be retrieved from our long-term memory by our working memory before it can be used to solve problems or make decisions.

An adaptation of the Hayes-Flower model of composing has made its way into the classroom as the “writing process approach.” This writing process approach, teaching writing as a thinking and problem-solving process, is easily aligned with the integrated skill process defined by the EFF Standard Convey Ideas in Writing.

Support for the Continuum and Performance Levels in Research Contrasting Novice and Expert Writers

During the 1980’s, researcher added to our understanding of the writing process through research on the differences between novice and expert writers. Bereiter and Scardamalia (1987), for example, found through their research that less skilled writers produce much less elaborate and more abstract sets of prewriting notes. Novice writers concern themselves with generating content during composing and spend much less time considering goals, plans, and problems posed by the writing. Bereiter and Scardamalia (1987) found that less-experienced writers, when beginning to compose texts, needed to keep the task relatively uncomplicated in order to direct their working memory to the basic task of converting oral language experiences into written form. Until these lower-level processes of putting text on the page become automatic, writers are less able to focus on the kinds of higher-level processes needed for making global revisions. For beginners, the primary goal is to tell someone what they have retrieved and to translate this into letters, words, and sentences. These strategies work especially well, for example, when recounting a personal story where coherence can easily be created by following a basic chronology.

Processes for planning, generating language at the sentence and text levels, and reviewing and revising written text are considered higher-level processes (Berninger & Swanson, 1994). For beginners, “the goal is to automatize the lower-level processes so that working memory resources are freed for the higher-level constructive aspects of composing” (Berninger et al., 1998, p. 652). Increasingly, researchers are seeking to better understand how these lower-level processes can best be acquired *within the context of* composing.

As writers become more expert, more of their attention is directed to problem analysis and goal setting. The resulting goals, and the problems anticipated, lead to plans for how to resolve them, whether they are problems of content or problems concerning the best way to organize the narrative in light of previously presented information and the audience to be addressed (rhetorical problems). As one problem is solved, others are created, and in this way new content is generated or new ideas about how to organize the ideas are developed. As solutions to problems are formed, they feed into the knowledge-telling component of the process and are written down. Bereiter and Scardamalia (1987) argued that the writer’s effort to resolve content and rhetorical problems by moving between these “problem spaces” invokes a dialectical process that allows for more reflection.

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Of particular interest to adult literacy educators has been a body of research that began to focus on remedial writing at the postsecondary level. In *Errors and Expectations* (1977), Mina Shaughnessy detected predictable patterns in the kinds of the errors made by “basic writing” students. She showed that under-prepared students write the way they do “not because they are slow or non-verbal, indifferent to or incapable of academic excellence, but because they are beginners and must, like all beginners, learn by making mistakes” (1977, p. 3).

Sondra Perl (1979) found that adult remedial students she studied might begin to follow a train of thought as they wrote but then lost it when they had to interrupt their thoughts to attend to more mechanical concerns, such as letter formation, punctuation, and spelling. Mike Rose (1980) investigated more closely the experiences of basic writers with writer’s block. He found that writers were blocked because they followed a set of rigid rules, applying them to situations where they did not apply. Nancy Sommers (1980) found that basic writers typically solved problems simply by rewriting, without analyzing the problems with their text. Flower (1979) found that while writing, expert writers thought about their reader more than did novice writers. This helped them to plan their essays and generate text. Beginning writers, on the other hand, wrote what she called “writer-based prose.” They did not think about their reader while writing but were concerned primarily with the text. Taken together, these studies showed that to move from the status of a basic to a more expert writer, students had to learn to revise what they wrote, to consider the reader in their planning, and to attend to more global problems, such as re-sequencing and rewriting units of text.

Reflections of Writing Research in Convey Ideas in Writing Key Knowledge, Skills, and Strategies

The findings of the research summarized above are reflected in the “Key Knowledge, Skills, and Strategies” sections of the Convey Ideas in Writing Standard. In Level 1, for example, students are provided with considerable scaffolding to help them with the planning process. They are expected to convey information with only minimal attention to the audience since it is understood that their “working memory” will be devoted to text production. The requirements for revision and editing are minimal and focus primarily on text level features.

Excerpt from Convey Ideas in Writing Performance Continuum—Level 1

- Follow a highly structured, externally developed plan (or text model) to organize information about self and/or related to immediate needs in very simple structures such as lists or responses to prompts for everyday information;
- Write all letters of the alphabet and numbers and appropriately use simple, everyday, highly familiar words (personal names, signatures, addresses), numbers (dates, phone #s, addresses, prices, etc) and simple phrases to convey information with minimal attention to audience;
- Make a few simple content changes based on review and feedback from others and make a few simple edits of handwriting, spelling, punctuation and capitalization.

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By Level 3 students can be expected to have learned how to use simple planning processes and to have begun to develop their rereading and revision skills.

Excerpt from Convey Ideas in Writing Performance Continuum—Level 3

- Use simple planning strategies to identify and organize a limited number of ideas to support a single purpose (to convey personal experience, meet a specific need or respond to recent learning), and produce a legible and comprehensible draft
- Appropriately use mostly familiar vocabulary based on personal experience and learning, and basic text structure of simple steps/instructions/commands or a few short, well- linked paragraphs to convey ideas, with several supporting details/examples reflecting some attention to audience
- Use simple revision strategies to monitor effectiveness by rereading and revising during the writing process and making revisions to a first and final draft based on review and feedback from others. Demonstrate beginning attention to clarity, descriptiveness, personal voice and appropriateness of text for the intended audience.
- Make several simple edits of grammar (such as simple tense agreement), spelling and punctuation (such as periods, capital letters, and some commas), sentence structure (such as compound and some complex sentences), language usage and text structure using tool with support, including the use of tools such as spelling word lists and simple editing checklists.

At Level 6, we can expect that more of students' working memory resources are available for the higher-level constructive aspects of composing, including planning, revision and more complex features of editing. More of their attention can be directed to problem solving and goal setting, allowing them to synthesize ideas and solve problems related to drawing sound conclusions based on more complex ideas and information. They have begun to know when and under what conditions to use various strategies for revision and to reread their work several times as they solve layers of problems related to how to organize the information. Although students at this level would not be considered fully expert they can be expected to be more able to use all three cognitive processes of writing: planning, text production and revision.

Excerpt from Convey Ideas in Writing Performance Continuum—Level 6

- Select from and use a wide range of tools and strategies for overall planning and organization; reproduce, synthesize and draw sound conclusions from complex or extensive ideas; and produce a legible and comprehensible draft
- Appropriately use extensive everyday and specialized vocabulary (including idiom, colloquialisms and cultural references as appropriate) and a variety of sentence structures (including those reflecting logical relations), in medium-length, well-sequenced and detailed text, in modes of organization and with appropriate voice, tone, rhetorical forms and style suitable for a variety of audiences

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- Choose from a variety of strategies to make multiple simple and global revisions during the writing process. Effectively seek out, describe and work through more global problems posed by the writing task (such as the need to re-sequence text for clarity, to add more details to make a logical argument, or to change the tone or style to accommodate the audience).
- Undertake multiple re-readings of text in order to make comprehensive edits for grammar, spelling, sentence structure, language usage, and text structure. Use appropriate editing tools as necessary.

Reflections of Writing Research in Convey Ideas in Writing Descriptions of Fluency, Independence and Ability to Perform in a Range of Settings

As students move from novice to expert levels of performance on the standard, their ease in writing increases and the level of effort required for text production aspects of writing decreases. Students move from working independently only with highly structured writing activities to being able to independently accomplish a variety of less structured and more complex writing activities, and the range of rhetorical forms they are able to use increases.

Excerpt from Convey Ideas in Writing Performance Continuum—Levels 1, 3 and 6

Adults performing at Level 1 can write individual words, simple phrases and a few very simple sentences slowly and with some effort and some errors. They can independently accomplish simple, well-defined and highly structured writing activities in a few comfortable and familiar settings.

Adults performing at Level 3 can write simple narrative, informative or expressive texts of a few short paragraphs and steps/instructions/commands with some effort but with few errors. They can independently accomplish well-defined and structured writing activities for varied audiences (self, family, workplace, teacher) in a range of comfortable and familiar settings.

Adults performing at Level 6 can write a variety of sentences in medium-length, detailed text and in a variety of rhetorical forms, easily and with few errors, to independently accomplish structured or unstructured complex writing activities in a variety of familiar and novel settings.

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