Making Room for Writing
A Blue-Sky Paper on Building School Writing Cultures

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It is a tall order to coordinate the moving parts of a quality English Language Arts (ELA) program. What are the most effective and engaging ways for students to master writing? When students write, and edit a piece of work, they are reading for a purpose – to improve the text. When we read, write, speak, and listen to anything, we can improve our literacy skills with a solid understanding of words, poetry, literary terms, sentences, parts of speech, and prose. Yes, a tall order, but not insurmountable. How can we design ELA curriculum to make room for writing so young people feel confident as mindful writers?

Many of the ideas shared about the teaching and learning of written text mirror and reinforce current research, however, several distinct initiatives are introduced that deviate beyond conventionally-accepted practices. When viewed through the lens of generating school-wide approaches to building a culture of writers, I anticipate this text will generate further discussion that can lead to better ways of helping students enrich their 'writing lives'. From a curriculum design view, imagine if students could work at their own pace and master writing expectations in progressive, reinforcing and rigorous ways. Think about this natural flow for learning how to read, write, speak, listen and recognize symbols and patterns in the following continuum of ELA learning targets:

- Letters
- Words
- Parts of Speech
- Poetry
- Symbols and Pattern Recognition (reading images/media)
- Sentences
- Paragraph
- Multiple Paragraphs
- Stories/Articles
- Novels
- Plays (text/screen)

Such a linear view does not mean that letters, words, and sentences cannot be explored within the contexts of more formal fictional prose, or informational texts. What is key to the development of the learning context is that teacher learn how to blend the curriculum of the child with a host of other literary rich contexts. The research on authentic learning is ripe with evidence that cautions for instance, the isolated use of spellers and dis-connected grammar workbooks. According to Graves (1983): "skills are very important, provided they are not studied in isolation of what information the child knows" (p. 195). By establishing progressive

"If we teach today as we taught yesterday, we rob our children of tomorrow." ~ John Dewey

targets for each student to master – within the context of meaningful work, it is possible to help more students achieve mastery of foundational ELA understandings and skills.

To increase the critical mass of literate learners, it's important to determine where students get bogged down in writing. What makes some students step away from the discipline or move to a position of simply tolerating it? In the early years, there tends to be a rush to writing sentences without an opportunity for young learners to make connections between letters and words, and words and individual sentences. In later years, it seems like the sheer volume of reading and inauthentic tasks associated with such readings act as deterrents. Rather than digging deep into a text, the need to read every classic seems to overfill the curriculum map, and as such, too many students simply go through the motions of doing ELA, rather than becoming inspired literate citizens. There is no need to teach fables every year, or for that matter, Shakespeare or adjectives, or advertising. If there is time for students to delve into these critical areas without the superficial plan to teach everything every year, there will be more room for learning that sticks. Typically, the *Common Core State Standards* and most commercial resources flood the curriculum with all genres, all story elements, and the mother-load of literary devices, and a random use of grammatical and punctuation applications, for young people to experience every year. It is rare for schools, districts or state-level curriculum designers to identify a focus beyond the 'teach everything every year' approach.

Think about how we can design ELA curriculum so that students can master language progressively from simple to more complex levels of understandings. Specific fiction and informational texts should remain the contexts for learning, rather than focusing on everything at the same time. Think again about these series of targets, but within varied literary contexts. Figure 1 reveals a sample scope and sequence of fiction and non-fiction contexts for each grade.

Figure 1: Sample Scope and Sequence of Grade Focused Fiction and Non-Fiction

Grade	**Fiction Focus**	**Non-Fiction Focus (integrated with Social Studies)**
PK/JK	Nursery rhymes	Home/School (labelling)
SK	Fairy tales	Community (mapping)
1	Tall tales and action stories	Country (journaling)
2	Fables and folklore	World (friendly letters)
3	Myths and Adventures	International Issues (research reports)
4	Humor	National Issues (news, on-line and website reviews)
5	Social Justice	Local Issues (biographies & business letters)
6	Mystery	Innovation (essay & novel writing)
7	Drama	Diversity (speech & novel writing)
8	Science Fiction	Fairness (autobiographies & novel writing)

Rather than mixing fiction and non-fiction, students can concentrate for at least one semester on fiction, another semester on non-fiction, with options for integrated and project-based work in a third semester. As students move through each genre or non-fiction focus, they would compare their understandings with previous studies. For instance, students studying mystery as a focus would also contrast it with story elements in humorous, mythical, and social justice genres.

Just as the arrangement of specific literary themes can help students engage in deep learning, the idea of moving from words to poetry to sentences to prose can also help learners master fewer concepts at once. It can help teachers identify which students need to spend more time on words or sentences before rushing to paragraph writing. Educators are aware that students, especially in 'Kinder' and 'Primary' grades, develop at different rates, so such an approach to teaching and learning language arts can provide built-in differentiated instruction. There are also exceptional Primary students, who are ready to write multiple paragraphs; teachers who see beyond the teacher guide or the grade expectations, can provide specific programming to suit the needs of such students who can benefit from more enriched tasks. Rather than rely on an alphabet full of levelled 'readers' that make more expectations and mini-grades for reading, it might be more helpful to work through the challenges of moving students to understand vocabulary, then words within poetry, without the rules of sentence structure. With a solid grasp of words under their belts, they are ready for more formal attention to building sentences that form paragraphs. Helping students become writers that read and re-read their own work is at the core of helping young readers embrace other real books and texts. I know this idea will rub against the grain of those educators who have spent countless hours coding and levelling books in classroom libraries. The reliance on such a levelled system of texts can provide neat quantifiable metrics, but this approach seems to convey what stronger readers are already doing. I'm not convinced that putting all our ELA eggs into this one basket has moved the needle for weaker writers and readers.

When many Kindergarteners first enter school, they learn about nursery rhymes, picture poems and different kinds of homes and schools around the world. The next year their literacy reach may broaden to include fairy tales, rhyming poems and an understanding of local and neighborhood communities. When students enter the primary grades, the literacy context could focus on tall tales and action stories, action poems and a non-fiction read and write about what it means to be a citizen (i.e. Canadian, American, British…). In second grade, students could concentrate on fables, nature poems (i.e. haiku) as well as a non-fiction focus on international stories and events. Rather than teach different kinds of genre and different kinds of poems each year, the idea of identifying a concentrated emphasis can help teachers find time to help students learn 'deeply' the different kinds of literary texts. How often do students need to do a project called: 'All about Me, when there is a community, a country and a world to relate to, as well. Linking the Social Studies curriculum content to the reading and writing of non-fiction makes good sense in classrooms that are required in many cases to dedicate upwards of 50% of the time on informational texts. Teaching about letters, words,

poetry, sentencing, and paragraphing can happen in the context of rich fictional poetry and prose, as well as non-fiction. Think about the ways you might teach the following expectations, as outlined in Figure 2, using fiction and non-fiction texts.

Figure 2: Part of a PK/JK-Grade 2 ELA Curriculum Map

Print upper case letters of HF and first name (sight word)	Print upper & lowercase letters and first & last name (sight words)	Arrange words in alphabetical order using first two letters	Use dictionary to find root, prefix, suffix and Compound words
Identify letters and print HF PK/JK words based on beginning sound of words	Identify & print HF K words based on first and end sound of words	Identify & print action verbs and Grade 1 HF words with soft vowel sounds	Identify and print common and proper nouns and Grade 2 HF words with complex vowels and blended letters
Recite picture poems & identify picture words	Read, recite & dramatize nursery rhyme poems	Write, recite & dramatize rhyming poems with alliteration	Recite, write & identify imagery in different cultural poems (Haiku, Tanka)
Print first consonant to label things	Print first and ending consonants in words to make rhyming poems	Print words in statement sentences with first and end sounds with proper use of capitals and periods.	Print different kinds of sentences with period, question marks with proper use of capitals

*HF (high frequency)

Time Dedicated to Letters - For 'Kinder-aged' students, writing begins with etching letters. There are 26 letters in the alphabet; double that number to account for both upper and lower case letters. You see young people first write their name in capital letters; as they become more aware of lowercase letters, they usually mix them up, and then their signature is fine-tuned, so that they only use one upper case letter at the beginning of their name. Some students come to school having mastered the printing of upper and lower case letters, but there are still students who need instruction to help them distinguish which sounds go with which uppercase letters. I encourage teachers to keep the text in the first semester and the written samples of words throughout the classroom in uppercase only, to ensure mastery of the 26 letters that form short sight words. In the second semester, students can then study the relationship between upper and lower case letters as well as the basic rules regarding capitalization. The rush to get to words and sentences can disrupt the flow of learning. The image of the teacher pointing to each letter in the alphabet asking students to identify it, and its sound, is not enough. Having students spend time looking at letters as symbols and patterns can lay the groundwork for solid word acquisition and sentence construction down the road. We can wait for it.

So, what about context? How do we focus on letters within an engaging and authentic learning setting? The non-fiction stories are abundant in 'kinder' classrooms. Students share things that happen to them at home and at school every day. The names of each student in the class are posted on desks or chairs, and students get to hear each other's name often. The curriculum of 'names' gives students a chance to see the alphabet live daily. They can relate to N because the N sound represents Nancy; they become very familiar with M because it's used

often when students ask Ms. Miss., Mrs., or Mr. 'teacher' daily questions. Names are a powerful starting point for stories, as well. The focus on characters in stories is key to helping young people make connections, or not, but the frequency of the names of each character repeated in nursery rhymes or fairy tales also helps students focus on letters. After being exposed to multiple examples of rhymes or tales, students can then dictate stories and begin to draw images and use single letters to represent words. In this way letters are not taught in isolation, but within the literary context being discovered.

Teaching Sight Words and High Frequency Words

Pages of sight words and high frequency words line many teacher's assessment tool kits. Which words are taught when, tend to be based on a teacher guidebook, but even expert literacy authors do not seem to agree on an order for introducing such words, from series to series. Other than building lists of word families, for the most part, the teaching of high frequency and sight words seems quite random. Once students have figured out the sound options for letters, they are ready to put first sounds and final sounds together. For some students, this combination of sounds takes more time than others, and rushes to add in consonant sounds can be very confusing when learners are rushed to next steps before they are ready. It makes sense then that one and two-letter words would make up the first mastery list for students to read and write. Figure 3 illustrates a sample Word Wall for PreK/or JK students:

Figure 3: Sample PK/JK Kinder and Sr. Kinder Word Walls

PK/JR KINDER WORD WALL				
A	I	ME	WE	GO
AT	IN	UP	ALL	HE
IT	IS	SEE	AM	BE
NO	AN	SO	ON	DO
IF	OR	US	BY	HI
MY	OF	TO		

Sr. Kinder Word Wall				
A	I	me	We	Go
At	In	up	All	He
It	Is	see	Am	Be
No	An	so	On	Do
If	Or	us	By	Hi
My	Of	to		

Setting a goal that 100% of Kinder students can master such words is 'do-able'. All teachers in K-2 classrooms are aware of expectations at upper grade levels, so students when ready, can move on to learn words with more letters in them.

It also follows that the next step would involve three-letter words and word families with soft sounding vowels. Having students print and spell such words helps young people think about the order and relationships of letters. As Booth (2011) noted students: "need to focus on a small amount of information at one time, especially in examining connections among words and word families" (p. 55). The teaching of phonics, within a meaningful literacy context for learning does not mean that a teacher has abandoned a whole language approach to learning. When one only teaches phonics, the focus is less authentic. Lynn & Moore (2003) pointed out that phonics can be about solving word puzzles for young people.

> Phonics lessons for early readers may focus on vowel patterns…or learning about words with more complex consonant. Because the brain is most efficient when it can use patterns to decode words, effective phonics instruction for early readers emphasizes using analogy to known words as a strategy for decoding unknown words (p. 12).

Whether the brain is most efficient, or not, it makes sense that introducing fewer patterns to be mastered at first can help build a solid base for reading. When students have mastered reading and writing simple words, they are ready for 4 letter words with blended letters. At this stage students would be ready to tease out the hard vowel sounds, while identifying ghost letters with no sounds. By this point students would be able to easily identify lengthier compound words. Ideally if 100% of the students can master this progression of word use by the time they complete grade 2, they should be ready to figure out all kinds of curriculum words in upper grades. In a conventional ELA classroom, a lengthy list of high frequency and sight words tend to be introduced on an 'as reads' basis, rather than a systematized approach to exposing students to graduated understandings of more complex words. To recap, this systematized way for recognizing letters and word formation grouping PK/JK to Grade 2 words involves teaching high frequency and sight words in the following order:

- Uppercase letters
- Lowercase letters
- Two letter words (emphasizing the sound of the first letter)
- Three letter family words (soft vowel sounds)
- Three and four letter words (hard vowels sounds, more complicated vowel combinations)
- Words with 'ghost letters' without sounds
- Blended letter and compound words

By having a clear understanding of which expectations should be mastered in each grade, it is possible for more students to achieve mastery, especially when the goals of upper grades are not mixed into grade level expectations. The chunking of high frequency and sight words, should help teachers introduce words in an order that contributes to learning. Figure 4 and 5 outline a systematic process for targeting high frequency and sight words in the first and second grade.

Figure 4: Sample Grade 1 Word Study Bank

Sample Grade 1 Word Study Bank	
WEEK 1	**WEEK 2**
bad, dad, had, lad. mad, sad, cab, dab, lab, gag, nag, rag, sag, tag, wag, ball, call, fall, hall, mall, tall, wall, doll, ban, can, man, pan, ran, tan, fan	cap, gap, lap, nap, rap, tap bar, car, far, jar, tar, war gas, bass, pass, bat, cat, hat, mat, pat, rat, sat, paw, raw, saw
Week 3	**Week 4**
bed, fed, led, red, wed, beg, leg, peg, bell, fell, sell, tell, well who, what, when, where, why, how	who, what, when, where, why, how, bet, get, jet, let, met, set, wet, den, hen, men, pen, ten, less, mess
Week 5	**Week 6**
did, hid, lid, kid, big, fig, jig, pig, rig, wig, dig fill, hill, mill, pill, will, fix, mix, six box, fox	over, very, open, off, of, bin, fin, pin, tin, win, dip, hip. lip, rip, sip, tip, hiss, kiss, miss, bit, fit, hit, lit, kit, pit, sit, its
Week 7 Guide	**Week 8 Guide**
bob, cob, job, mob, rob, cod, nod, pod, rod, dog, fog, hog, jog, log, boss, loss, moss, toss, warm, farm	warm, farm, help, hop, mop, top, pop, dot, got, hot, not, lot, pot, rot, cow, bow, how, now, wow, boy, toy
Week 9 Guide	**Week 10 Guide**
cut, hut, nut, put, cub, rub, sub, tub, bug, dug, hug, jug, rug, tug, the, one, won, buy, many and, band, hand, land, sand	the, are, buy, many, was, were, yes, ask one, won, fun, gun, pun, run, sun, cup, pup, full, pull, gum, hum
Week 11 Guide	**Week 12 Guide**
fast, last, past, want, went, bent, rent, sent, tent, best, rest, nest, test, west, ring, king, sing, wing, wing, long, song	she, her, any, new, you, here, him, his cost, lost, pull, full, bump, jump, pump, dump, lump, bust, dust, gust, just, must, rust
Week 13 Guide	**Week 14 Guide**
may, bay, day, pay, say, way take, bake, cake, lake, take, make, made gave, save, have, has came, game, name, same, ate, date, gate, late, ride, hide, side, wide, like, bike, hike, pike	time, dime, lime, mime, five, live, dive, hive, find, kind, mind, wind, hind, poke, woke, joke, hole, mole, pole, bone, cone, lone, tone, none
Week 15 Guide	**Week 16 Guide**
cold, bold, hold, sold, told, corn, born, torn, worn, why, try, fly, cry, dry, too, two, to, our, out, into	who, what, where, when, why, over, very, open, off, of, warm, farm, help, bird, baby, eye, the, one, won, buy, many, she, any, new, you, here, too, two, to, our, out, into

Figure 5: Sample Grade 2 Word Study Bank

Grade 2 Word Study Bank	
WEEK 1	**WEEK 2**
five, live, dive, hive, time, dime, lime, mime, *vowel, consonant, community, root, prefix, suffix, compound	bake, cake, fake, lake, make, rake, take, wake, fade, made, age, cage, page, came, fame, game, lame, name, same, tame, cape, neighbor, noun, common, proper
Week 3	**Week 4**
find, kind, mind, wind, hind, people, places, things, world, continents, celebrate, explore, narrow, gather, analyze, generate, educate	poke, woke, joke, hole, mole, pole, bone, cone, lone, tone, none, compare
Week 5	**Week 6**
know, no, knot, not, knee, knock, knife, ghost, climb, environment, survive, cycle, change *dormant	over, very, open, off, of, warm, farm, help, bird, baby, eye, the, one, won, buy, many, she, any, new, you, here, too, two, to, our, out, into
Week 7	**Week 8**
blue, black, blast, blend, blind, brave, brick, bring, broke, clap, clue, class, clock, close, crab, crib, crack, cross, drag, drip, drop, drum, drill, drink, drive, flag, flat, flip, flash, grab, grin, grape, grass, plan, place, plane, plant, price, pride, print, slip, slide, track, trap, trade, trick, truck	chin, chop, chess, shop, shade, shake, shape, shark, the, they, them, their, they're, there, than, then, that, this, thin, thick, thing, think, third, who, why, what, when, where, while
Week 9	**Week 10**
bee, bead, cheer, fee, feed, feel, feet, green, sleep, tea, team, tree, three, sheep, dream, clean, stream	weigh, being, pie, tie, field, friend amphibians, birds, fish, mammals, reptiles, insects
Week 11	**Week 12**
air, fair, hair, chair, rain, main, pain, chain, train, pail, mail, tail, trail, said, migratory, tributary	coat, goat, road, toad, soap, boat, float
Week 13	**Week 14**
oil, soil, point, noise, voice	zoo, loon, soon, room, pool, boot, tool, moon, hoop, book, cook, foot, hook, look, wood, door, floor
Week 15	**Week 16**
our, out, you, soup, group, found, round, sound, could, would, should	Tuna, turn, tune, tube, bush, clue, truck, duck, luck, lump, bump

Poetry – as Medium for Learning and Expression

It seems that poetry is often skipped or skimmed over in ELA programming. The opportunity for learners to embrace words, without the conventions and rules of prose, can be an important link to building more elaborate sentences. The soothing sounds of rhyme can help young readers and writers see examples of high frequency and sight words, in the context of simple poetic forms. Students need time to make connections between words and word families. They also need to explore how changing consonants can aid in building rhyming options.

Students need practice being immersed in consonant sounds at the beginning and ends of words, while being permit to explore inventing spelling. If such expectations could be mastered in these early years, I suspect students would have a stronger English Language Arts

foundation. In addition to ensuring that students are exposed to high frequency and sight words, it is also important for teachers to add in curriculum words that for some may be decoded, but may be sight words at first.

A focus on poetry inside ELA can be much more than introducing many kinds of poems to students and then asking them to build their own portfolio. Just as it doesn't make sense to introduce all genres of fiction to students in one academic year, the design of ELA curriculum can spread out the study and analysis of various poems over a span of ten or more years. Figure 6 illustrates poetry strands can be distinct for each grade.

Figure 6: Sample PK/JK to Grade 8 Poetry Strand

PK/JK-Grade 8 Poetry Strand	
PK/JK	Recite picture poems & identify picture words
SR	Read, recite & dramatize nursery rhyme poems
Grade 1	Write, recite & dramatize rhyming poems with alliteration
Grade 2	Recite, write & identify imagery in different cultural poems (Haiku, Tanka)
Grade 3	Recite, write and identify hyperbole and simile in descriptive poetry (cinquain)
Grade 4	Recite, write and identify antonyms and metaphors in comparative poetry (diamante)
Grade 5	Recite, write and identify puns and satire in humorous poetry
Grade 6	Recite free verse poetry from memory &identify flashback & foreshadowing in poetry & musical lyrics
Grade 7	Compare main idea, tone, mood & use of symbolism & dialect in different ballads
Grade 8	Identify personification and onomatopoeia in a sonnet

Poetry can be a powerful context for identifying literary terms; as well, students should be expected to apply them when drafting and editing their own poems. It is rare for students to be asked to write ballads or sonnets, but it should not be enough to analyze the works of others. How can students come to deep understandings of what it takes to write a sonnet or ballad without attempting to craft them? More research into how such rigorous experiences may advance student capacity in high school ELA might render some interesting results. Certainly, the cries of college professors and workplace employers that students have limited

Generating Sentences

Referring to a New York Times interview with Judith Hochman:

> Many educators are concerned less with sentence-level mechanics than with helping students draw inspiration from their own lives and from literature… Before writing paragraphs — which is often now part of the kindergarten curriculum — children do need to practice writing great sentences. (Goldstein, 2017).

Helping students build strong sentences requires much more work than asking students to put everything they write in a "complete sentence". Just as a swimmer cannot improve their backstroke simply by doing an additional 200 lengths, a student does not improve the quality of their sentences by writing more of them. In fact, it is possible to entrench weaker writing habits, especially if the student does not receive feedback or input about how to strengthen the sentence. I've been in many classrooms where teachers insist that all ideas must be conveyed in sentence form. It really depends on the task as to whether a sentence is required. In a science report students often record observations in point form, and use labels to fine-tune their illustrations. Graphic organizers are also popular ways of gathering key ideas. It's a good idea to combine sentence writing with comprehension or data gathering expectations on occasion, but it is not necessary all the time. It's important to note that if sentence formatting is expected in History and Science classes, for instance, then time to teach sentence construction in such contexts should be allotted. It's not fair to assess something that has not been taught.

Often feedback about writing happens during conferences with a teacher, but such input usually skips the sentence writing stage as the focus is more on paragraph writing. While there are opportunities for students to re-work multiple sentences, it can be worthwhile for ELA program to designate specific time to look at one sentence at a time.

Mastering the Single Paragraph

There are formal readers of writing and there are personal readers of writing. Formal readers are the public, most often in schools, this would be the teacher Personal writing is private, for the student's eyes only. There is evidence that strong readers can develop solid formal and personal written work. Relying on osmosis, however, to do the teaching, is not enough. Even when teachers work tireless to craft a comprehensive reading program such actions cannot negate the need to be as vigorous about teaching writing, speaking, listening and media literacy. Writing support needs to more than responding to reading. And, just as writing gobs of sentences does not lead to improving the quality of writing, neither does assigning oodles of paragraphs, compositions or essays, lead to better practice. While informal free writing may be enjoyable, I do not believe it should be the dominant form of writing taught in school.

Journaling can be a safe-haven in that student's words and sentence construction can be off limits in terms of judging the quality of the work. In Calkins (1986) 600-page guide, *The Art of Teaching Writing*, students are encouraged to record what they wonder about in his/her "writer's notebooks". It is important for students to learn the difference between reflecting ideas for their eyes only, and recording a response to questions for assignments in different subject areas for grading purposes. While a journal may be a tool that students can use to capture first or ongoing impressions, it typically is a non-graded text. In some cases, teachers can assess the quality of discussions or arguments used within 'dialogic journals' when students share their ideas with each other or with the teacher. To support a solid

communication flow, dialogic writing journals would require more clarity and evidence to back up assumptions between the multi-authored texts.

Experts agree that conventional journaling where the writer constructs texts in an uninterrupted fashion helps to develop stamina, a habit needed to prepare for more lengthy college writing pieces. According to Columbia University's *Reading and Writing Project*:

> When students have time to write each day it leads to greater fluency and proficiency. This is well-supported by Hattie and Gladwell who both maintain that there is a direct correlation between the amount of time we spend in pursuit of a habit, goal or skill and our individual growth in relation to that habit, goal or skill. In order for students to improve as writers, and build stamina, it important for them to have long stretches of time to practice (https://readingandwritingproject.org/about/research-base).

Students apply the practice of journaling when they text and respond, when they add commentary to social media sites or emailing. While schools address digital literacy and the need for personal safeguards, young people have many opportunities to access text and to write texts, without adult intervention. Journaling experiences have a place in a school-wide writing, but given the breadth of writing genre for students to explore and master, it cannot be the sole path for a comprehensive development of 'writing lives'.

Clarifying a clear path from sentencing to paragraphing can help teachers set 'do-able' targets for students that can build-in the examination and implementation of accurate punctuation use at the same time. Figure 7 illustrates a sample of sentencing and paragraphing targets.

Figure 7: Sample PK/JK to grade 8 Sentencing and Paragraphing Targets

PK/JK	Dictate sentences using a period to end each idea.
SK	Print statement sentences using letters to represent words with proper use of capitals and period.
Grade 1	Print different kinds of sentences with period, question marks, and proper use of capitals.
Grade 2	Print paragraphs, type sentences, and use hyphens effectively.
Grade 3	Write single paragraphs and use commas effectively.
Grade 4	Write three-paragraph pieces and use apostrophes effectively.
Grade 5	Write five-paragraph stories and essays with effective use of transitional words and colons.
Grade 6	Write 500-word short essay with effective use of independent & semi-colons, conjunctions & dependent clauses.
Grade 7	Write 1000-word script with a focus on using quotation punctuation effectively.
Grade 8	Write 2500-word essay with a focus on eliminating run-on sentences and fragments.

While students in earlier grades will engage in paragraph writing, I would not insist that all students be rushed to master paragraph writing at the same time. After all, if we teach to reach the personalized needs of students, then we cannot follow step-by-step grade expectations at the same time. The beauty of multi-age classrooms allows for students to work at their own pace. To increase the critical mass of effective writers, teachers need to discuss

when it best to expect more rigorous standards for all students and when to allow differentiation for some students to catch up or be enriched, that is, work on advancing their writing at their own pace. Aiming for three-paragraph mastery by grade 4 and the capacity to write 5 paragraphs well by grade 5 would give students plenty of time to be ready for the lengthier paragraph work at the heart of middle and high school essays. The cramming of multi-paragraph expectations for all students in primary grades may be a seed for generating a sub-culture of reluctant writers. If staff can determine where the ceilings are in each grade, then all students will have extensive opportunities to achieve mastery. As educators, we must take care to not let the talented outliers determine what all would be expected to achieve.

A well-tuned curriculum will give students a chance to learn how to read and write different literary genres as well as styles of varied subject disciplines. Pulling together sentences in a paragraph or multiple paragraph prose requires an understanding of a framework that might best suit the purpose for writing. Many colleges have established on-line writing tutorials or labs to help students develop writing skills that frankly could have been mastered years before students entered higher education. *Duke University's Thompson Writing Program* provides a series of comprehensive writing tools to support the development of this critical skill for college level success. (https://twp.duke.edu/writing-studio/resources/handouts-for-high-schoolers). The teaching of writing need not be a random sprinkling of learning experiences; there needs to be a much more concerted effort to synthesize a curriculum that truly prepares students for the writing demands in college and the workplace.

Learning to write is not an easy process. Having students learning early on, how to craft a piece of work by introducing examples of how drafts can improve via a process of guided revision can help young people learn how to become writers. Before rushing to hand out paragraph assignments, it is important for students to be comfortable with words and how they form sentences. Writing should not be a struggle if students have been exposed to progressive ways to revise and edit their words, sentences and paragraphs. Teachers who build bridges or scaffolds between their students' level of understanding and their own, can improve writer's lives considerably. According to Rosenshine (2012),

> the more effective teachers do not overwhelm their students by presenting too much new material at once. Rather, the most effective teachers only present small amounts of new material at any time, and then assist the students as they practice this material. (pp. 13-14).

The first paragraph can be a writing milestone. By the third grade, a student might demonstrate mastery of many writing expectations through problem-based activities. The following 'Writing about an Invisible Thing' example (Figure 8) describes how pre-writing and editing can lead to a quality final writing piece.

Figure 8: *Writing About An Invisible Thing* Task

Challenge: Simon is on vacation and his glasses broke; he cannot see. He won't be able to have them fixed until he flies home. What visible and invisible things will he need to enjoy the rest of his vacation?

Pre-Writing:

1. Blindfold one partner while the other partner gives them verbal directions to complete a simple task
2. Both partners share feelings.
3. Talk about feelings as invisible things.
4. List other invisible things:

   air, hot, cold, hunger, sound, germs, gas, feelings (happy, love, sad, proud, disappointed…) qualities (courage, fear…)

5. Share findings with the rest of group. The teacher can record ideas on a screen, whiteboard or chalkboard.

Illustrating:

6. Then students can choose one from the list or select an idea not yet shared publicly.
7. Students can work on their own, in pairs, or with younger students in a peer teaching situation.
8. Students can then sketch and label an invisible thing they might want to write about (best to do on a large sheet of paper – but it can also be done on a smaller canvas).

Check out Writing Sample

9. Students can read a sample of Nadia's writing about her invisible thing:

It wakes me up every mornings when dad is in a hurry on his way to work. It starts from a piece of bread, too long in the toaster. Then it moves upstairs, under my door and now climbs into my bed. The smell of burnt toast has found me. The words NOT AGAIN ring in my head.

Nadia

10. In a small group or class lesson, students can talk about assess Nadia's first draft based on the following criteria:

✓	The draft followed directions as outlined in the assignment.	Yes, Maybe, Not Yet
✓	The draft focused on an invisible thing.	Yes, Maybe, Not Yet
✓	The draft described the invisible thing in a setting.	Yes, Maybe, Not Yet
✓	The draft included an introductory and concluding sentence.	Yes, Maybe, Not Yet
✓	wrote draft using double-spacing.	Yes, Maybe, Not Yet

11. Students can then read out loud Nadia's story and talk about how it was edited after her conference that focused on strong verbs, nouns, and adjectives:

It wakes me up ~~every~~ some mornings when dad is in a hurry ~~on his way to work~~. It starts from a piece of bread, ignored too long in the toaster. Then it ~~move~~s creeps up the stairs, under my door and now climbs into my bed.

The smell of burnt toast has found ~~me~~ my hiding spot. The words NOT AGAIN ring in my head.

Nadia

12. In a small group or class lesson students can talk about how well Nadia's draft:
✓ used stronger verbs and nouns
13. Students can then read out loud about Nadia's revised story and talk about how well she has made changes to each sentence, added more ideas that flow with proper punctuation and included a cool title:

Not ~~a~~Again *by Nadia*

It wakes me up ~~every~~ some mornings when dad is in a hurry ~~on his way to~~

~~work~~. It starts from a piece of bread, ignored too long in the toaster. Then it ~~moves~~ creeps up the wooden stairs, through the keyhole and under my door and now climbs into ~~my~~ bed between me and my cuddly bear. My clock reads 6:57. I close my eyes but the smell keeps knocking on my nose. The ~~smell~~ sniff of burnt toast has found ~~me~~ my hiding spot. The words NOT AGAIN ~~ring~~ scream in my head.

14. In a small group or class lesson students can talk about how well Nadia's draft was edited:

✓	The edited draft shows at least one change to each sentence in draft	Yes, Maybe, Not Yet
✓	The edited draft has added more ideas that flow	Yes, Maybe, Not Yet
✓	The edited draft includes proper punctuation	Yes, Maybe, Not Yet
✓	The edited draft added a cool title	Yes, Maybe, Not Yet

15. Students can then talk about the changes from the sketch and first draft to the following piece of writing:

Not Again *by Nadia*

It wakes me up some mornings when dad is in a hurry. It starts from a piece of bread, ignored too long in the toaster. Then it creeps up the wooden stairs, through the keyhole and under my door and now climbs into bed between me and my cuddly bear. My clock reads 6:57. I close my eyes but the smell keeps knocking on my nose. The sniff of burnt toast has found ~~me~~ my hiding spot. The words NOT AGAIN scream in my head.

16. Students can then return to their sketches to add more details.

Draft First Sentences

17. Students can begin to write their own first drafts about their invisible things.

Editing

18. Then students can read their pieces aloud to each other and their teacher with the goal of making changes where it sounds funny or doesn't make sense.
19. They can then listen to someone else read their work out loud with the goal of making changes where it sounds funny and doesn't make sense.
20. Then the teacher can keep track of how well the students have mastered the expectations and work with students during conferences to help them address what parts of their writing might need more work

Nadia's fiction story would be considered a composition. Under the non-fiction umbrella, students first learn how to write friendly letters before business letters that usually involve multiple paragraphs. Letter writing is a highly authentic context for learning. Letters invite interaction. Many students regularly take part in sending notes electronically or in print form. Young people can write thank you letters to friends and family members, as well as notes on get well or condolence cards. Aguilar (2011) wrote about Middle School students writing pen pals in Iraq:

> Just before the Iraq War started in the winter of 2003, my middle school students had English-speaking pen pals in an international high school in Iraq. My students were very concerned about the impending war and they wanted to hear different perspectives on the brewing conflict; they also wanted to impress their older pen pals with their writing skills and so they wrote, re-wrote, and revised their email letters until they were polished. And after they got responses, they were even more motivated to write long, detailed letters full of explanation and description -- and without a single grammar, spelling, or convention error.

In Aguilar's words: "There was something about the format of a letter -- personal but structured, an invitation to dialogue, the anticipation of response that always got kids writing."

An authentic writing piece should be much more than a written assignment turned in on a regular basis, that is reviewed by a teacher, and graded or not, and returned to the student, rarely read again or linked to future writing or other readers. Students who plan proposals for real events that will unfold, submit on-line reviews of books for Amazon or Barnes and Noble, or write to a politician requesting a response, are engaged in 'writing to be read'. Not only must they apply rigorous reading and editing to their own work, and work with the teacher as a guide, they target a real audience who ideally will respond to their message. Many writing resources are generous with ideas that stretch the notion of authenticity.

Multiple Paragraphs

When students have mastered the nuances of the single paragraph, they can then work on crafting three and five-paragraph composition, reports, or extended friendly, as well as business letters. While it is not as common nowadays, but some schools expect students to write speeches, either for school-wide contests or as part of a comprehensive ELA program. In one grade 7 class, we assigned the task of writing a speech to run for the first School Council President. This authentic student government forming experience was not about nominations or popularity contests. It was about the strength of their ideas and their capacity to communicate their message and arguments in convincing and compelling ways. Knowing there is an audience beyond the teacher can motivate students to take care with their word and sentence choices. Older students may write speeches that prepare for debates, or personal pieces of prose such as valedictorian speeches, toasts or eulogies.

A common language for teaching expository writing instruction can support a school-wide approach to inspiring an engaged writing culture. According to Heritage (2008):

> learning involves progression….teachers need to understand the pathways along which students are expected to progress. These pathways or progressions ground both instruction and assessment. Yet, despite a plethora of standards and curricula, many teachers are unclear about how learning progresses in specific domains…Explicit learning progressions can provide the clarity that teachers need. By describing a pathway of learning they can assist teachers to plan instruction (p. 2).

It can be challenging for students to learn a new language of writing instruction each school year. Schools can encourage teacher teams to work on establishing a common language for teaching writing to remove such artificial barriers between grades. An ideal opportunity for developing a sustained and progressive set of writing expectations can happen in K-12 schools or when high schools and feeder schools come together for collaborative staff development. The ***IDEAL*** approach (Figure 9) for teaching writing has emerged from work with students in public, charter, private, international elementary and high schools, as well as work with student teachers in colleges of education. These five actions help students to meet and master 'ideal' writing habits:

Figure 9: Ideal Writing Model

I	Illustrate
D	Draft
E	Edit
A	Advise & Revise
L	Lure

By focusing on each action, teachers can help guide students improve the clarity of their communication and confidence in becoming skilled writers. There are plenty of ways that 'IDEAL' Writing can be integrated into school curriculum. First off, those responsible for ensuring the mastery of writing skills need to read student writing at all stages – the outline, the draft, and the final work. A key purpose of reading, I will argue, is for writers to share responses, reviews and ideas to further develop writing. All writing at any stage can be improved.

By making the habits of strong writer's transparent, in combination with giving learners the skills to identify their mistakes head-on, students can be more prepared to write impressive papers and conduct sound research in high school, college and throughout life. At first it can be challenging to understand so many features of quality writing (organization, word choices, unity, coherence, original thought, mechanics…). Furthermore, when to expect mastery and application of so many moving parts can also be an overwhelming task when establishing a school writing curriculum. By gradually introducing ways to polish writing that is purposeful and memorable, we can make significant improvements in the critical mass of quality student writing.

Illustrate - The research on the lure and value of graphic texts has added much to the body of literature on reading practices. The role of graphics or illustrations in writing, however, has not received as much attention. While it has be featured in English as a Secondary Language (ESL) or English Language Learner (ELL) classes, the universal value of image texts for universal writing purposes seems limited to early primary writing applications.

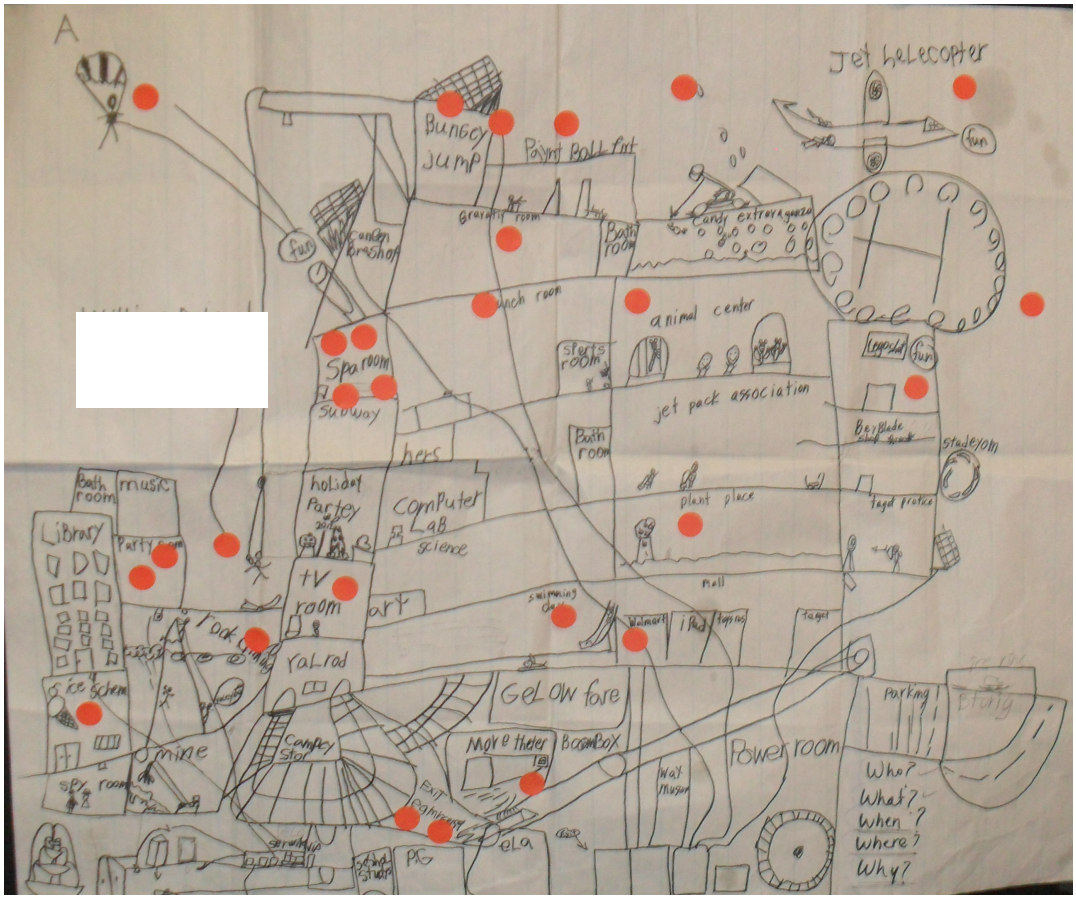
For students to become skilled writers, **educators need to help students love writing**. Helping students to **picture their ideas** first, and be granted permission to wade into a mix of graphics and texts, can evoke more imagination and organizational skill, before being thrown into the deep end of prose. The marriage of image and text is a common feature in science classrooms. Observations, and detailed labeling, are the habits of today and tomorrow's scientists, but there is no reason, other than convention, why writers cannot begin with diagramming or readers cannot do a book report on a Venn Diagram or a physical education journal might be a series of photographs with labels.

A visual outline of ideas helps prepare a roadmap for writing. I have found that a visual representation of ideas provides some of the best opportunities for widespread student buy in. Young male writers have responded well to the task of creating a detailed image for labeling, rather than the conventional listing of ideas. **The bigger the poster paper** – the better! By including this idea of making illustration first, we could provide a safe place for writers to begin their brainstorming. The following excerpt from a book section titled: "What's Worth Changing For?", I described this use of illustrations as an initial step in a writing process:

> The process began with students generating a picture, much like a brainstorming web...The teacher's role was to encourage students to elaborate and further edit their initial work by adding many details to their images, and then add as many labels as possible. Rather than putting the picture outline away, students spent more time returning to this starter tool for days before ever writing their first sentences. The dodging echo "*But I don't know what to write,*" fell by the wayside, when students were directed to make sentences around each label (Smith, in press, 2019).

At an elementary school in DC, I worked with Grade 3 and 4 students on a project piece called 'The Ideal School'. They generated their first ideas on large poster paper that they labeled and then returned to edit both the drawing and the labeling. The following example (Figure 10) illustrates the collaborative outline created by two grade 3 boys for what would become a three-paragraph proposition about what they thought would be an ideal school:

Figure 10: Sample Student Image for Writing About an Ideal School



In this case, one of the young boys was gifted in drawing, but hesitant to write. When the students added as many labels as they could, it was much easier for them to write many sentences around the words for their first drafts. In this and many cases, the question: "I don't

know what to write" was virtually eliminated. I asked Ms. Almonte to share her teacher perceptions of the experience:

> Dr. Smith actively came into my third and fourth grade classroom weekly and demonstrated a unit in which students were to develop their ideas for their ideal school. She helped the students to visualize their ideal school by asking the appropriate questions, then had them work in pairs to draw their ideas as a prewriting process. Due to this process, the essays were elaborate and descriptive.

Students can use webbing, graphic organizers, or lists to prepare a detailed outline of the plan for writing. Having choices at the early stages for what tools they use can be motivating; some students may need to be guided to try on certain tools if their initial tool of choice does not engage them in the process. Exploring multiple tools can help students determine which tools helps them improve their writing the most.

A great outline should leave room for plenty of ideas. Giving students large sheets of paper opens up space for more words to populate the outline. Ideally students can work in pairs, read and view each other's first thoughts and provide suggestions to enhance their emerging sketch. Rather then head right to the writing of the first draft after the initial drawing, the writers are encouraged to return to the image and edit it again by adding more images or more detail to the existing images and labels.

The outlining step tends to be rushed in conventional writing settings, but putting aside generous time to develop big and detailed ideas upfront is well worth the wait! Most intuitive teachers also take time to conference with students about their outlines. Given writing is a social process, with peers and experts, it makes good sense to build in time for students to talk about their outlines with their teacher. Conferencing at any stage in the writing process is also a tool for teacher planning. By seeing firsthand how students respond or not to prompts and their task, a teacher can revise his or her own lessons to remove redundant material or add in more specified instruction to support enhanced learning.

In addition to conference discussion, I would recommend that each part of the writing process, especially the planning phase, be part of the process be assessed. Students should be rewarded for putting deep thought and effort into building their plan. I use a rubric that not only gives feedback about their outline images, but it also provides instructional direction in advance of the task. I often build in an expectation of at least 80% mastery of the outline image expectations before students would be given the green light on moving forward with their first draft.

Draft- Keeping a room of writers focused on the task of writing their first draft in prose is much easier if the outlining stage has generated an emotional response. It is also helpful when a teacher can communicate details of what constitutes an effective first draft. The outline can

help students move ideas to sentences. Before committing words to sentences, I share a mini lesson with instructions about what to include in a first skeleton of a draft piece of writing. By weaving the criteria into a checklist, students can view each item in advance, and during the drafting of their first sentences. At the end of the draft students can self-assess their work prior to participating in a writing conference with peers or their teacher.

It is important to note that the first draft is not a written piece where grammar, punctuation, unity or clarity must spill out automatically. The first raw response in sentence form, following the directions of the task, is precisely why it is called a 'rough draft'. Without a clear rubric with assessment criteria, many writers are left to anticipate what the reviewer might be looking for in a quality response. For instance, if an assignment does not explicitly ask students to add a title, most authors will not include one. In terms of formatting purposes, so reviewers can add insights within a body of a drafted text, it makes sense to write drafts on every other line. Without establishing a consistent writing practice, students tend not to initiate titles or space for others to add comments. By building in assessments for each stage of the writing process, it is possible for teachers to push students toward better habits, simply by making what they value in a response, more transparent. Graham, McKeown, Kiuhara, and Harris (2012) confirmed that when "writing strategies were taught to both typically developing and struggling writers in Grades 2–6", the results were positive (p. 889). Figure 11 illustrate a sample self-reflection tool for a rough draft:

Figure 11: Sample Rough Draft Self-Reflection Tool

Criteria/Expectations for First Draft	**Yes/Not Yet**
Follows assignment directions	
Reveals a theme or claim	
Includes detailed points that relates to theme or claim	
Uses evidence or examples to backs up theme or claim	
Describes a detailed setting	
Includes appealing introductory sentence	
Includes solid concluding sentence	
Is double-spaced	

It makes sense that the first draft be 'double-spaced' to make room for all the changes and hard work that happens in this editing stage of writing. Students should be encouraged to change words, as well as add and delete sentences, and often change their order.

Advise and Revise – Advising and revising involves four editing activities, each using talk in different ways to alter and improve writing drafts:

a) Self-Talk about word choices (using a Language Chart)
b) Reading the draft aloud to a peer
c) Listening to a peer read the draft aloud
d) Self-Assessing and Conferencing Using a Draft Revision Rubric

The role of talk in writing has usually been reserved for conferencing with a teacher, however, many students can benefit from collaborating with each other to enhance the editing process. Picking up where the reading research left off, embracing the idea of talk throughout the editing or altering stages of a draft can be particularly helpful.

Self-Talk - The power of self-talk about a piece of writing should never be under-estimated. The use of a language chart allows the writer to use self-talk to review the first draft through a lens that focuses specifically on language use in a passage. Barger (2006) suggests that: "creating opportunities for children to play with words is vital not only to enhancing their vocabulary but also to increasing their comprehension" (p. 279).

For instance – breaking the word choices into grammar and types of figurative language can help the reader such tool to improve writing. The following words in Figure 12 were captured from about the plight of homeless people in Vancouver.

Figure 12: Sample IDEAL Language Chart

IDEAL Language Chart	
List 3 Powerful Nouns	3 Powerful Adjectives
Therapy	expressive (writing)
Opportunities	Dismal
Survival	Hopeless
List 3 Powerful Verbs	List 2 Adverbs
Committed	Especially
Designed	
Impressed	List 2 Examples of Figurative Language
List 2 Phrases	
from a hopeless cycle of living (adjective phrase)	
over their head (adverb phrase)	
TOTAL = 12/15	

In a mini lesson and conference to follow, the teacher would address the word use in writing by sharing some of the following tips:

- review of figurative language options
- review of adverbs
- change simple words (i.e. got) – use thesaurus to add 'richer' vocabulary
- slang only used for special emphasis
- 'anyways' is slang and 'anyway' is the only way the words should be used
- clichés need to help make a point, but one is plenty in a piece of work

In the first draft, the student did not include figurative language. By reviewing options (use of imagery, metaphor, simile, personification, alliteration, irony, foreshadowing, hyperbole….) she could think about which options might enhance her writing, and eliminate others that did not fit or support the main idea. She could also look for places in the writing where adverbs might help to modify existing verbs, or add more interesting sentence starters. Given the writing would be altered often, she would have more opportunities to circle back to her language chart throughout the revision process, and add in improvements, and thus improve her score. By integrating the learning of language skills within the writing process, and coordinating when to introduce various concepts, I sense that a school-wide plan can help students transition from novice, through apprentice to expert writers well ahead of college. Based on a review of multiple studies, Graham, McKeown, Kiuhara, and Harris (2012) noted:

> When students receive instruction designed to enhance their strategic prowess as writers (i.e., strategy instruction, adding self-regulation to strategy instruction, creativity/imagery instruction), they become better overall writers. Likewise, when students are taught specific knowledge about how to write (i.e. text structure instruction), the overall quality of their writing improves (p. 891).

Apart from acknowledging the application of parts of speech and literary terms as tools for writers, students can learn from reading their own and others' work that:

- it is so easy to leave out words when your mind is racing.
- they can streamline sentences by thinking about how many words they can remove to make the message smoother.
- they can identify common mistakes that can be remedied before writing is formally assessed.

During both speaking and listening activities the writer stops and starts when editing to add in missing words, delete excess words or make changes so the text runs together more cohesively. Sometimes the order of the sentences can be re-aligned. Some ideas are better placed further above or below certain sentences. To fine tune writing, so that the style enhances the message, the writer needs to work with others to try and making changes ideally to each sentence in the first draft. Modifications may also require the inclusion of additional sentences to explain the message, so any reader can fully understand it.

<u>Reading the Draft Aloud to a Peer & Listening to a Peer Read the Draft Aloud -</u> After paying attention to vocabulary use, it is helpful to focus on how well the writing flows. At this stage, the draft will be read out loud twice – once by the writer – and once by the reviewer. Hearing the written words can help the writer make more revisions. Students need to ask a writing partner to read aloud their draft. The writer may ask the reader to stop at any time to make revisions, but the partner must read the full draft out loud. Writing, therefore, is not only permitted, but embraced, as a social process. Outside advice is sought to help writers see their

strengths at the same time as provide an extra set of eyes to catch mechanical, organizational, and word choice errors. Habits of most strong writers include asking others to review their work. Building in this read-aloud phase, is one way the IDEAL writing process helps young writers emulate career authors. People are not born great writers; people have been helped along the way, especially if they have not attained the art of writing via osmosis from reading.

Self-Assessing and Conferencing using a Draft Revision Rubric - After making changes to add powerful vocabulary and reading and listening to the text, the writer should self-assess the draft to make the final changes. At this stage, student writers self- assess draft work according to criteria listed in a simple rubric. For instance, by indicating on the rubric that students should make changes to each sentence, students are forced to think on a micro level how to make many alterations to writing, emulating how real writers behave when they craft their work. A writer may need to read over his/her work many times to make sure changes are made to ensure that the piece of writing has included the features of quality writing. According to Sizer (1995):

> It takes time to step back to say, 'Why did you write that way, calculate that way, say what you did about that experiment?' It takes schools that make sure the answer is not 'I didn't have time to make it better.'

While rubrics are common in elementary school for final written products, they are rarely applied to draft work or for purposes of self-evaluation to help the writer, prior to making a piece of work public. Frustrated Social Studies and Science teachers might have more insight into what students know by asking students to hand in each stage of work, thus sharing the growth of ideas and their thinking along the way. By making an editing rubric transparent, the student can then return to her revised draft, and with the aid of self-talk, think about it through the lens of the self-assessment. Speaking of the TCRWP writing workshops, where students are encouraged to use self-assessment checklists, Graham, McKeown, Kiuhara, and Harris (2012) identified the following effective instructional practices for teaching writing to elementary school-aged children after an analysis of 115 studies on writing intervention: "Both typically developing students (Grade 4) and struggling writers (Grades 2–6) benefited when they were taught how to apply self-regulation procedures, such as goal setting and self-assessment, to help them manage the writing strategies they were taught". Typically, assessment tools focus on the end-product, rather than the process. If something is worthy of being read, it is important to read and assess the work at all stages of the process. It is important, therefore, to develop rubrics that can support the growth of writing in action. The following *Draft Revision Rubric* (Figure 13) would be viewed in advance of a writing conference to determine if further edits are required.

This phase of writing is an extensive investment of time, for students and the teacher. After working with the Language Chart, reading the draft out loud and listening to the draft, and completing a self-assessment and conferencing with the teacher, the following feedback can

be gathered in rubric form, to determine whether writers should go ahead and complete their final mastery copies.

Figure 13: Sample Draft Revision Rubric

Student Self Score	2 = mastered skill 1 = a start (just learning) ? =Not Yet	Teacher Score
Substance – This piece of writing…		
2	shows you followed directions	2
2	has at least 3 great details	2
2	has at least 3 interesting details about setting	2
2	includes at least 3 distinct pieces about evidence	2
1	develops an original idea	1
Organization – This piece of writing…		
1	demonstrates how ideas flow sequentially	2
2	includes ideas that fit together	2
2	has a clear and captivating introductory sentence	2
2	has a clear and captivating concluding sentence	2
2	includes interesting words and phrases recorded in the Injection Choices Chart	2
Revise! Revise! Revise! – This piece of writing…		
1	shows one change to each sentence on draft	1
2	has accurate punctuation (capitals, periods)	2
2	demonstrates good format for reflective expository writing	2
2	is double-spaced	2
2	has this checklist reviewed by an adult	2
27	TOTAL	28

The term "Not Yet" links directly to Carol Dweck's (2012) notion of the power of 'yet'. Rather than using a zero, or add in a token point value, the 'Not Yet' grade serves a placeholder, for learning yet to be demonstrated. Students should be required to go back and complete the task to at least an 80% mastery.

To be prepared for the demands of middle school, high school and college writing, students need to be aware of their strengths and weaknesses. There are many sites and resources that feature frequently misspelled words, as well as common mistakes, usually listed in large quantities, and rarely coordinated for mastery within certain grade groupings. It makes sense to deliberately teach students to be aware of common mistakes in writing and to increase the capacity for sustained learning, school-wide writing curriculum should gradually introduce these barriers to students in preparation for middle school, high school or college writing. Such expectations can also be aligned for selecting criteria for assessment tools. By making mistakes explicit, the tool itself can serve as a teaching resource. After students have experienced using rubrics, they can also generate them individually or collectively.

Mini Lessons focusing on learning from mistakes can be built into writing curriculum. Students can benefit from explicitly attending to common errors, such as the use of commas instead of periods and run-on sentences. Teachers or students could also create board games to help teach about common mistakes and more such as the following listed in Figure 14:

Figure 14: Common Mistakes in Writing

- Missing a subject before a verb
- Using fragments
- Wacky use of “this” or “that”
- Using “that” is used as a subject
- Lack of first or third person agreement
- Using proper past tense words
- Leaving out words
- Use of excess or extraneous words
- Use of absolutes (best – safe –only – always, every)
- Repeating words
- Use of too many simple words
- Use of slang or awkward use of clichés
- Careless about word endings “ed” and “ing”
- Misuse of contractions and apostrophes

Editing is not an option if a school’s goal is to produce masterful writing. Modifying the text happens when writers are prepared to roll up their sleeves and deliver on the hard work necessary to craft an improved piece of text. Before making the modifications, it is important to have a way for students **to SEE the changes made to the draft.** For this reason, I advocate for younger writers (Grade 3 through 5) printing off drafts and using a pen or pencil to make changes. I am also a huge supporter of using “track changes” on the computer, but I would reserve the use of this feature until writing habits have been well established.

At first, it is important for the young writer to show the reader where the writing changes. Students who type a draft one day, save it in a folder, and then return to it the next day – typically make changes that are not tracked, and therefore, fail to see the value of the editing process. Teachers also need to see the thinking, the effort and the growth the students have made in their quest to evolve from novice to expert writers. If the original work is not there to compare, it is almost impossible to determine the extent of editing, a required habit of skilled writers. Recommending students make changes the old-fashioned way (using pencils/pens to the paper draft) until they have become accustomed to outlining, drafting, and re-drafting habits of living writer’s lives. Teaching students how to modify their texts, by creating a culture of writers and reviewers, is how many teachers can help their students knock their writing out of the ballpark.

Vygotsky’s (1934) ideas on the social construction of learning, suggests that students need to go back and forth between individual and social settings. An approach to editing writing that builds in a process that moves between self and other reviewers should include and encourage student writers to return to outlining and all beginning and more advanced stages of editing, including the outline or plan. The teacher influence can be ongoing throughout each phase,

functioning as support throughout the process, helping the student move through the 'zone of proximal development'. By interacting with an expert, a student can apprentice from a novice status by learning in an explicit way to use the tools of experts, specifically language in terms of what they write, but more specifically in how they appropriate the language of experts.

For any learner to grow stronger, that learner must be provided with informative, responsive targeted feedback. Hattie's (2008) research perhaps best supports this claim. He reviewed 180,000 studies involving 20 to 30 million students and found that of 100 factors that contribute to student achievement, providing learners with feedback rates in the very top 5%-10% of influences. The feedback is especially valuable if the teacher helps the learner know where he is doing, what progress he has made so far, and what specific activities he can do next to progress toward the goal. Ideally, learners also receive help in refining and seeking more challenging goals.

Lure – Aguilar refers to the audience as a 'secret sauce'. Even when most edits are complete there is much to do to attract an interested audience. Before typing up a polished draft, written work usually needs a carefully crafted title. Some texts may not require titles (letters, journal entries, assignments with pre-determined titles…), but for those that require one, it is best to think carefully about this first impression. The title should give a strong hint about the main idea, but it should also draw the reader in with a creative, ideally, one-of-a-kind headline for the writing. Waiting until the meat in the middle of the writing before creating a captivating title makes sense. Paying attention to titles in fictional or informational texts, music, film or television can help young writers think carefully about what words they can choose to highlight their writing. Whether students generate metaphoric titles, like *To Kill a Mocki*ngbird, or *Shark Tank*, or a puzzle, like *The Tipping Point*, the writer will need explicit direction that a title must connect to a main idea, as well as illustrate accurate use of capitals and punctuation. Students frequently record titles ending with a period or only including capital letters with the first word in the title. Making time to explore titles and speak to how they can enhance rather than distract from the writing is something that fits well during the polishing or mastery stage of writing.

Spelling mistakes can detract from a powerful piece of writing. It was quite deliberate to leave the review of spelling until this final stage. Students often misinterpret spelling as a part of editing, but this is more a copy-editing skill, that fits more with presenting an 'alluring' text. Key ways to make sure that spelling is not a distraction, are for writers to make time to check for:

- proper use of homonyms (there, they're, their; to, too, two; our, are; your, you're). STOP every time you see one and MAKE sure you have it right, *NOT write!!!!*)
- *word endings* ("s", "es", "ed" and "ing"…). Racing minds can lead to careless errors. An extra 'read aloud' can usually catch these typos.
- Canadian, American and British versions of spelling

And, do not rely spell check. Students need to learn that many words can be replaced on spellcheck that have correct spellings but have nothing to do with the sentence. Writers need to proof their work so the reader are not put off by sloppy or careless spelling errors. It is also easy to be add more spelling errors, particularly when students make frequent changes to their drafts.

Writers can also miss adding apostrophes or add them in where they do not belong and note that contractions (or hyphens) are generally not used in formal writing. Figure 15 reveals a Sample Final Mastery Writing Rubric for teacher input that could be adapted to include self-assessment.

Figure 15 Sample Final Writing Mastery Rubric

Final Writing Mastery Rubric ➔ Place a number in the box on LEFT hand side of the page. 2 = strong skill; 1 = developing skill (still learning); not yet = did not see evidence	
Great Polish – This piece of writing….	
Included a captivating title	2
used accurate punctuation (commas, periods, question marks and apostrophe…)	2
did not use run-on sentences, repeated words or contractions	2
used words properly (grammar; homonyms; no slang…)	2
used accurate spelling and use of capitals	2
Task Completion – The writer…	
stayed on task and completing work in a timely manner	2
helped others stay on task	2
read writing aloud to partner and made changes to draft	2
made changes when writing was read aloud	2
included a final copy on EVERY LINE (Is ready for publishing)	2
	TOTAL 20

/20 Teacher Check

The notion of 'lure' can go beyond the written text. Illustrations in many books help lure the reader to the text. Whether the medium is printed or digital, there are many ways to bring text to life. Video, PowerPoints, social media and printed publications represent a few options for authors. Certainly, writing a piece of work that is worthy of referencing is key to luring readers to a piece of work or a body of work. Building in options for others to review work or using a text as a resource for teaching can also be powerful ways to build attention.

From Paragraphs to Essays

When we developed curriculum for the Jalen Rose Leadership Academy, we coordinated monthly visits to a local senior's residence in Detroit, Michigan. Students formalized regular relationships with many of their elders in the community prior to interviewing them to write their biographies. The point form notes from many interviews shifted to a collection of draft

sentences that were edited, polished and eventually pooled together for a publication shared within the class and at the senior center.

While essays follow the same rules of writing multiple expository paragraphs, they are often assigned based on the assumption that students have learned and mastered the craft. That very first essay in ELA, or Social Studies should be a time where the teacher and the student go through the work piece by piece, through the writing process, emulating the practice of students with their thesis supervisors. At what point in the curriculum does the teacher help the student shape their first essay? Without such a critical experience, students need to find it elsewhere, on-line, at home, or often in college, when professors recommend they attend writing workshops. If we look at how we can teach writing differently in Middle School, we can help students see themselves as writers, rather than novices stuck with figuring it out on their own. From the perspective of fairness, how can any teacher assign an essay without teaching how to construct an essay. If high school teachers were aware that students had learned how to craft that first essay, and had mastered the skills, they could then assign it, without the responsibility of deliberately teaching these expectations. It can help significantly when teachers reduce the amount of prose that students are required to write. There is no point in having a student write an essay with a designated number of words, if they have not mastered the five-paragraph essay. What you usually get is something that the 'word count' has targeted, or what might be easily lifted from the Internet. When that first or second essay has been co-constructed with a writing expert, there have been so many edits, that it's impossible to ever be plagiarized. While it is much easier for grade 6 teachers to roll up their sleeves and co-write twenty essays with students, it is next to impossible to do with more students in a class, so class size matters. The effort to help students in their first essay writing experiences is well worth the cost, considering the damage that occurs when students consolidate poor writing habits with the volume of prose assigned to them before they enter college or the workforce.

From Paragraphs to Short Stories and Novels

Future novelists also need a forum for writing different fictional genres. Just as a solid curriculum would not lay out a superficial smattering of reading every genre every year, teachers should collaborate about when to introduce writing drama, adventure, humor, social justice, fantasy and science fiction. The scope of writing expectations needs to be spread over several years. I have been in schools where we have introduced the teaching of dialogue for short novel writing, but like real authors such works are not completed in a term or even a year. Middle school students gathered their details in Grade 6 to write their outline, pulled together their first draft in grade 7 and used grade 8 to revise and publish their work. In this way, they emulated the practices of living writers. Along the way, teachers initially helped these students co-write short stories. Whether the novels ended up being 25 pages or 300 pages, we wanted our students to feel what it's like to be fictional writers. Such a sustained

novel writing experience gives students a chance to read each other's work, housed in school libraries.

From Essays and Novels to Documentaries and Screen Plays

Working backwards from the powerful draw of students to media, it is important to not leave out opportunities whereby students can be encouraged to emulate the practices of documentary and screen play writers. Understanding the persuasive power of YouTube, blogs, and other media forms is at the heart of helping young people critically analyze messages. To learn how to emulate a pattern for creating documentaries and screen plays is one thing, but with media, students learn how to blend image with words. Given that many documentaries tend to be presented in third person, the integration of text and image at any age makes sense. PowerPoints presentations and videos, can be great starting points for early documentaries. Students in younger grades can share research using words and phrases to express ideas about images. Once students have mastered paragraph writing (which includes editing), they can add prose to visual presentations. Formal documentaries can be used to lure audiences to listening to or reading student essays. Students can also create documentaries about authors, poems or their interpretation of themes in fictional works. Students may also document biographies (authors, historical and political figures…) as well as autobiographical stories. The screenplay, on the other hand, has multiple voices, perspectives and mechanically, punctuation. Most young people read Shakespeare, and might even have a glimpse of other playwrights, but rarely are they expected to write plays that could be viewed on a screen or enacted on a stage. It is much easier for teachers to analyze text of such scripts, but students can experience a much deeper understanding of plays if their work is actualized, beyond the typically two-dimensional read of other people's work.

A Culture of Literacy from the Inside-Out

The idea of luring prospective writers to text can also be viewed from more of a cyclic perspective. When teacher model writing for their students, the "lure" of the text can serve a prompting function. When students are aware that their teachers are writers, too, this can help students see the importance of the craft. It is not simply an exercise to endure. It is an activity that can last a lifetime. Teachers may take part in writing communities about improving their teaching craft, but by committing ideas to text, they can also learn how to emulate the practices of great writers. Universities can play a role in cultivating habits of teacher writers. To meet course work requirements, student teachers or educators enrolled in further education could benefit from their work being featured in education journals or magazines. Rather than decrease publishing opportunities to add status based on the number of rejected articles, it could be beneficial for colleges of education and journal publishers to consider expanding the number of practitioner-type journals available for teachers to develop their professionalism in more authentic ways. It is rare for the direct voice of teacher practitioners to be heard in many academic journals. Many college professors, whose tenure is

dependent on publishing, will interview, analyze and interpret what teachers say, but teacher ideas, tend to be muted.

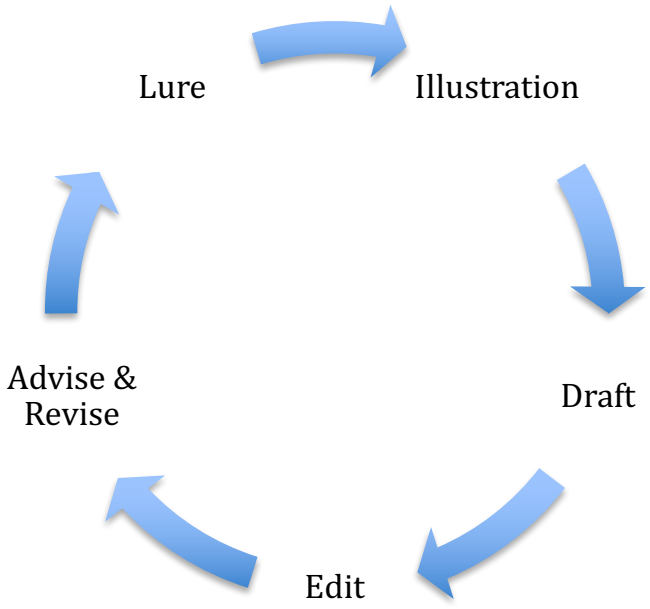
For decades, David Booth, at the University of Toronto, on the other hand, has invited teachers to write with him. His *Talk Project* (1991) in the early nineties involved a collection of teacher action research. Seeing the worth of such a transforming experience, Booth continued to publish his graduate student and mentees work in a series of practitioner books such as *Being Critical* and *Caught in the Middle*. Booth, in his editorial role, meets with his teacher writers throughout the process and then celebrates with them when their collaborative work is published. In this way, Pembroke and Stenhouse Publishers should be recognized for having the foresight to sponsor texts that link experts with practitioners.

At the school level, the practice of systematic collaborative action research is rare, or considered optional as a personal professional development action. For administrators to understand the value of such professional practice, they too, would need to model it for their teachers. Given the reality that few principals engage in or publish their own work at school, for school improvement or strategic planning purposes, there seems to be an inherent gap. How can administrators assess or expect teachers to develop habits that they are not developing themselves? Building a staff of writers, people who can write fiction, documentaries or establish a school-wide writing curriculum, is at the core of building a writing culture. Establishing environments conducive to supporting the growth of teachers as writers may help determine how a school can coordinate a culture of thriving student writers.

It seems commonplace for teachers to be handed extensive teacher guides accompanying literacy programs, with and without professional development to implement in their classrooms. Many of these resources offer a lesson-by-lesson approach, without the input or crafting of the teacher, who knows his or her students best.

As much as it can seem challenging for a student to envision being an author, it can be equally or perhaps more of a stretch for a teacher to identify as a writer. The goal of transforming a school into a culture of writing lives can be supported by a comprehensive and focused professional development program that should be directly connected to the school improvement and strategic plans. For a school-wide writing program to stick and impact student identities, teachers need to embrace the culture as professionals, rather than technicians implementing someone else's plan. Teachers need to be involved in making meaning, and through writing curriculum for their students, and each other, their voices can be heard. In schools where cultures of writing are celebrating the 'lure' serves to generate new illustrations and cycles of text making activity. Figure 16 illustrates an Emerging Model for Building a School Writing Culture.

Figure 16: An Emerging Model for Building a School Writing Culture



Ideally, a school-wide approach to writing mastery would include reaching out to families as writing role models as well. When students can discover from writing adults or older peers about their struggles and challenges of moving ideas to a published form, it can help young writers be more persistent with rigorous revision phases of the craft. Drawing attention to how well prolific writers have the capacity to think and effect how others' think, can increase how young people can come to understand the relevance of learning how to write well.

Unfortunately many teachers are stuck in models that instruct them to follow lessons as repetitive scripts, to focus teaching only on individual tasks, , to assess only products, to keep control of the talk in classrooms, or focus on right answers on multi-choice tests, or to trust that writing skills evolve through reading /alone. Becoming a writer not only demonstrates to students that they have writing models in their lives who craft lessons and material for them daily, but it also gives teachers a voice in collaboratively shaping the vision of the school. Professionals are empowered when they are encouraged to write about what works in their classrooms, how to revise an activity from the web or print resource to make it more authentic and/or how to establish a common language in a school for teaching any subject matter.

Writing for teachers can be somewhat of a lonely process if their narrow audience is for a professor of graduate or continuing education course, outside of the context of their schools. DuFour's (2004) recognition of professional learning communities stops short of helping teachers become deeper thinkers through the process of writing:

> The professional learning community model is a grand design—a powerful new way of working together that profoundly affects the practices of schooling. But initiating and sustaining the concept requires hard work. It requires the school staff to focus on learning rather than teaching, work collaboratively on matters related to learning, and hold itself accountable for the kind of results that fuel continual improvement (p. 6).

When teachers are expected to work on a team to think through and define what is most essential, reduce the number of assignments, or coordinate an aligned curriculum between grades, they are more invested in the plan and therefore have ownership over the direction of teaching and learning. Ultimately such a shift to bring teachers into the world of expertise, through writing, can have far-reaching effects for students. When teachers realize their ideas can be honored they can be open to giving students more autonomy. A culture where teachers write about what they generate for students can help teachers go the distance in terms of coordinating less busy work and more authentic and collaborative writing experiences within a coordinated approach to writing literacy.

Discussion

There are many incredible writing experts who support curriculum that promotes the authentic texts. As educators, we must help move the organization of ELA past individual daily lessons. It takes time to develop writing, not more writing tasks. Creating texts that matter is at the heart of nurturing student voice. Figure 17 lists activities that students in my experience have found more engaging, in contrast with writing topics or tasks students do not find as engaging. The 'what's not so engaging' activities also appear to require less thinking than the expectations outlined in the 'more engaging' column.

Figure 17: Moving from Not So Much to More Engaging Writing Tasks

Not So Much	**More Engaging**
Reading short texts and writing a scripted response for a test or the teacher	Reading short texts of interest and writing a review online
Responding to questions after each chapter in a novel study	Writing a review of a novel on Amazon/other on-line book ordering companies; Re-writing the ending in a novel; rewriting a novel into a script
Writing a biography about people who you never met	Interviewing seniors and writing biographies of real people – to be read by seniors
Writing about literary terms found in poetry or other texts	Using literary terms to add richness to own writing
Writing five paragraphs	Writing a school newspaper article
Writing a pretend application	Writing a real application
Writing about the history of the school	Writing about the design or renovation of the school
Writing about other people's theories	Creating own theories
Responding to questions with prose	Creating tables, making lists; drawing and labeling images; creating instructions for "how to" to make things, play games or follow directions…
Writing by yourself	Writing with others, and for others
Revising own writing	Peer editing (younger students in writing buddy scenarios)

The web is chock full of prompts and pre-writing activities, but when released into the classroom, they can fall flat and simply not be enough to inspire quality work. Some students may write away and complete the task with unwavering focus; others may go through the motion of spilling out words to fill a paragraph, and finally, others may choose avoidance strategies that take the teacher away from 'conferencing' into the collateral world of classroom management. Some charismatic teachers can keep more students on task, but without a deliberate plan for guiding the process, it is doubtful how much a teacher can increase the critical mass of writers in any classroom. Student writing can be propelled by the authenticity of an audience, that can function to motivate the necessary and relentless will of a writer to want to fiercely convey his or her own voice.

With so many educators sporting advanced degrees, it doesn't make sense that there is not more of a cry for reform. The tipping point for professionals may lead to scrapping the foundation that is currently in place, or it may probably adjust, albeit slowly, toward more authentic, collaborative, coordinated, and empowered experiences for all students. Writing is a constructive practice that can help students break through barriers and become the authors of their understandings. Rather than teachers relying on a 'test me what you know' approach, students can show teachers and others what and how they know through a writing process fueled with tools for thinking and innovation. A process –based approach to teaching writing is not new. In the 1970's the *Teachers College Reading and Writing Project* was "borne out of a writing revolution" to help educators understand that they can teach students "to progress through the authentic experience of composing that emulated that of published authors."

While the avid readers tend to be strong writers through osmosis, they may not understand what makes a good piece of writing great. Many teachers might skip the teaching of a writing process if they have a group of strong readers who seem to automatically write well. I would argue that without exposing students to a writing process, where they deliberately re-think their work, teachers are limiting the writing potential of both weaker and stronger students.

According to the Writing Group of NCTE: "Everyone has the capacity to write, writing can be taught, and teachers can help students become better writers." While most educators agree with such a claim, there is less consensus about how to develop strong writers and fewer school-wide systems or initiatives that focus attention on the development of writing quality work through the grades, but across all disciplines. Just as a budget needs to shift specific allotments in order to make room for new initiatives, a school curriculum cannot grow, if time is not distributed differently. If many students must take courses in college to learn how to write, then something needs to change if basic expository practices cannot be mastered in 12 to 14 years. I would argue that teacher writers, who cast a wide net to think about many options and perspectives, can contribute more to the development of sound thinkers and innovators, young people more capable of making meaning in oral, print and digital forms. Reducing the amount of time dedicated to testing and reading comprehension, can give

students room in a jammed curriculum to grow from novice to more expert writers. Reading, writing, speaking, listening and non-verbal communications should not be competing forces; developing exceptional literacy skills requires further attention to more balanced and systematic approaches in English Language Arts. Teachers are strong readers, but those who are supported with professional time to become confident writers, have the capacity to develop deeper understandings of what it takes to build a strong culture of writers in schools.

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