

Welcome to the English Language Arts Systematic Writing Instruction module presented by the National Center and State Collaborative (NCSC). This module will review how to increase opportunities for students with intellectual disabilities to write and improve their writing skills.



This printable PDF version of a NCSC module has been provided for your convenience. The PDF version of the module will be very similar to the online module, with a few revisions to eliminate features that are only necessary in the online learning environment. Because the PDF presentations are the content of the online courses and retain the formatting and some of the features of the modules, we have included the following description. The NCSC professional development courses each consist of one or more modules. To help the learner navigate in the courses, the modules have a uniform design and format. All learning modules follow four themes: plot the course, explore the terrain, check the map, and expand your horizons. In plot the course learners discover what is covered in the module, including their learning objectives and other steps they will follow while viewing the module. In explore the terrain, the learner will engage with the content and learn about the topic covered in the module. In check the map the learner has the opportunity to review and self-assess their understanding. Some of the PDF presentations (printable versions of the modules) will not contain Check the Map sections as there are no self-assessments in the printable PDFs. Finally, expand your horizons offers ways in which the learner can explore the content further, or apply what they have learned. Theme Indicators appear on most slides to tell the user what type of content is contained in the slide.

## STATE THE ISSUES



Special educators need more information on writing instruction.

Special educators need more information on how to develop writing opportunities.



This module will review writing instruction for students with significant intellectual disabilities. This is a relatively new area of instruction for many special educators. More information is needed on what writing may look like and how to develop writing opportunities.

## MODULE GOALS



Know the components of writing instruction.

Describe how reading, writing and communication can be interwoven.

Know what writing instruction looks like.



Our goals are to help special educators understand the basics of effective writing instruction components. What does it mean to weave this instruction within daily activities that provide students with opportunities to read, write about what they read and talk about what they write.

## RELATED CONCEPTS



Here are some concepts that will be discussed in this module. If you would like background on these concepts, click forward on the playbar. If you are familiar with the concepts and do not need additional background, click on the button labeled skip definitions.

- Successful writing instruction
- Principals of Effective Writing Instruction



We encourage everyone to review the related concepts for this module. There are several terms that special education teachers are not familiar with in the context of writing instruction. This includes background information on the concepts of successful writing instruction and the principals of effective writing instruction.

## RELATED CONCEPTS-WRITING INSTRUCTION



Writing instruction for students with intellectual disabilities.

- Writing instruction is most successful when.....
  - It is based on effective writing practices for all students, and
  - It is embedded in a framework of communication instruction that includes opportunities for reading, writing and discussion.
- Teaching writing may be new to many teachers who are just starting content instruction for their students.



This module will review writing instruction and although writing isn't a new concept for us, teaching students with significant intellectual disabilities how to write is new for many teachers. Writing instruction is based on the same research done for general education students and sounds very similar to how we teach students with disabilities. These guidelines apply to writing instruction:

- Provide many opportunities to practice during the day.
- Generalize to a variety of contexts and content areas.
- In writing activities, include reading, writing and opportunities for students to talk about what they have written.

For teachers just starting communication instruction, writing should use the same communication system a student uses for reading and discussion. All students need ways to communicate and communication instruction will either be to initiate communication or build on the system they use.

## RELATED CONCEPTS: PRINCIPLES OF EFFECTIVE WRITING INSTRUCTION



Students need:

- ✓ **frequent, predictable times** to write.
- ✓ An explicit writing process of **writing drafts, revising, and editing** using the supports needed by the student.
- ✓ to be able to **choose** writing topics which may motivate writing.
- ✓ authentic opportunities to write for **real purposes** and **real audiences**.
- ✓ Use writing as a tool to strengthen **reading comprehension**.

Hudson, Browder (2012)



The research on effective writing instruction includes many of the effective practices we use with students with intellectual disabilities.

Students need frequent, predictable times to practice a new skill and in this case it is writing. This doesn't mean that student's have 'writing time' once a week but that activities around content should provide opportunities to read, write, and talk about what they are learning.

Students should have to make choices about what to write.

Effective writing includes explicit instruction in the writing processes of **writing drafts, revising and editing** using the supports needed by the student. Authentic opportunities to write include writing for a purpose and a real audience. When writing is incorporated into reading, writing and discussion, writing then becomes a tool to strengthen reading comprehension.

## WRITING, READING AND COMMUNICATION

What does this look like for students with intellectual disabilities?



How do you ensure that students receive instruction on writing, reading and communication? Where do you start with either young students or students who haven't had appropriate grade level content instruction? For this very broad topic, this module will provide you with the basic strategies and the references to help you find more detail. As always for students with intellectual disabilities, the instruction is individualized. This is a starting place.



## FOUNDATIONAL ENGLISH LANGUAGE ARTS INSTRUCTION



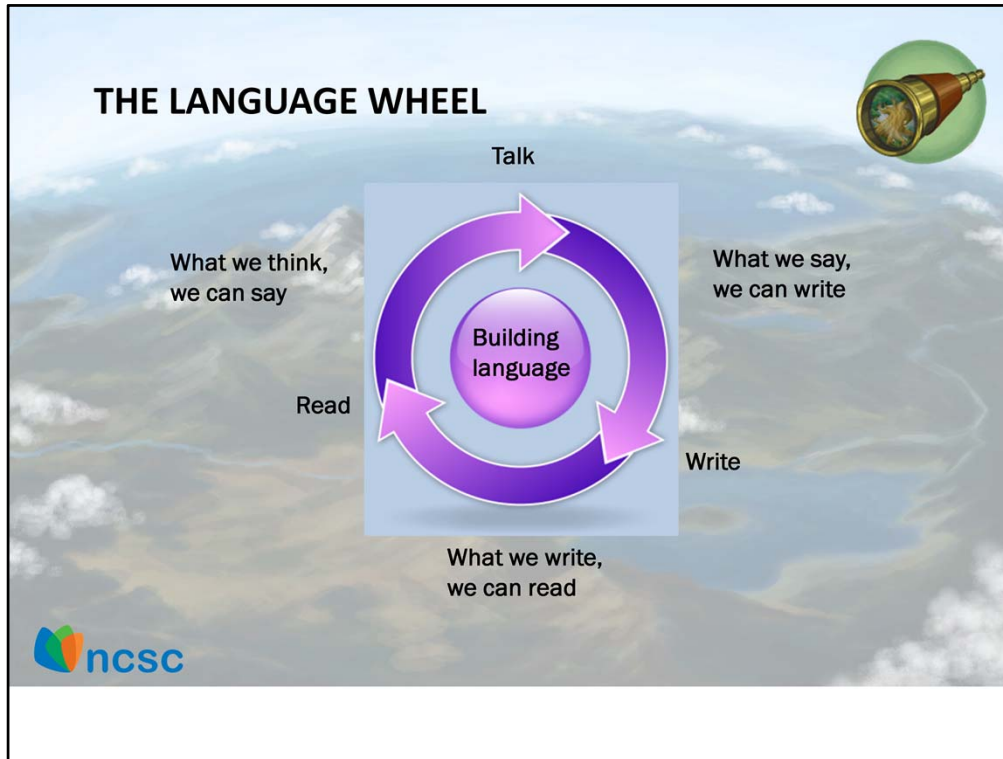
- Foundational Skills-  
Early, systematic, and explicit teaching of the foundational reading, writing and communication skills is required.
- During the K–2 years, teaching of all aspects of English Language Arts should take place simultaneously and be coordinated.



The CCSS and many state standards indicate that accomplishment of Foundational Standards in the early grades (and therefore instruction in Foundational Skills) should not be thought of as prerequisite to other aspects of the ELA Standards. Rather, instruction in Foundation Skills should occur in concert with instruction related to Reading, Writing, Speaking and Listening, and Language. This is an approach that many special educators already use to introduce and generalize academic skills.

Foundational skills should be taught early, at grades K-2, **and** should occur simultaneously with the grade level content.

If students are in higher grades and just starting ELA instruction, teaching of all aspects of ELA – including foundational skills in reading and writing - should take place simultaneously and be coordinated with grade level content



Several modules from NCSC use The Language Wheel model, which was included in Susan Kempton’s book **Let’s Find Out!**, to exemplify what interwoven reading, writing and communication instruction might look like. Although Kempton’s book is about young children needing to broaden their language, experiences and background knowledge, the basis of this model holds true for students with intellectual disabilities using age/grade appropriate content. Communication instruction, language development, reading and writing should all be inherently intertwined in daily instruction. Kempton suggests recording cooperative dialogue, thinking through pictures and words and constructing meaning of words by looking at pictures and words together. Specifically selected reading material and a variety of related objects and materials that can be touched and moved around add to the language experience of content. The material used depends on where you start instruction for each student but it is always based on grade level content.

In this model, students:

- Read stories or information
- Talk about stories/information
- Retell stories/information
- Write stories/ information

## EFFECTIVE WRITING INSTRUCTION



Daily reading activities that provide opportunities to write and talk about what they have read.

- ✓ **frequent, predictable time** to write
- ✓ an explicit writing process of **writing drafts, revising and editing** using the supports needed by the student
- ✓ to be able to **choose** writing topics which may motivate writing
- ✓ authentic opportunities to write for **real purposes** and **real audiences**
- ✓ writing as a tool to strengthen **reading comprehension**

Hudson, Browder (2012)



The research on effective writing instruction includes many of the effective practices we use with students with intellectual disabilities including daily reading activities that provide opportunities to write and talk about what they have read. Reading and writing are for all students. Students need frequent, predictable times to practice a new skill and in this case it is writing. This doesn't mean that students have 'writing time' once a week but that activities around content should provide opportunities to read, write and talk about what they are learning. Students should have to make choices about what to write. Effective writing includes explicit instruction in the writing processes of **writing drafts, revising and editing** using the supports needed by the student. 'Writing' can be done with tactile representations, pictures, sentence strips and or words. When writing is incorporated into reading, writing and discussion, writing then becomes a tool to strengthen reading comprehension.

## WHAT TO WRITE ABOUT



What does Tom look like?



The NCSC wiki has 3 English Language Arts UDL units as sample instruction of the common core. The middle school unit is based on the text *Tom Sawyer* by Mark Twain. This is an example of teaching students to write about Tom as a character by looking at the components of characterization. They go on to describe him as funny and brave. Writing for this student is the selection of picture symbols from an array of choices to talk about what they've read.


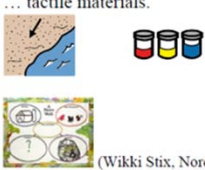
Developing writing instruction includes building the student's background knowledge which many of our students lack. We need to provide them reading instruction that in turn provides them with something to write about. Here are a few suggestions.

Students need exposure and experience with genres both *fiction*, such as comedies, mysteries, drama, fables, and prose and *non fiction* such as biographies. Story books are not enough. As students progress through the grades the reading material changes. Standards reflect the skills needed to read and understand not only poetry and literature but informational text.

Students need opportunities to study and read the genre in which they want to write. Examine notable examples from literature. Notice the writer's techniques, author's craft, and study text structure. The basic format of a story or narrative is that it has a beginning, middle and end. Within these parts the author uses text structure of descriptions, sequencing of events, cause and effect and problem and solution to enhance his writing.

## PATHWAYS TO LEARNING FOR STUDENTS WITH COGNITIVE CHALLENGES




Write by ... or write using ...	Pathways to writing in all areas of the curriculum
<p>... tactile cues</p> 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Use the student's mode of communication to make a "written" comment when an adult or peer edits work with a student.</li> </ul>
<p>great job / needs more work</p> <p>... tactile materials.</p>  <p>(Wikki Stix, Nordin)</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Explore sand and tactile materials to provide kinesthetic feedback. Use them to draw or write numbers.</li> <li>Use finger paint as a means of expression - make a print and publish the image.</li> <li>Write with Wikki Stix - create tactile graphics which adhere to almost any smooth surface and provide a raised line effect. Use them to form numbers, or as points or lines on a graphing map (Dacey).</li> </ul> <p style="text-align: right;">Denham, 2004</p>



A document called Pathways by Anne Denham, provides multiple examples of presenting material and ensuring that students have a way to respond either in answering questions or writing about what they have learned. Denham exemplified the principles developed by CAST of Universal design for Learning (i.e., multiple means to representation, presentation and engagement) and covers most communication strategies. This resource, the NCSC UDL Units in English Language Arts and the NCSC modules on developing lessons, using general education lessons to provide access and increasing text complexity are all located on the NCSC Wiki.


## AWARENESS OF TEXT STRUCTURES



Engage students in wide reading and read aloud to gain familiarity with text structure (how the author organizes their stories).

Examine story structure – stories are organized in predictable ways.

Knowledge of story structure can also improve students' comprehension.  
Hudson, Browder (2012)



Individualizing material and offering ways to respond is used with all content. Once access to material is provided the student can access the concepts within grade level content standards. Most states include standards on characterization, plot, and setting or story structure.

Understanding a story's structure not only improves students' reading comprehension but helps them break down the components of plot, story sequence, character and setting and helps them organize their thoughts about what they've read or have had read to them.

Both general and special educators' use of graphic organizers are one way to examine a story's structure and compare one story to another. Flow charts, T charts and Venn diagrams can be taught in systematic ways for assisting students with intellectual disabilities' understanding. This understanding will help them start to compose or write about what they've learned.

## GRAPHIC ORGANIZER




Setting	Character Interactions	Tom
	talk about rase	Lee win!
	Tom Samuel	trics Samuel do bak withut hem
	Tom Caplin Canon tak yell	Ex ited scared to drive bote



For many of our students, a Venn diagram or T chart can be used to help students organize what they've read or heard. Drawings, picture symbols and or words are used in this initial writing activity example. From here students can write about the settings, character interactions and about Tom Sawyer.

## Accessible Grade Level Text ORGANIZED INFORMATION



Ramo forgets his hunting spear and

detail

main idea

detail

Island of the Blue Dolphins by Scott O' Dell

detail

Graphic Organizer


Write or cut out a sentence. Put picture here or draw.

beginning

middle

end

tribe	kayaks	Ramo	Ghassan
Akut	hunting	alone	lonely
friends	island	amusement	girl
trust	island	Bantu	forgive
hope	animals	weapons	love



Grade level text in a graphic organizer may also look like this- information/text organized in a specific way to help the reader understand the concepts, for example – main idea and details, sequence of events are identified giving the student several areas to write about.



## GRAPHIC ORGANIZERS

Character Traits: *Emily Dickinson: A Biography* by Connie Ann Kirk



Graphic organizers can be as complex as the previous picture word format or 4 trays using tactile representations for character traits. What does writing about the character of Emily Dickenson, with support, look like? A series of trays prioritized by the student and captioned by the teacher or a peer.

- Emily was kind to animals.
- She loved to work in her garden.
- She was in love.

## DRAFT, REVISE, EDIT



Tom was on  
the Lee. He  
tricked  
Samuel. Tom  
was excited  
about the race.  
Tom drove  
the boat.

UNIT 3 - Lesson 4 - ER

Robert E. Lee

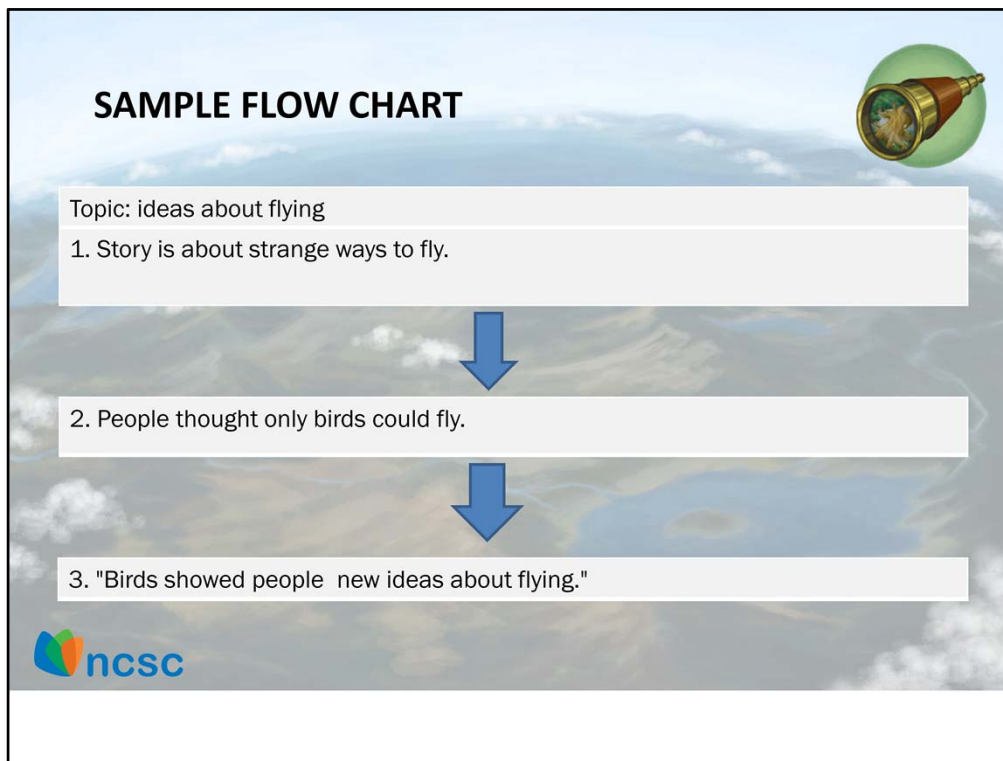
tricked

TRICK

Graphic resources: All symbols with permission from Meyer-Johnson Dynamic, ateamboat, picture  
net-0129487



This is an example of the student's final writing product. Key vocabulary words are highlighted and picture symbols are used as support or cues as the student presents his writing to the small group. From this there are so many opportunities to talk, from how Tom showed that he was excited to what kind of boat the student likes.



Organizing thoughts can be the beginning of a writing activity. This example was modified from a larger activity in the middle school LASSI on the NCSC Wiki. For more information on prompting refer to the Instructional Resource Guide on the Wiki.

Systematic instruction on a writing activity might include questions that help the student focus on specific sections of the text. What is the topic? What is the first sentence? Student chooses sentence strip or points to picture and places it on the flow chart.

Using least intrusive prompting, provide the task direction/natural cue (e.g., "What is the topic? What is the first sentence?")

Always give the student an opportunity to make the correct response before providing any prompting on each step of the task analysis.

Use the least intrusive prompt first and progress to more intrusive prompts until the learner responds correctly (usually 3 to 5 second delay between prompts).

If the student makes an error, immediately provide the most intrusive prompt to ensure the student makes a correct response. For literal text recall, if the student makes an error, immediately move on to the next prompt in the hierarchy.

Encourage and praise the student after independent, correct responses

The prompt hierarchy is on the NCSC Wiki in the Instructional Resource Guide. A Sample Script for CTD (Teaching Expressive Symbol Identification) is provided with a detailed script

and possible student responses.

## SCAFFOLDING STUDENTS' WRITING EXPERIENCES



- Shared Writing
- Interactive Writing
- Guided Writing
- Independent Writing



Independent writing doesn't come next. Looking back on what the student placed under Tom on the chart, composing a sentence or sentences telling about how excited Tom was to drive the boat will take time as will each written product. Scaffolded writing instruction begins with

### Shared Writing

Teacher and students create the text together but the teacher does the actual writing using the student's communication system.

### Interactive Writing

Teacher and students create the text together and share the pen or communication system to do the writing.

### Guided Writing

Teacher plans and teaches a lesson to small group.

### Independent Writing

Students engage in the writing process to create their own self-selected writing products.

After every writing activity should be an opportunity to talk about what they wrote. Read, write, Talk is embedded in every stage.

## WHAT DO WRITERS DO TO DEVELOP WRITING IDEAS?



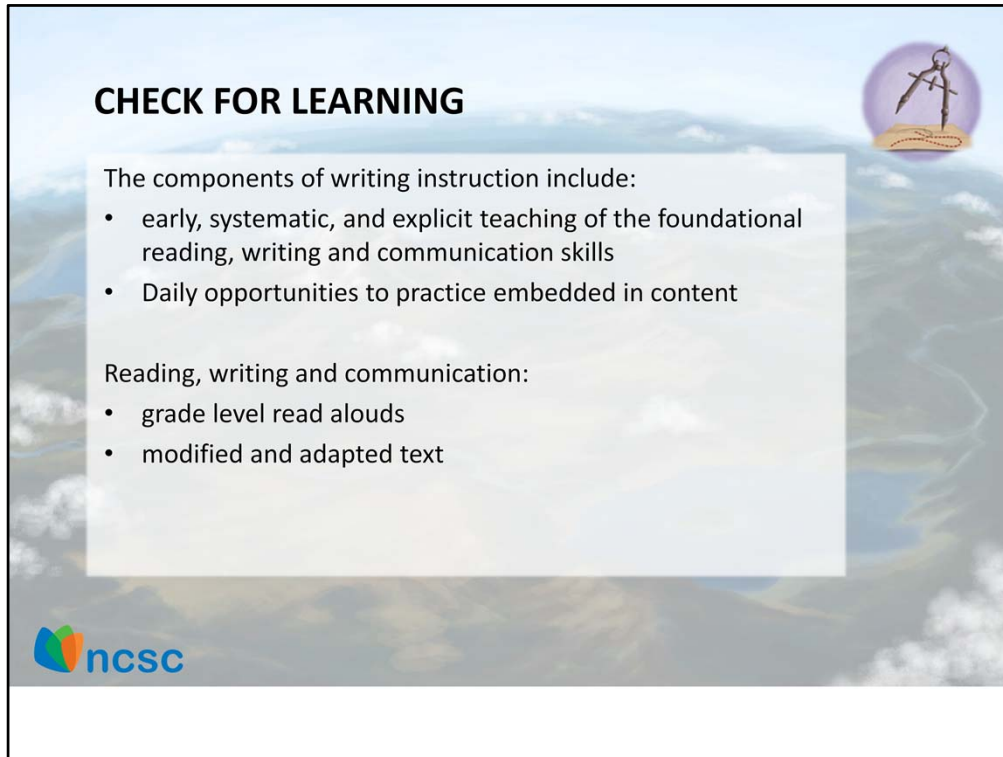
- Read and read aloud stories and articles
- Research a topic
- Visit places such as museums
- Interview family members
- Listen to a story about a family member
- Observe
- Learn a new skill

Hudson, Browder (2012)



How do you get started with writing? To begin writing you should consider the topic and develop ideas about the way you want to present the topic. Here are a few ideas for conversation and writing starters but the general education teacher at your student's grade level will have even more.

Read and read aloud stories and articles  
Research a topic  
Visit places such as museums  
Interview family members  
Listen to a story about a family member  
Observe  
Learn a new skill




## CHECK FOR LEARNING

The components of writing instruction include:

- early, systematic, and explicit teaching of the foundational reading, writing and communication skills
- Daily opportunities to practice embedded in content

Reading, writing and communication:

- grade level read alouds
- modified and adapted text

 ncsc

The components of writing instruction include daily opportunities to practice, embedded in content area instruction, and early, systematic, and explicit teaching of the foundational reading, writing and communication skills.

Reading, writing and communication can be interwoven by providing activities that start with grade level read alouds and modified and adapted text.. The Language Wheel shows the progression of reading, writing about what is read and talking about what was written. Interwoven instruction includes organizing information and can be systematic.

Writing instruction includes graphic organizers.

## NEXT STEPS



This concludes the Systematic Writing Instruction module.

### **What to do next?**

- Review the references.



This concludes the content of the Systematic Writing Instruction module.



## RESOURCES AND REFERENCES



[www.CAST.org](http://www.CAST.org)

Denham, A. (2004).

[\*Pathways to learning for students with cognitive challenges\*](#)

Lexington, KY: University of Kentucky, Interdisciplinary Human Development Institute. (PDF : 990 Kb)

Hess, K., & Biggam, S. (2004). A discussion of "increasing text complexity" Grades K-HS. Published by NH, RI, and VT Departments of Education as part of the New England Common Assessment Program (NECAP) Grade Level Expectations. For Reading. (on line). [www.nciea.org](http://www.nciea.org).

Hudson, M. E., & Browder, D. M. (2012). *Guidelines for Adapted Grade Level Text for Students with Significant Cognitive Disabilities*. University of North Carolina at Charlotte for the NCSC Project which is funded by Department of Education (PR/Award #: H373X100002, Project Officer, Susan.Weigert@Ed.gov)

Kempton, S. P. (2014) *Let's Find Out. Building Content Knowledge with Young Children*. Stenhouse Books, Portland, ME.



Here is the list of reference materials used in the writing of this module. They will provide further detail on the content covered.