

Stop Teaching Grammar; Start Teaching Writing

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BROAD VIEW vs. CLOSE-UP VIEW

- ▶ What are the basic differences between Photographs A and B? In other words, what does the broad view (Photograph A) provide, and what does the close-up view (Photograph B) provide?

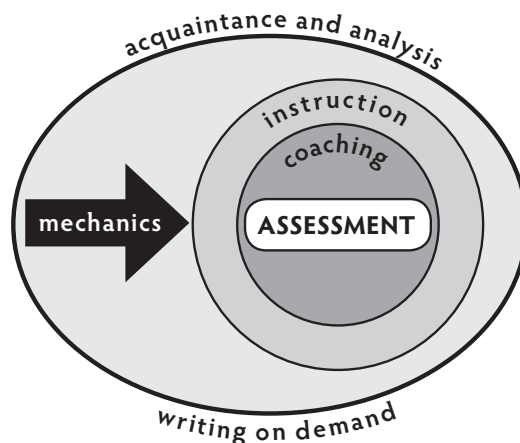
- ▶ Contrast what the two views provide in a statement—e.g., A broad view provides _____, while a close-up view provides _____.

BROAD and CLOSE-UP VIEWS:

Equipping and Engaging Writers

A broad context exposes developing writers to writing models of varying lengths in diverse genres. A broad context also creates opportunities for developing writers to regularly practice their craft.

Complementing the broad context, targeted teaching helps developing writers assume a close-up view of their writing and address specifics that can improve their communications.



CONTEXT ELEMENT: Acquaintance and Analysis

Researchers suggest the best way to teach students “how to create a piece of written discourse as a holistic, global experience in which the thoughts of the writer are synthesized into a whole work that will achieve that writer’s purpose” is to give them the widest possible exposure to writing models AND then *discuss the writing* (not the content) with the students (Mathers, Benson, & Newton, 2006).

Example

One of the most unexpected findings of recent years is that DNA, or deoxyribonucleic acid, is not randomly jammed into the nucleus, as one might stuff cotton into a teddy bear. Rather, DNA is folded into the nucleus in a complex and tightly regulated manner. The reason for this molecular origami: cellular career options. Fold the DNA one way and the cell will become a contributing member of your liver. Fold it another way and the cell will become part of your busy bloodstream. Fold it a third way and you get a nerve cell—and the ability to read this sentence.

—from *Brain Rules* by John Medina (2008, p. 53)

CONTEXT ELEMENT: Writing on Demand

Follow the directions for the prompts given below.

In _____, we...

- 1.
- 2.
- 3.

I learned...

I think...

I want to know...

I plan to...

CLOSE-UP ELEMENT: Mechanics

Mechanics is a general term for grammar, punctuation, and usage. Examples include identifying a sentence's parts of speech, using a comma and conjunction to join independent clauses, and maintaining consistent verb tense.

- ▶ Research indicates that **almost no relationship** exists between mechanics instruction and writing achievement.
- ▶ Mechanics should be taught from the understanding that their purpose is to help the writer communicate more clearly with the reader
- ▶ Mechanics should be taught as a means of thinking—a way of helping students make their writing more “meaningful, well-constructed,” and “information bearing” (Rothstein, Rothstein, & Lauber, 2007, p. 72). Instruction and practice need to progress beyond the recall and identification levels to the point of multiple and diverse use.
- ▶ Mechanics is a means to an end, *not an acceptable end*

- ▶ To give mechanics their proper attention AND their proper place in writing instruction, selection of what to teach should be guided by two considerations: 1) elements that occur frequently or could be naturally utilized widely by students at the grade level, and 2) elements that enable the students to apply skills of revision appropriate for the grade level.
- ▶ Mechanics elements should be viewed and taught as PREREQUISITES to revision skills. In your own words, what is a prerequisite? How is thinking of mechanics as prerequisites different from how mechanics is often taught?

MECHANICS to REVISION SKILL to GENRE: AN EXAMPLE

TEACHING WRITING: PRINCIPLES OF EFFECTIVE INSTRUCTION

- ▶ Exposure to powerful writing combined with analysis and discussion of the writing provides students with the best way to teach students “how to create a piece of written discourse as a holistic, global experience.”
- ▶ Writing is a means of learning; therefore, writing should be a regular, even daily, practice *in every academic discipline*.
- ▶ “Writing on Demand” provides students with opportunities to make revision skills part of their thinking while drafting. It improves student writing by equipping students to produce better raw material for revision.
- ▶ Mechanics instruction alone has “almost no relationship” to writing achievement. Anything taught in isolation tends to stay isolated.
- ▶ Mechanics should be taught as prerequisites to revision skills. Instruction should flow from mechanics to associated revision skill(s) to writing within a genre that provides opportunities for applying the revision skill(s).
- ▶ Decisions about what mechanics’ elements to teach should be heavily influenced by two considerations: 1) elements that occur frequently or could be naturally utilized widely by students at the grade level, and 2) elements that enable the students to apply skills of revision appropriate for the grade level. A focused stop enables they elements of instruction that will equip writers.
- ▶ Skills are processed most effectively through direct instruction *that includes modeling*.

- ▶ In writing, students construct significance by transforming thought into words. Their completed writing represents a constructed response that requires performance criteria for a fair assessment

CONCLUSION

“This new perspective of writing dictates that I teach differently. I must teach students how to revise. I must encourage them to not only express their thoughts, but instruct them how to sculpt those thoughts. Everyone may have something to say, but only those with the tools to express it elegantly, inventively, or intelligently will actually be heard. I want to teach students how to be heard. I want to teach students how to write, so I must teach them how to revise. I must teach them to craft.”

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