Content-Area Writing

Every Teacher's Guide

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Acknowledgments

At the Academy Awards, if you try to thank everyone who helped you win that Oscar, the orchestra will start "playing you off" after about thirty seconds. They will drown you out and make you shut up. That can't happen in books, but maybe it should.

Between us, we have written nineteen books, and after nineteen sets of acknowledgments, we have already thanked virtually every person on the planet, including our spouses, children, parents, siblings, cousins, and ancestors; our current and former students; our own teachers from back in elementary school; our camp counselors, sports coaches, and Scout leaders; our current colleagues, principals, deans, department heads, and bosses; and our increasingly crucial personal support crews, the hardworking acupuncturists, yoga instructors, masseuses, and physical therapists who keep our bodies together so we can still think. In one book, Smokey even acknowledged the musicians whose tunes he listens to while writing (thanks again, Steven Tyler, Ted DeMille, and JT).

So this time around we'll just say: **You know who you are, and we love you all! Goodnight!**

Well . . . maybe *just a few* specific thanks. For us, it all comes down to kids, teachers, and our wonderful publisher.

☞ Our gratitude to all the students who contributed samples of their writing and stories about their writing experiences. We are in awe of what you can do with words. As our Colorado colleague Charles Coleman says: "Often the beauty of student writing is the freshness of its voice." Thanks, kids—without your voices, this book would definitely not be "fresh," with all that means today.

☞ Thanks to all the teachers who invited us into their classrooms to coteach, observe, and steal their best ideas. With some of you, we came in the flesh and spent many days together; with others, we talked on the phone and communicated by email. Whatever the delivery system, we hope that your teaching ideas and assignments appear here fully and accurately. Your professional generosity is a much-needed example in these hard times, when so many forces turn teachers into competitors instead of colleagues.

☞ Steve and Smokey published their first book with Heinemann in 1985. As we now enter our third decade as Heinemann authors, we can testify better than anyone (except maybe Don Graves, Nancie Atwell, and Lucy Calkins) why this

is the premier publisher in education and why the strongest voices in our field are on Heinemann's list. Lesa Scott leads a team that's second to none. Thanks to savvy editor Leigh Peake, le supervisor du production Abby Heim, marketing maestro Pat Carls, overall guru Maura Sullivan, the left side of our brains, Melissa Wood, back cover concoctor Eric Chalek, and Marissa DuPont, who can actually decipher Smokey's handwriting. Special hero-category thanks go to our production editor, Patty Adams. She received the worst kind of manuscript you can get in this business—late and long—and whipped it into a beautiful and, we hope, coherent book. Finally, when we take our books and ideas on the road, the way is paved by the redoubtable Vicki Boyd, Angela Dion, Cherie Bartlett, Karen Belanger, money wizard Kristine Giunco, and everyone else up in "the balcony."

We really *do* love you all.

Come to think of it, we'd also like to thank each other. In this book, we recommend that students should sometimes write *together,* coauthoring texts just as people in American workplaces do every day. On this topic, at least, we are certainly no hypocrites. We've just found out that if two's company, three's a delight.

Though each of us has previously written a fair amount, this is our first book together. And there's never been a smoother, more seamless process than this one. Whether Steve was walking the Great Wall in China, or Smokey was packing to move to New Mexico, or Nancy was trying to grade 150 student papers, somebody always stepped in and took up the slack. Writing books is never easy or stress free, but this one was a joy to work on—together.

—Smokey, Steve, and Nancy
December 4, 2006

[*Music swells.*]

Oops, we almost forgot to thank our families—Elaine, Nick, and Marny; Susan, Mark, and Daniel; [*louder music*] and Bill—for their constant support and unfailing . . . *FADE TO BLACK*

Writing to Learn

Remember the last time you went to the grocery store? Did you bring a list with you? We sure hope so, because whenever we go shopping listlessly, we always forget the bread and the milk while piling up the cart with unplanned purchases, costly treats, and calorific impulse buys. That's why we need a list: to help us remember things, to plan and organize our shopping behavior, and, perhaps, to stick to the budget and the diet, no matter how tempting the treats might be in aisle 6.

The humble grocery list is an example of *writing to learn* (WTL). You probably use more of this kind of writing in your everyday life than you realize. Maybe you leave notes around the house for yourself or other family members, make holiday card or gift lists, jot reminders on a calendar or in a Palm Pilot, and dash off emails that take care of assorted everyday chores. If you are trying to make any kind of decision—how to balance the household budget, what to name the new baby, how to remodel the attic—you are probably using some form of writing, scratching, or noodling with paper (or the computer). Recently, while hunting for a new house, coauthor Smokey Daniels and his wife, Elaine, found themselves using a pro-and-con list to decide whether to make an offer on a particular property:

27 Tall Tree Drive

Pluses	*Minuses*
lots of square footage	far from town
great views	high maintenance costs
outdoor areas	kitchen appliances old
vaulted ceiling	bathroom fixtures ugly
huge kitchen	office space very small
satellite TV antenna installed	dialup internet access

And no, the Danielses didn't buy the house on Tall Tree. Using this little bit of writing to learn, they were able to examine both sides of the available information more carefully. (And, after all, who wants to go back to dialup Internet access now?)

What we are doing in all these modest, everyday instances is using writing as a tool of thinking. We are using writing to find out what's inside our heads, to dump ideas down on a page so we can play with them, move them around, make connections, figure out what's important, cross some out, and highlight others. In other words, we are *thinking*. And this kind of thinking, using writing as a kind of torque wrench of the mind, is officially called *writing to learn*.

Hearing this, you might say, "Aw shucks, that scratching I do? That's not really writing." (Well, you probably wouldn't literally say "aw, shucks," but you get the idea.) Don't be so modest. Denying that your jotting is really writing is like saying that, for example, skimming a document isn't really reading. Hey, skimming is a vital thinking strategy that proficient, literate people know how to use when it's the right tool for the job. Just think how cumbersome life would be if we had only one approach, one rate, one all-purpose form of reading in our cognitive repertoires. Same for writing; there are different types for different tasks.

A story: Among the women in Harvey's family, there is an old joke that when you copy down a cooking recipe for a friend, you always leave out one crucial ingredient. That way, no matter how earnestly Marge tries to duplicate your lemon chiffon cheesecake, hers will never taste quite as good. We do the same thing in our classrooms every day—we leave out key ingredients when we give kids the recipes for reading, writing, and thinking. (Unlike the omissions of the diabolical Daniels women, ours are inadvertent.) Writing to learn is a great example of one of these missing ingredients.

If we competent adults use writing-to-learn activities in our lives, maybe it is not just an "aw, shucks" throwaway, but a window into how smart people think. Maybe using a wide variety of casual writing and graphic representations is actually one of the keys to our success. Maybe our little writing to learns (or WTLs), among other factors, have helped us cope with college, become an expert in a complex discipline of

knowledge, get ourselves a job and a life, and call ourselves a grown-up and a teacher. And maybe all the personal, informal writing that we have done for our own purposes over the years has also paved the way for us to create larger, more public documents when the time came for that. In fact, if we look back at our own writing lives with more than the usual scrutiny, we can probably notice that when we wrote successful big pieces in life or in school, they often began with or grew out of some humbler jottings, lists, or scratched outlines.

Writing to Learn in School

In the next two chapters, we will show you fifteen ways to use writing to learn in your classes. As you choose to implement these, you will be showing your students some of the tricks of the thinking trade, giving them new tools for delving into your subject matter.

We want to be crystal clear: WTLs are different from the more formal or *public* writing tasks teachers commonly assign students—like term papers, research reports, and critical essays. It's important to understand the differences and to handle each type appropriately. In graphic form, the contrast looks like this:

WRITING TO LEARN	PUBLIC WRITING
short	substantial
spontaneous	planned
exploratory	authoritative
informal	conventional
personal	audience centered
one draft	drafted
unedited	edited
ungraded	assessable

To elaborate a little:

Short: Unlike a term paper or major project, WTLs—whether lists, notes, or instant messages—tend to be brief in length on a page and in composing time. They are bits of writing that we do in quick bursts, not in extended composition. They don't take up much of a page or a screen. Often, we write them on index cards or small pads of paper, or in a little box on a web page.

Spontaneous: A WTL is done off the top of our heads, just to get things down. We don't go rent a garret apartment in Paris and wait for the muse to strike. We don't *plan* lists, notes, or jottings the way you might carefully map out a longer, more

formal and public piece of writing. They come to us quickly, and often *while* we write, more ideas arrive and go down on the page.

Exploratory: In writing to learn, we use writing as a tool to help us figure stuff out, not as a way of announcing with certainty what we already know. WTL is writing in process, along the way—it's writing that doesn't necessarily know where it is going when it begins. When we start a grocery list, we don't know everything we need to buy. That's why we list! We use writing as a tool to help us develop a set of possibilities or goals for future action.

Informal: WTL is casual language, dressed down, relaxed and ready to spend a quiet evening at home. On a grocery list, we don't need to write *Hellmann's Mayonnaise*; *mayo* may be all we need. And when dashing off an instant message, we can use all the emoticons and shorthand we want. BTW, don't 4GET that so-called Internet jargon like ASAP, R&R, and FYI had already entered the standard language B4 the first silicon chip was ever cooked. KWIM?

Personal: Mostly, WTL pieces are *for us*, the writers, not someone else. When we are done with that grocery list, we don't mail it off to the editors of *The New Yorker* magazine, hoping they'll publish it and launch our literary careers. WTLs are not mainly concerned with reaching, pleasing, or informing an audience—they are created to help us think, to get some work done, to plan, to collect our thoughts. Occasionally, WTLs may be shared with other people, as with instant messages and notes around the household, but the audience is usually very small, safe, and uncritical.

One Draft: Almost a defining characteristic of WTLs is that, in keeping with their nature as brief, spontaneous, utilitarian jottings, they are not revised. You wouldn't go back and create a second draft of your grocery list. Hey, if it helped you to shop effectively, it has done its work. Nor would you do a second edition of an IM to a friend or a note left for your spouse on the kitchen table. Not to say we all haven't written a few quick notes we regret, but still.

Unedited: Correcting errors and editing grammar have little role to play in WTLs. What's the difference if you misspell catsup (or is it ketchup?) on your grocery list? If you get the red stuff, you're good to go. No one is going to see it anyway, unless you (like everyone else) leave the list in the bottom of the shopping cart. Even so, whoever finds it probably won't be an English teacher with a red pen in hand.

Ungraded: Speaking of red pens, they have no place in writing-to-learn activities. That's a big difference between WTL and public writing. In formal writing, kids' products may be reviewed, ranked, scored, rated, or otherwise evaluated. But just

Shouldn't Kids' Writing Always Be Graded and Corrected?

The idea of unedited and ungraded writing can make teachers nervous. We've been acculturated to mark up with red ink whatever kids write, without thinking much about it. In fact, to be honest, this labor-intensive kind of grading is one of the main reasons we don't assign more writing in our classes—it takes so darned long to circle all the errors! And that's when we start cursing the English teachers under our breath: *Why haven't they cured this?*

For now we'll just tell you flatly: the intensive correction of student papers does not work; it has never worked and it never will work. Kids' writing does not improve when teachers cover their papers with corrections, no matter how scrupulous and generous that kind of feedback may seem. There's voluminous research showing this, going back decades (Zemelman and Daniels 1988, 20–30). And still we teachers do it. And our departments require it. And the parents expect it. We are all trapped in this dysfunctional, unscientific, and staggeringly time-consuming tradition. The problem is, it doesn't grow better writers.

So, with writing to learn, we break with this tradition. But still you might wonder, if we allow unedited and ungraded writing, won't students' errors and bad habits take root? How are they going to write a decent term paper if we don't correct their mistakes and demand accuracy every time they write? To put it another way, do we impede kids' growth as formal, public writers by encouraging less-crafted writing some of the time?

Well, do you lose your ability to give a formal speech by shooting the bull with the gang at the bowling alley? Do you lose your ability to run if you walk a little bit? The point is that there is a sliding scale of language use that *all* speakers, kids and adults alike, use.

Formal ⟵——————————————⟶ Informal

Speaking or writing informally on one occasion doesn't undermine your capacity to use language formally later. But we all need balanced opportunities to operate across the whole spectrum of language uses, contexts, and levels. If we have students do only short, unedited noodling, we are doing them a big disservice. At the same time, if we have them write *only* big, abstract, third-person research papers, we are depriving them of a vital dimension of writing—indeed one that is often a building block of bigger public texts.

A great feature of WTLs is the way they can grow from something small, private, and embryonic into something bigger, more developed, and public. WTLs are often the seeds, nuggets, or kernels of longer, more polished pieces of writing. When we noodle ideas on a pad, or jot down a diary entry, or chart some pros and cons, we may be building the outline of something more. As you work through this book, you'll see how often smart teachers use quick WTLs as prewriting activities to help launch students on inquiries that end up with big formal, public texts.

Even if you still feel uncomfortable about leaving students' informal writing unmarked up, think of the *time* it would take you to grade it all. It's unthinkable!

We want you use lots of short, spontaneous writing activities in your class—maybe even every day. If you start dragging all those things home to grade, your personal life will be over. What's that you say? You work in a school where the department (or the kids themselves) demands that points be assigned for every piece of work? Fine! Just use all-or-nothing grading. Ten points for doing the WTL activity; zero for not doing it. This is over-the-shoulder grading—you should be able to walk by and assess by glancing at a kid's paper. All you have to keep track of is the four kids who didn't do the work. Everyone else automatically gets ten points in the grade book each time you do a WTL exercise. If you think kids will fake WTLs, announce that you will randomly collect one kid's piece from each lesson. Good deterrent.

like its out-of-school counterparts, writing to learn doesn't get graded. That's not to say that WTLs don't get lots of feedback. We will use them to start discussions, feed small-group work, or review key ideas, right during class.

So those are the traits of this special species of text called writing to learn: free, loosely structured writing with few rules and no penalties.

> *The intensive correction of student papers does not work; it has never worked and it never will work.*

Why WTL Is So Powerful

OK, how can this quick and casual writing help your kids learn physics? Or photosynthesis, World War I, abstract expressionism, the past-perfect tense, or *To Kill a Mockingbird*?

Well, what does teaching consist of? What, exactly, are we doing—and what are the students doing—with the subject matter? How do we arrange the variables of learning: content, time, space, materials, and people? For starters, we usually assign some reading and ask students to write answers to questions about it. And we offer presentations, either a lecture or a lecture-discussion, during which students are required to take notes. These major modes of instruction, both using writing, are time-honored and ubiquitous, but do they really work? Do students engage with the material? Do they understand and remember the content? Are they acquiring knowledge?

We know from learning research that in order for learners to understand and remember ideas, they must *act upon them*. Just hearing or reading words is not enough. We are all intimately familiar with students who truthfully tell us, "I don't remember anything," after reading a chapter or sitting through a presentation (even a great one!),

Quick Writes
Easy Writing-to-Learn Strategies

In This Chapter

1. Writing Break

2. Exit Slip

3. Admit Slip

4. Brainstorming

5. Drawing and Illustrating

6. Clustering

7. Mapping

Got two minutes? That's how little class time some of these activities will take, and yet they can deepen students' thinking, create more engagement, and spark lively discussion in your classroom. Is time tight in your teaching day? Got lots to cover? These simple ideas are the place to start. Try a few strategies and see if writing to learn helps students understand, remember, and use the content you are teaching this week.

Writing Break

What It Is

A teacher friend of ours puts it bluntly: "Writing breaks are a reminder to me to just shut up every once in a while and let the kids think." While we often feel pressured to talk till the bell—to pack as much content as we can into a class period—we also know that kids don't remember as much when they are overwhelmed. As we said in Chapter 1, less content can be more, if more is actually *retained.*

We already previewed this simplest of all writing-to-learns a couple of pages back. And the title says it all. At specific points during class, students stop and reflect in writing on the activities happening or information being presented. Some quick sharing either with partners or the whole class usually follows this writing.

When to Use It and Why

Remember that kids recall between 10 and 30 percent of what they read, hear, and see? Now think of our most common classroom activities: in-class reading, large-group discussion, teacher lecture, film or picture viewing. All of these certainly focus on covering content, yet alone they often leave students remembering far less than we would like. By incorporating *writing breaks* at regular intervals, about every ten to twenty minutes, you can really kick retention up a notch because writing and then talking about it moves the sticking rate into the 70 to 90 percent range.

Play by Play

Getting Started

Before starting your presentation, film, activity, or in-class reading, decide when students are going to stop and write. For a lecture or large-group discussion, you'll probably want to stop about every ten to twelve minutes since that is the maximum attention span adults have for focused listening (and perhaps optimistic for teenagers). For a film, it might be every fifteen or twenty minutes or after a key scene you want the students to zoom in on for further thinking. For examining a textbook illustration, slide, or transparency, students should study the graphic for a minute or two and write about what they see. For in-class reading, students might respond in writing at the bottom of each page or at a designated heading.

Once you've determined the breaks, decide what topics you'd like the students to explore in their writing. Your prompts might be general:

- What piece of information stands out and seems really important? Why?
- What are you thinking about right now?
- What does this remind you of?
- What questions do you still have?
- Rate your understanding of the material on a scale of 1 to 5 (1 low, 5 high). What makes sense? What's confusing you?

Or your prompts might be specific to the content:

- Which character's actions surprised you the most?
- What would you do if you faced this problem?
- What might have happened if Theodore Roosevelt had not overtaken construction of the Panama Canal from France?
- How would you describe the relationship between TRNA and RNA?

Just before you launch into the lesson, form students into pairs for today's writing breaks. They need to be sitting near their partner, each should have a blank piece of paper ready, and they should understand that this exercise depends upon clear, legible handwriting.

Working the Room

When you pause and students write, cruise the room and read over their shoulders. Besides offering the kids a moment to process the information before moving on, this writing time gives you a chance to see if students are stuck or confused anywhere. Even if they are not writing about their confusion, a struggle to write anything is a tip-off as well, indicating an unclear grasp or a possible lack of engagement. Either way, wouldn't it be great to recognize a learning gap ten minutes into the lesson rather than two weeks later, on the unit test?

Putting the Writing to Work

The best way to get students to use this informal writing is to follow with some pair sharing. Once the writing time is up, have students trade papers with their partner and read silently. Next, invite them to continue the conversation out loud, commenting on each other's ideas. After the partner talk, call on two or three pairs for a quick summary of their comments. This large-group part is *very* important because it creates accountability. If students know they might be asked to share, they will talk about their writing versus what happened at last weekend's party. Quickly clarify any questions that arise and then move on to the next segment.

Textbook Connections

Almost all modern textbooks have some questions that go beyond the standard factual-recall, skim-the-text-for-the-answers questions. Why not use some of those high-order-thinking questions for some of your writing break prompts? Modify them so that students respond in writing to these big ideas as they read. And, as mentioned earlier, have the kids look more closely at the charts, drawings, and pictures, the text features that students typically ignore as they read. After all, if they're going to carry around a fifteen-pound textbook for each class, they might as well start making use of those extras that are contributing to the added bulk!

What Can Go Wrong?

Any new strategy takes practice. Writing breaks require students to put thoughts down on paper quickly and clearly. In the beginning, make your prompts specific. That way the kids will be able to narrow their thinking and get something down instead of sitting and staring at the blank page. Also, after you've done writing breaks a few times, have students evaluate their writing with just a few criteria:

> ☞ Did I write for the entire time?
> ☞ How well did I support my ideas with specific details?
> ☞ How well did my writing create some interesting discussion with my partner?

At certain points, collect the writing breaks and give them a stamp, a check, a few points, a comment, something that shows this writing is important to the class. Also, collecting them from time to time will give you useful instructional feedback, plus some samples you can use as models with next year's class.

Example

In a history class, students were asked to examine a rather propagandistic 1860 newspaper drawing depicting Native Americans attacking homesteaders. In her writing break, Christina wrote about what she saw, based on three cues built into the teacher's prompt:

HISTORY

Clothing: The woman is wearing a long blue old-fashion style dress. The Native Americans are wearing loincloths and headdresses. The guy on the ground has his sleeves like he was working.

Things: Hills, a cabin, tree stumps, a river, a shovel, knife. These things say that the settlers live and work a lot outdoors. The Native American holding the knife is attacking the man on the ground.

Feelings: The settlers are scared for their lives because the Native Americans are trying to kill them. The Native Americans are mad because the settlers have moved onto their property. The woman in the back is on the ground begging for her life.

After students wrote for a minute or two, they shared with a partner and then compared their observations with the rest of the class. The kids found that different people noticed different things. No two people interpreted the illustration, something that students viewed as a pretty straightforward exercise, exactly the same.

Variation

A longer-range use for this kind of WTL is to help kids prepare for a test. After having students reread their writing breaks from the unit, ask them to discuss and list what else they remember. Once again, if you notice a certain topic seldom gets mentioned, that's the information to hone in on in your review, giving it the time it needs and not wasting valuable moments on concepts the students clearly control.

Newspaper Front Page

What It Is

Although we know that MS PowerPoint is all the rage, we think it's time that desktop publishing gets some attention as well. Nowadays, most desktop publishing programs (MS Publisher, PageMaker, Print Shop, QuarkXPress) have lots of ready-to-use templates that make for pretty quick work in the computer lab, particularly if the kids avoid altering the original layout. Though most of the newsletter templates run four pages, who says you can't just write the front-page articles and leave the inside copy to the reader's imagination? A newspaper front page can contain articles and graphics related to any topic being studied or researched. The goal is for each student to create a couple of short yet interesting articles that leave the reader wanting more.

When to Use It and Why

As with most of the other public writing examples, the newspaper front page is a great summary activity. After the conclusion of a unit, the kids become reporters, reviewing their notes and textbook for the five W's: who, what, when, where, why, and the big H: how. As with the RAFT assignment, the newspaper articles are written from a perspective other than the writer's. Besides straight news stories, a newspaper front page might also include an advice column, editorial, or feature article. All of these choices require both original thinking and content knowledge.

Also, writing for a newspaper, albeit a fake one, gives students a firsthand opportunity to study how objective news can still ring of subjectivity depending on word choice and how information is presented. In the upcoming *Trojan News* example, students were required to pick a dramatic event from *The Iliad.* Using specific details and style from the text, they needed to retell the story in breaking-news fashion but also create an opinion piece that commented on the event. These students chose to focus on Achilles' slaughter of Hector and his subsequent mistreatment of Hector's body. In the slant of their stories and choice of words (Hector was not defeated by Achilles; he was *murdered*), both articles show clear bias in favor of Troy. Had the newspaper carried the title *Greek Gazette* in its banner, the lead article would have lauded Achilles' heroism while the opinion piece might have supported Achilles' refusal to return Hector's body to his father for proper burial.

ENGLISH

Play by Play

Topic Search

For the newspaper front page, the teacher often stipulates the topic scope and article selections. In the Iliad example, students were required to focus on specific characters and a specific event as they composed a news story and an editorial, but the kids still needed to brainstorm additional characters, events, and potential bystanders that they might use.

Identifying the Audience

Part of the brainstorm process is coming up with an article title. That title should reflect the audience. The writer will have to ask this question: How will I need to write these articles so that they hold the interest of _____? In the case of the example, both articles were written to appeal to Trojans.

Another little twist for the project is coming up with an alliterative newspaper name. Though the example seen later in this chapter is called the *Trojan News,* the *Trojan Times, Telegraph,* or *Tribune* would have sounded a bit snappier! Following is an alphabetical list of common newspaper names. In the banner, almost all start with *The:*

Advance	*Gleam*	*Post*
Advertiser	*Gleaner*	*Press*
Advocate	*Graphic*	*Record*
Beacon	*Guardian*	*Recorder*
Bee	*Harbinger*	*Register*
Bulletin	*Herald*	*Report*
Chronicle	*Independent*	*Reporter*
Citizen	*Informer*	*Republic*
Clarion	*Inquirer*	*Republican*
Colonna	*Inquisitor*	*Review*
Commoner	*Journal*	*Sentinel*
Courier	*Ledger*	*Standard*
Daily	*Life*	*Star*
Democrat	*Messenger*	*Sun*
Dispatch	*Mirror*	*Telegram*
Eagle	*Monitor*	*Telegraph*
Enquirer	*News*	*Times*
Enterprise	*Observer*	*Tribune*
Examiner	*Outlook*	*Voice*

Free Press	*Pioneer*	*Weekly*
Frontier	*Plain Dealer*	*World*
Gazette	*Planet*	

Gathering Information

Though one option is to have students do further research, depending on the assignment a simpler approach is to focus on the information already available in students' notes and textbook. The trick for the writer is to reread the information with new eyes, thinking about how this "news" could be made most appealing to the newspaper's audience.

Prewriting

Between the brainstorming of the newspaper name and the information review, students will have already done some significant planning. The easiest way to move them on to the actual writing is to distribute photocopies of the newspaper front page template you plan to use. The example included here is from Microsoft Publisher. Students will need to plan their stories around specific lengths that will fit on the template. One story accommodates between 175 and 225 words while the other runs between 75 and 125 words. Though stories can go onto a second page, think hard about restricting the writing to those first-page limits. This is an opportunity to force the kids to make every word count! Plus, having thirty front pages to grade versus thirty full newspapers makes a big difference. In addition to the stories, students also need to imagine what else could go into the issue if it were a full-length paper. For example, if they are using the MS Publisher template, they will need to brainstorm items for the "Special points of interest" and "Inside this issue" boxes, both of which can be found on the left-hand side of the page.

Drafting

Since the articles are short, it makes sense to get the rough drafts started and possibly even finished right in class. Because this project will probably need to be completed in the school's computer lab, it's not worth having the kids type the stories up at home unless they're easily able to transfer the files from home to school.

Revision

For this project, it's important to get the content right before it is dumped into the newspaper template. Like the projects described earlier in this chapter, editing groups need to focus on wording, audience appeal, and skillful inclusion of information (see the description of the RAFT activity, beginning on page 159, for the full process). Writers should take turns reading their papers aloud and jotting down specific feedback.

Editing

Once the content is set, it's time to visit the computer lab. First, students need to type their two stories up in a word-processing program and run them through spell check and grammar check. Probably the most important function a grammar check can offer is converting passive-voice sentences to active-voice ones. Next, the kids need to find the word count of each of their stories, keeping the template requirements in mind. This means they might have to add or subtract and then edit again. If you have extra lab time, let the kids print their stories out so they can do some final partner proofreading with hard copies.

Now that students have two relatively clean-looking stories, it's time to start plugging things in. Students will directly type in the title, date, headlines, and left-hand box and columns. This is another time to edit carefully. Even though today's kids learned to use a keyboard before they learned to walk, it doesn't mean they're good typists. Plus, desktop publishing programs often don't do as good a job highlighting errors as word-processing programs. Blow those pages up big on the screen and have partners carefully read through and correct their headlines and columns.

The last step is to use the Insert command to pull the story text from their files and dump it into the newspaper columns. Once that's completed, the kids can spend the remaining lab time searching for the perfect picture or two to finish off their newspaper front page.

Sharing the Writing

The newspaper front pages are quick and fun to read. They can be passed around in the editing groups and each group can vote on the best story, which the writer gets to read before the entire class. Also, because of their visual appeal, front pages are worth posting on the bulletin board. Just remember that if you want them to be read, they've got to be at eye level since the text print is newspaper size: tiny!

What Can Go Wrong?

The biggest problem when using any desktop publishing program is that the kids will accidentally move a text column, erase a graphics box, or otherwise commit technical goofs. This is going to happen; it's guaranteed! So if you're serious about this project, it's *imperative* that you be familiar with the publishing program before you take the kids into the lab. The best way to do this is by creating your own newspaper front page. You'll have worked through the process and pitfalls, and you'll have a model for the students to follow. Also, when the kids are in the lab, having a computer projector hooked up makes a huge difference. When it comes time to create the front pages, you can guide the kids through the steps visually while you also manage the pacing.

How Do I Grade This?

We've included a rubric for grading front pages in Figure 7–5.

Example

After finishing *The Iliad,* the students in Donna Driscoll's freshman English class paired up and wrote accounts of the Trojan War as if they were reporters from either Troy or Greece. Besides needing to represent specific story details in the context of the news articles, students also had to reflect their bias through word choice and phrasing. Figure 7–6 shows a blank template from MS Publisher; Figure 7–7 shows how one group used the template to create their front page on the Trojan War.

Newspaper Front Page Evaluation

Name _____ Date _____ Hour _____

SELF		PEER		TEACHER		
YES	NO	YES	NO	YES	NO	ELEMENT
						1. Do you have a catchy title that uses alliteration?
						2. Do you have an accurate date and volume header?
						3. Have you filled in the "Special points of interest" box?
						4. Have you listed articles and page numbers under "Inside this issue"?
						5. Do you have a consistent serif font style for all text?
						6. Did you use no larger than a 12-point font for the articles?
						7. Do you have a consistent font style for all headlines?
						8. Do your headlines catch the reader's attention as well as pertain to the article?
						9. Are the article headlines slightly larger than the articles?
						10. Did you bold the headlines?
						11. Did you single space the body of each article?
						12. Does a scanned photograph accompany at least one story?
						13. Does the lead (first sentence) of each article grab the reader's attention?
						14. Do your news stories cover who, what, when, where, why, and how?
						15. Do your news stories reflect specific details and elaboration?
						16. Do the news stories reflect accurate depiction of people, characters, events, or content information?
						17. Do the articles reflect the information designated for research or review?
						18. Are headlines free of typos, spelling, and grammatical errors?
						19. Are articles free of typos, spelling, and grammatical errors?

Figure 7–5 *Rubric for newspaper front page*

Newsletter Title

Business Name

Lead Story Headline

This story can fit 175-225 words.

The purpose of a newsletter is to provide specialized information to a targeted audience. Newsletters can be a great way to market your product or service, and also create credibility and build your organization's identity among peers, members, employees, or vendors.

First, determine the audience of the newsletter. This could be anyone who might benefit from the information it contains, for example, employees or people interested in purchasing a product or requesting your service.

You can compile a mailing list from business reply cards, customer information sheets, business cards collected at trade shows, or membership lists. You might consider purchasing a mailing list from a company.

If you explore the Publisher catalog, you will find many publications that match the style of your newsletter.

Next, establish how much time and money you can spend on your newsletter. These factors will help determine how frequently you publish the newsletter and its length. It's recommended that you publish your newsletter at least quarterly so that it's considered a consistent source of information. Your customers or employees will look forward to its arrival.

Caption describing picture or graphic.

Special points of interest:

- Briefly highlight your point of interest here.
- Briefly highlight your point of interest here.
- Briefly highlight your point of interest here.
- Briefly highlight your point of interest here.

Inside this issue:

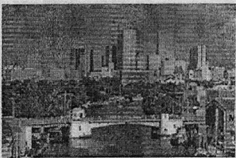| Inside Story	2
Inside Story	2
Inside Story	2
Inside Story	3
Inside Story	4
Inside Story	5
Inside Story	6

Secondary Story Headline

This story can fit 75-125 words.

Your headline is an important part of the newsletter and should be considered carefully.

In a few words, it should accurately represent the contents of the story and draw readers into the story. Develop the headline before you write the story. This way, the headline will help you keep the story focused.

Examples of possible headlines include Product Wins Industry Award, New Product Can Save You Time!, Membership Drive Exceeds Goals, and New Office Opens Near You.

Figure 7–6 *MS Publisher template*

The Trojan News
Special Final Issue

Achilles vs. Hector *written by Michael Blanco*

Today, horse-taming Hector was killed at Achilles' hands. Hector, not wanting to return to the walls of Troy waited outside to face Achilles man to man. But when Achilles arrived his heart was filled with fear and Hector attempted to flee. With strength given to him by Apollo, Hector ran around Troy 3 times, with Achilles close behind. No Greeks threw anything at Hector by order from Achilles. Eventually Athena put an end to it. By turning into one of Hector's brothers, Athena tricked Hector into stopping and facing Achilles. Hector tried to make a deal with Achilles to return his body to his family, but he would have none because of his anger and sorrow.

Achilles threw first, but it missed its mark, because Hector bent down beneath the spears path. Fortunately Athena returned Achilles' spear. It was Hector's shot now and he threw his spear, but it was turned harmlessly away by Achilles' bright shield. Needing another spear, Hector looked to find that his brother was not actually with him. Knowing his fate was sealed, he drew his sword and charged Achilles. But Achilles sprang forward as well, and seeing an

The war continues to rage on, but without flashing-helm Hector, we will eventually meet defeat.

opening in Hector's armor, speared him in the neck. Hector could still speak, dying as he was, and prayed to Achilles to no effect. So ended the fight between Achilles and Hector. City-wasting Achilles was victorious.

More on Hector's Death

It had been confirmed. Our great hero is dead. Hector was murdered by Achilles in a blind rage. According to all reports that we have at this time, Achilles has denied Hector's dying wish, that he be given a proper funeral in the city he once defended, high-walled Troy. I personally think that this sense of revenge for Patroclus has turned Achilles into a bloodthirsty savage, comparable to the citizens of Thracia. There are rumors that Priam is going to go to Achilles to get Hec-tor's body back, but I just hope that the old king returns alive. Achilles has been dragging Hector's body around Troy for the past five days. One of the witnesses of the death of man-killing Hector says that is brother, Deiphobus, was there one second then gone the next. We suspect that this was one of the gods. I think Achilles would not have won that battle without the help from heaven. If Achilles has any shred of honor left within him, he will give back Hector's body.

Figure 7–7 *Michael captures the Trojan spin in his reporting of the war.*