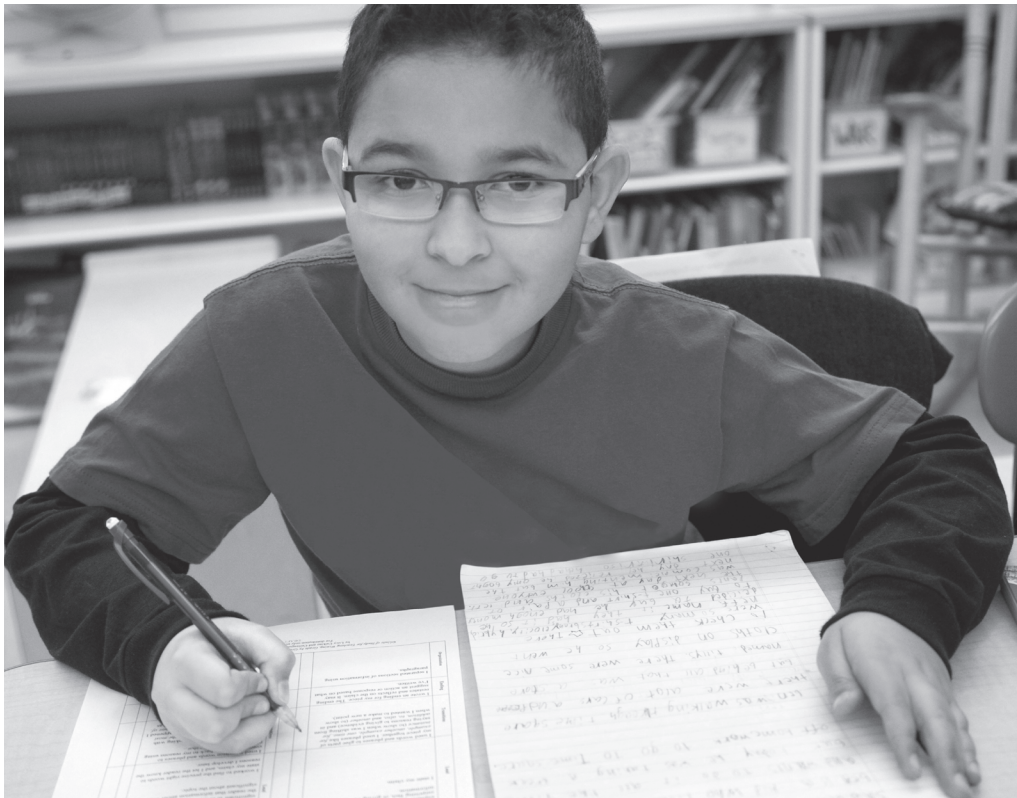# Writing Pathways

Performance Assessments and Learning Progressions, Grades K–8

Lucy Calkins

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Photography by Peter Cunningham

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Letter to Teachers

EXPECTATIONS HAVE NEVER BEEN HIGHER for young writers—nor for you, as a teacher of writing. This book will help you to translate these expectations into clear, understandable, and kid-friendly goals for your student writers, thereby enabling you and your students to rise to the challenge set by these soaring expectations. But a word to the wise: this book will be exponentially more potent if you and your colleagues use it in the company of one another. My colleagues and I have been dazzled by the results when teachers are given opportunities to pore over their collective students' writing. As you do so, you can clarify shared goals for writers, norm expectations across grade levels, and, ultimately, become more expert at providing students with the individualized feedback they need for success.

Writing Pathways was initially written to undergird a grade-by-grade curriculum for teaching writing (Units of Study in Opinion/Argument, Information, and Narrative Writing K–8). Assessment will always work best when it fits tongue and groove into a curriculum. But this assessment system can also undergird curricula other than the one my colleagues and I have developed, as long as you teach students to welcome feedback, to draft and revise their own important writing projects, and to progress along these trajectories in narrative, argument, and information writing. Teachers have told us that because *Writing Pathways* provides crystal clear trajectories of writing development, the book has allowed students to work with zeal toward self-improvement. You'll find that this book can help you and your students tap into the extraordinary power that can be found in rubrics, checklists, and benchmark texts. It can help you provide your students with clear feedback as they work toward concrete, obtainable goals.

An assessment system such as this needs some basis for evaluation, and we've turned to the Common Core State Standards for that grounding. To the best of our ability, we've aligned expectations in *Writing Pathways, K–8* to the world-class standards set forth by the CCSS—and by that, I refer not only to the actual standards but also to the exemplar texts in Appendix C of the CCSS, because those texts offer an interpretation of the standards.

You may question why we've grounded these assessments in the Common Core when some states are standing back from those standards. The reason is this. People who question the Common Core do not question the need for world-class standards, nor the specific expectations embedded in the Common Core. Instead, doubts about the CCSS have come from issues with implementation and from a committment to local control. Still, states that are rejecting the Common Core are nevertheless hurrying to develop their own, similarly ambitious, state standards. We believe that lifting the level of teaching and learning in writing is not something that can wait, and that at

least for the time being, a consensus has coalesced around most of the expectations embedded in the Common Core. While politicians and statewide educational officials continue to joust, teachers and students have work to do.

The fact that these assessments are aligned to the expectations embedded in the Common Core means that the expectations that are built into these rubrics, tools, and benchmark texts ask a lot of students—and of you. For teachers, parents, and students in schools that have not taught writing explicitly in the past, the CCSS expectations (and those in this book) can feel like pie in the sky. I've seen teachers guffaw incredulously at samples of student writing in Appendix C of the Common Core. It is not surprising that people in any school system that has treated writing as a frill, as an extra-credit option, will feel that the standards contained in the Common Core and in this book are inaccessible. After all, consider what students' math skills would be like if only a handful of teachers taught math and if the math instruction that did happen was invented off the cuff by each teacher alone, with no effort to establish a coherent cross-grade curriculum.

But when writing is truly regarded as a basic skill (remember the old emphasis on "reading, 'riting, and 'rithmetic"?) and when teachers are given the curriculum and professional development they need to teach writing well, the standards are suddenly more accessible. When these assessments are used in conjunction with a rigorous, research-based writing curriculum, you will find that although the new expectations are substantial, they are also plausible.

Writers grow like oak trees, in the fullness of time, and for any teacher to bring her students to the ambitious levels that are crucial for success in the twenty-first century, those students need the opportunity to grow over time. To truly prepare students for the future requires a schoolwide, cross-grade commitment to teaching and assessing writing.

The good news is that you need not feel empty-handed when you ask, "How can we help students meet the new expectations in writing?" By offering you this treasure chest of assessment tools, experiences, theories, and techniques, we put the results of three decades of work into your hands.

—Lucy Calkins

About the Assessment System

An Assessment Toolkit

I T FEELS AUDACIOUS TO BE WRITING A BOOK about assessment at this time when the world has gone so data-crazy that many teachers flinch at just the mention of assessment. But the truth is that we cannot let assessment be regarded as part of The Dark Side. There is good reason for the emphasis on assessment. For example, John Hattie, in his seminal text, *Visible Learning: A Synthesis of Over 800 Meta-Analyses Relating to Achievement* (2008), reviewed studies of more than twenty million learners to understand the factors that maximize achievement—and found that it is important for a learner to have crystal clear, ambitious goals, to be given feedback that highlights progress the learner has made toward these goals, and finally, to know of next steps that are within reach. The checklists, rubrics, and benchmark texts within this resource will help you to provide students with that sort of potent assistance so that they aren't just writing, writing, writing, but they are instead working with deliberateness toward specific goals.

The tools contained within this resource will provide your students with clear pathways forward, helping them answer not only the question "How am I doing?" but also the more important question "How can I improve?" By providing them with checklists, rubrics, and texts that illustrate a pathway forward in argument, information, and narrative writing, you help your students develop a sense of efficacy, of "I can do this, if I work hard." With these tools, students can become evidence-based close readers of their own writing. While learning to write, then, they can also learn that when a person applies strategies, works hard, and doesn't give up, that person's work gets visibly better.

But the checklists are not only designed to lift the level of *students' writing*; they are also designed to lift the level of *your teaching*. There is widespread agreement among researchers that the one factor that matters more than anything in student achievement is the quality of your teaching. This explains the ever-increasing focus on teacher evaluation. Whether your school system has adopted teacher evaluation frameworks from Charlotte Danielson, Robert Marzano, Kim Marshall, or others, chances are good that your school leaders are intent on evaluating your teaching and, more specifically, on evaluating the extent to which your instruction is assessment-based. When observers watch your teaching, they want to know what your goals are, how you use data about your students to determine those goals, and how you will assess students' progress toward the goals. Again, that focus on goal-driven instruction comes from research on the factors that accelerate achievement. It has become especially urgent, then, that you get the help you need to keep your finger on the pulse of your students' learning.

Writing provides you with a perfect forum for becoming a more assessment-based teacher, because the results of instruction in writing are both visible and, when

instruction is solid, dramatic. Writing is a subject in which the quality of students' work can improve in only a matter of weeks in ways that are visible to both you and to them, no matter what grade you teach. If your instruction doesn't result in visible changes in your students' writing, something is wrong. By staying attuned to your students' progress, you will be able to adjust your teaching, extending whatever you are doing that *is* yielding results and altering that which is *not*. If you are keeping an eye on your students' progress, this means you can individualize your instruction, helping students with the exact skills they need to work on and noticing which teaching strategies work best. Being attentive to results will provide you with a feedback loop and a self-correcting system.

Of course, you can learn not only when your own teaching yields results, but also when a colleague's teaching yields results. Both this assessment system and the accompanying curriculum (Units of Study in Opinion/Argument, Information, and Narrative Writing, Grades K–8) have been written with the hope that teachers across each grade level and school need not teach alone. Whereas once upon a time it was possible for you to close your classroom door and teach in isolation, expectations are high enough now that you need support from colleagues. This system helps you be part of a collaborative system of continuous improvement.

Michael Fullan, one of the foremost authorities on change, points out that the problem in education is not resistance to change but the presence of too many changes, uncoordinated with existing approaches and with each other, implemented in superficial, ad hoc ways. The field of education is often characterized by a constant frenzy of efforts to grasp at yet one more magic solve-all—and this is premised on the hope that somewhere, there is a program to buy, to install, that will provide the magic solution. But the truth is that if there is a magic solution, it is an engagement in a persistent cycle of teaching, observing the results of teaching and then responding thoughtfully to what one sees. What's called for is that you, as a teacher, as well as your colleagues and your students, study student work and develop and adapt curriculum in light of what the evidence shows. In the end, the greatest contribution these tools can make is that they can help both you and your students self-assess, collaborate with other learners, learn from feedback, and work collectively toward challenging, clear goals. And in the end, if there is a magic formula in education, a secret to success, it is this process of continuous improvement.

> *There is a growing body of research suggesting that the use of performance assessments embedded within curriculum improves instruction and supports students' building higher-order, complex skills (Gold-schmidt et al., Educational Assessment, 2007 (12): 239–66; Pellegrio, Chudowsky, and Glaser, Knowing What Students Know, 2001; Wood et al., "Refocusing Accountability: Using Local Performance Assessments to Enhance Teaching and Learning for Higher Order Skills," 2007, available at www.fairtest.org/refocusing-accountability, Google search term "Fairtest refocusing accountability").*

A SET OF TOOLS

This book is chock-full of resources and writing assessment tools that can be used across a district, school, or classroom. These tools, found in Part II of this book, can enable you to grasp where your students are in their writing development and to figure out what help they need to take next steps. The system of teaching and learning that is embedded in the series makes progress in writing concrete and attainable and allows students to share ownership of this progress. The tools within *Writing Pathways*—each of which has been piloted in thousands of classrooms through the work of the Teachers College Reading and Writing Project—include:

- **Learning progressions for opinion/argument, information, and narrative writing.** These three learning progressions are based upon thirty years of research-based practice in writing development and were designed to align to the lofty expectations of the Common Core State Standards. These progressions are written to communicate expectations to students as well as you, so they are written in straight-forward, clear language. Not only will they help you track students' progress across the three kinds of writing, locating each student's current level and determining the next steps the student should take, but they will also help you to see the cross-currents between the three types of writing so that you can help students realize that lessons learned in narrative writing can transfer to information writing, and so forth.

  In Part II of the book, each of the learning progressions is broken into two tables, one for PreK through grade 6, and one for grades 3 through 9, for ease of use. Please note that the full grade span PreK–9 is also provided in a single table for each genre online.

- **Teaching rubrics for scoring each of the three genres.** These rubrics, grounded in the learning progressions, use numbers corresponding to grade levels and give appropriate weight to each category so that if your district requires this, you can derive a point score for each student's work in a particular type of writing, as well as track students' progress statistically (see Figure 1–2). The grade-specific rubrics can be used to assess both on-demand writing and students' published writing. While the student checklists only allow a student to say "not yet" with regard to meeting a particular expectation, the rubrics allow you to note whether that aspect of the writing resembles work expected for students who are two years below grade level, one year below grade level, or somewhere in between. While these scores are reductive—reducing the complexity of the work to numbers, as rubrics always do—they can help you to measure growth across time and notice patterns that can inform whole-class and small-group instruction. These scores can allow you to look at the data from select groups (boys versus girls, for example). Translating writing progress into quantitative data in this way also makes it possible to use indications of writing progress as measures of student learning in ways that meet your district or state mandates.

- **On-demand performance assessment prompts for each of the three genres.** These prompts, available for all three genres, direct students to compose the best piece of writing they can—narrative, information, or argument—in a fixed period of time (see Figure 1–3). The resulting pieces can then be assessed using the learning progressions and rubrics (provided in Part II and online). In other words, each student's on-demand writing can be ascribed a grade level ("Overall, Natasha's opinion writing is at her grade level, although her elaboration meets the next grade's standards."). Assuming you conduct a similar assessment at intervals throughout the year, you can track each student's progress over the year, starting from this baseline piece of writing.

- **Student-friendly checklists for each genre.** These allow students to assess their own writing, set goals for themselves, and with your help, work to make palpable progress toward those goals. The checklists for grades K–6 have been illustrated (see Figure 1–4), and are also available in nonillustrated versions online. The Resources section of the Teachers College Reading and Writing Project's website, readingandwritingproject.org/resources/video-and-e-media.html (Google search term "Reading and Writing Project Multimedia"), contains videos showing the use of these checklists in whole-class and small-group teaching to help you imagine the many ways to use these checklists in your daily writing instruction.

Learning Progression for Information Writing

	Pre-Kindergarten	Kindergarten	Grade 1	Grade 2	Grade 3	Grade 4	Grade 5	Grade 6
STRUCTURE								
Overall	The writer told and drew pictures about a topic she knew.	The writer told, drew, and wrote about a topic.	The writer taught readers about a topic.	The writer taught readers some important points about a subject.	The writer taught readers information about a subject. He put in ideas, observations, and questions.	The writer taught readers different things about a subject. He put facts, details, quotes, and ideas into each part of his writing.	The writer used different kinds of information to teach about the subject. Sometimes she included little essays, stories, or how-to sections in her writing.	The writer conveyed ideas and information about a subject. Sometimes she incorporated essays, explanations, stories, or procedural passages into his writing.
Lead	The writer started by drawing or saying something.	The writer told what her topic was.	The writer named his topic in the beginning and got the readers' attention.	The writer wrote a beginning in which he named a subject and tried to interest readers.	The writer wrote a beginning in which she got readers ready to learn a lot of information about the subject.	The writer hooked her readers by explaining why the subject mattered, telling a surprising fact, or giving a big picture. She let readers know that she would teach them different things about a subject.	The writer wrote an introduction in which he helped readers get interested in and understand the subject. He let readers know the subtopics that he would develop later as well as the sequence.	The writer wrote an introduction in which she interested readers, perhaps with a quote or significant fact. She may have included her own ideas about the topic. She let readers know the subtopics that she would develop later and how her text would unfold.
Transitions	The writer kept on working.	The writer put different things he knew about the topic on his pages.	The writer told different parts about her topic on different pages.	The writer used words such as *and* and *also* to show she had more to say.	The writer used words to show sequence such as *before, after, then,* and *later.* He also used words to show what did not fit such as *however* and *but.*	The writer used words in each section that helped readers understand how one piece of information connected with others. If he wrote the section in sequence, he used words and after. If he organized the section in kinds or parts, he used words such as *another, also,* and *for example.*	When the writer wrote about results, she used words and phrases such as *consequently, as a result,* and *because of this.* When she compared information, she used phrases such as *in contrast, by comparison,* and *especially.* In narrative parts, she used phrases that go with stories such as *a little later* and *three hours later.* If she wrote sections that stated an opinion, she used words such as *but the most important reason, for example,* and *consequently.*	The writer used transition words to help his readers understand how different bits of information and different parts of his writing fit together. The writer used transitions such as *for instance, in addition, therefore, such as, because of, as a result, in contrast to, unlike, despite,* and *on the other hand* to help connect ideas, information, and examples and to compare, contrast, and imply relationships.
Ending	After the writer said, drew, and "wrote" all he could about his topic, he ended it.	The writer had a last part or page.	The writer wrote an ending.	The writer wrote some sentences or a section at the end to wrap up his piece.	The writer wrote an ending that drew conclusions, asked questions, or suggested ways readers might respond.	The writer wrote an ending in which she reminded readers of her subject and may either have suggested a follow-up action or left readers with a final insight. She added her thoughts, feelings, and questions about the subject at the end.	The writer wrote a conclusion in which he restated the main points and may have offered a final thought or question for readers to consider.	The writer wrote a conclusion in which she restated her important ideas and offered a final insight or implication for readers to consider.
Organization	On the writer's paper, there was a place for the drawing and a place where she tried to write words.	The writer told, drew, and wrote information across pages.	The writer told about her topic part by part.	The writer's writing had different parts. Each part told different information about the topic.	The writer grouped his information into parts. Each part was mostly about one thing that connected to his big topic.	The writer grouped information into sections and used paragraphs and sometimes chapters to separate those sections. Each section had information that was mostly about the same thing. He may have used headings and subheadings.	The writer organized her writing into a sequence of separate sections. She may have used headings and subheadings to highlight the separate sections. The writer wrote each section according to an organizational plan shaped partly by the genre of the section.	The writer used subheadings and/or clear introductory transitions to separate his sections. The writer made deliberate choices about how to order sections and information within sections. He chose structures and text features to help emphasize key points. The writer used transitions, introductions, and topic sentences to pop out his main points. He wrote multiple paragraphs in some sections.
DEVELOPMENT								
Elaboration	The writer put more and then more on the page.	The writer drew and wrote some important things about the topic.	The writer put facts in his writing to teach about his topic.	The writer used different kinds of information in his writing such as facts, definitions, details, steps, and tips.	The writer wrote facts, definitions, details, and observations about her topic and explained some of them.	The writer taught her readers different things about the subject. She chose those subtopics because they were important and interesting. The writer included different kinds of facts and details such as numbers, names, and examples.	The writer explained different aspects of a subject. He included a variety of information such as examples, details, dates, and quotes. The writer used trusted sources and gave credit when appropriate. He made sure to research any details that would add to his writing.	The writer chose a focused subject, included a variety of information, and organized his points to best inform her readers. The writer used trusted sources and information from authorities on the topic and gave the sources credit for important excerpts in the text and in a bibliography.

FIG. 1–1   Sample learning progression

Name: _____   Date: _____

Rubric for Information Writing—Third Grade

	Grade 1 (1 POINT)	1.5 PTS	Grade 2 (2 POINTS)	2.5 PTS	Grade 3 (3 POINTS)	3.5 PTS	Grade 4 (4 POINTS)	SCORE
STRUCTURE								
Overall	The writer taught her readers about a topic.	Mid-level	The writer taught readers some important points about a subject.	Mid-level	The writer taught readers information about a subject. She put in ideas, observations, and questions.	Mid-level	The writer taught readers different things about a subject. He put facts, details, quotes, and ideas into each part of his writing.	
Lead	The writer named his topic in the beginning and got the readers' attention.	Mid-level	The writer wrote a beginning in which she named a subject and tried to interest readers.	Mid-level	The writer wrote a beginning in which he got readers ready to learn a lot of information about the subject.	Mid-level	The writer hooked her readers by explaining why the subject mattered, telling a surprising fact, or giving a big picture. She let readers know that she would teach them different things about a subject.	
Transitions	The writer told different parts about her topic on different pages.	Mid-level	The writer used words such as *and* and *also* to show he had more to say.	Mid-level	The writer used words to show sequence such as *before, after, then,* and *later.* She also used words to show what did not fit such as *however* and *but.*	Mid-level	The writer used words in each section that helped the reader understand how one piece of information connected with others. If he wrote the section in sequence, he used words and phrases such as *before, later, next, then,* and *after.* If he organized the section in kinds or parts, he used words such as *another, also,* and *for example.*	
Ending	The writer wrote an ending.	Mid-level	The writer wrote some sentences or a section at the end to wrap up her piece.	Mid-level	The writer wrote an ending that drew conclusions, asked questions, or suggested ways readers might respond.	Mid-level	The writer wrote an ending that reminded readers of her subject and may either have suggested a follow-up action or left readers with a final insight. She added her thoughts, feelings, and questions about the subject at the end.	

FIG. 1–2   Sample rubric for assessing students' writing

ON-DEMAND PERFORMANCE ASSESSMENT PROMPT

Information Writing, Grades 3–8

Say to students:

"Think of a topic that you've studied or that you know a lot about. Tomorrow, you will have forty-five minutes to write an informational (or all-about) text that teaches others interesting and important information and ideas about that topic. If you want to find and use information from a book or another outside source to help you with this writing, you may bring that with you tomorrow. Please keep in mind that you'll have only forty-five minutes to complete this. You will only have this one period, so you'll need to plan, draft, revise, and edit in one sitting. Write in a way that shows all that you know about information writing."

"In your writing, make sure you:

- Write an introduction.
- Elaborate with a variety of information.
- Organize your writing.
- Use transition words.
- Write a conclusion."

Use the teaching rubrics to assess and score these pieces of on-demand writing.

FIG. 1–3   Sample on-demand assessment prompt for grades 3–8

Name: _____   Date: _____

Information Writing Checklist

Grade 5			
STRUCTURE			

I taught readers different things about a subject.

I put facts, details, quotes, and ideas into each part of my writing.

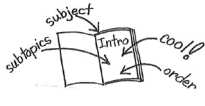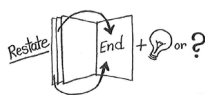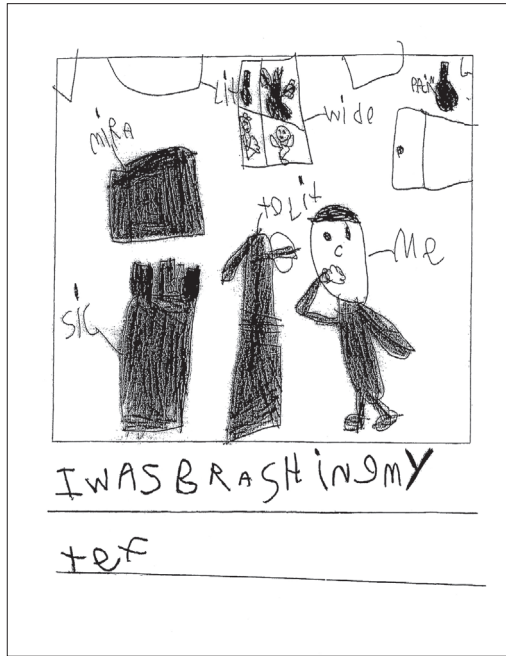| Did I do it like a fifth grader?		NOT YET	STARTING TO	YES!
subject, subtopics, Intro, cool!!, order	I wrote an introduction that helped readers get interested in and understand the subject. I let readers know the subtopics I would be developing later as well as the sequence.	☐	☐	☐
Results: →consequently →as a result; Comparisons: →In contrast... →By comparison →Especially...; Opinion: →But the most important reason is... →for example; Narrative: →A little later...	When I wrote about results, I used words and phrases like *consequently* or *as a result*. When I compared information, I used words and phrases such as *in contrast*, *by comparison*, and *especially*. In narrative parts, I used phrases such as *a little later*. In sections that stated an opinion, I used words such as *but the most important reason* and *for example*.	☐	☐	☐
Restate, End + 💡 or ?	I wrote a conclusion in which I restated the main points and may have offered a final thought or question for readers to consider.	☐	☐	☐

FIG. 1–4   Sample checklist for students' use

- **Two sets of benchmark student writing samples for each genre, at each grade level.** Each benchmark text was written by a student, without help, using the on-demand prompt and protocol. These benchmark texts represent what students at each grade level should be able to do within a similar on-demand context by the *end* of that grade. The two texts at each grade represent different but equivalent ways for a student to be "at level" for that grade. One of the kindergarten narratives zooms in on a small moment; the other retells a story that happens across a broad swath of time. One of the fifth-grade narratives is angled to illustrate a theme; the other is a problem/solution story. (See Figure 1–5.) One of the eighth-grade narratives tells a story and weaves suspense and character relationships into the story; the other narrative is more like a memoir, with explicit self-reflection and essay-like passages incorporated into the storytelling.

The information and argument writing samples, too, show the variety of ways in which students can produce work that is at benchmark level. For example, one of the third-grade information pieces is a little chapter book, the other is more like a feature article. One of the seventh-grade arguments is based on a topic of personal concern—wanting access to more rides at amusement parks—with evidence drawn from the writer's own experience, while the other seventh-grade argument writer supports her position with references to research articles. Yet all of these texts are on grade level samples.

The pieces are also selected because they are memorable: they are funny or insightful. You and your students will enjoy them and find them worth studying. Many teachers
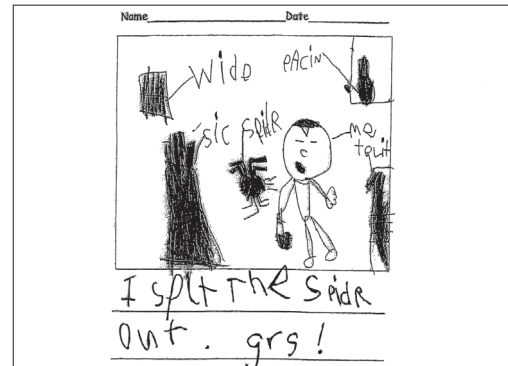
Kindergarten

I WAS BRASHIN9MY

teۍ

Sample 1, page 1

A SPidR CAM oINMY MOF

Sample 1, page 2

I SPLt THE SAdR out. grs!

Sample 1, page 3

Grade 5

THE TOASTER

"I'm hungry," my brother yelped. "Get something to eat ... you're so stupid, Nick," I gave him advice. "I know, I haven't eaten breakfast yet. I guess I'll have some toast," Nick babbled to me, as he pulled the refridgerator open, and took out the bread. I was sitting in the kitchen, on instant messenger on the computer.

Nick shoved 2 slices of bread into the old toaster. I guess he thought I was watching it, so he ran upstairs. The toast began to warm up, little by little.

I heard Nick coming down the stairs, hustling. He made his way into the kitchen, and then was taken aback by the sight.

"FMI!" He screeched in my ear.

"What?" I was confused. "What did I do?"

My question was answered, as I turned to look at where Nick was pointing - the toaster. It was up in great, blazing flames. I felt the heat.

"What should I do, Nick?"

He shrugged and ran upstairs, leaving me biting my lip.

I filled a cup with tap water, and from a distance, I threw it on

Sample 1, page 1

the toaster. Just as the water hit the toaster, I remembered, THE TOASTER WASN'T UNPLUGGED! I shuddered as glass was shattering everywhere in the kitchen. But, there was still fire. I threw some water on again. This time I moved. The toaster basically exploded. I was safe, but we had a broken toaster, and no breakfast for Nick, unless he liked black toast. The fire died down, a couple seconds after.

I scrambled up the stairs to my parents' room.

"Nick, why'd you leave me?" I kicked him. There was no comment from him.

My mom looked at me curiously. I recited the whole story. She just stared at me.

"You could've been electricuted!" She placed her hands on her hips.

"Our house could've been burned down!" I placed my hands on my hips. She hugged me.

Downstairs, my dad had picked up all the pieces of the toaster, and looked up at me. "I could fix this toaster up!" He told me, excitedly.

I rolled my eyes and said, "no!"

Sample 1, page 2

FIG. 1–5   Benchmark student narrative writing in kindergarten and grade 5

use these texts within minilessons, conferences, and small-group work as a way to give a clear vision of specific writing goals.

• **"Up the ladder" annotated demonstration texts in each genre, for each grade level.** My colleagues and I have written these texts, which progress through grades K–8 with essentially the same content in each genre, to show how small revisions add up incrementally to texts that meet increasing expectations. For each K–8 grade level, there is an iteration of the same text that matches the expectations for that grade. In each instance, we write a text as if we were a kindergartner and then improved it up a notch to write it like a first-grader, then a second-grader, and so on through eighth grade. These pieces illustrate the items on the checklist—more precisely and completely than any one piece of student writing ever could—and can be used to show students how they can revise their own writing to take it from one level to the next. (See Figure 1–6.) For example, a second-grade teacher could use the third-grade level text to demonstrate to students how they might go about writing a more sophisticated conclusion.

• **Other writing performance assessment tools.** These assessments include a progression for assessing students' engagement with the writing process, and (online) writing-about-reading sample on-demand prompts and rubrics.

THE SOURCE OF THE EXPECTATIONS THAT UNDERGIRD THE ASSESSMENT TOOLS

Earlier I pointed out that the standards that are codified in these checklists, rubrics, and benchmark texts are derived from the Common Core State Standards. While we try to preserve the academic vocabulary within the standards, we have also elected to use student-friendly language to describe something in some cases. In the fifth-grade narrative writing checklist, for example, instead of including the CCSS language, "Orient the reader by establishing a situation and introducing a narrator and/or characters. . . ." (CCSS W.5.3.a), the checklist states, "I wrote a beginning in which I not only showed what was happening and where, but also gave some clues about what would later become a problem for the main character." Our aim is to be more helpful, operational, and kid-friendly. There are other times when an item in our progressions, rubrics, and checklists is entirely missing from the CCSS, and in such an instance, this item is here because we believe it is vital to writers' success with that genre. Usually, when our tools differ from the CCSS, it will be because our tools are more specific and, we hope, more supportive.

There is no one source of authority that can say whether the benchmark pieces we've selected are actually "on standard." The pieces of writing collected in Appendix C of the CCSS were often written over long stretches of time, with help from teachers and parents. The benchmark texts found in this resource represent our hypothesis for benchmark levels of at-standards-level on-demand writing. We have selected these texts by drawing on our deep knowledge of writing standards and of exemplar of texts put forward by other organizations as meeting high-level standards, and on our own thirty years of research, publications, and work in K–8 classrooms. We are confident, in any case, that the texts are at least at, and perhaps beyond, the level of the standards. Working toward these levels, then, will be helpful for you and your writers.

Of course, expectations for students' published work will always exceed expectations for their on-demand writing. The work we include here in no way shows the full capacity of what students can do when given many days (and sometimes weeks) of time

Grade 1

The writer named a topic in the beginning, then teaches all about the topic.

The writer used commas in a list.

Bulldogs

Bulldogs are the best kind of dog.

Walk Your Dog

Give your bulldog a walk so it gets exercise. Also, brush its hair and teeth so it stays pretty.

Food

Bulldogs like different kinds of food. They like food from a can, biscuits and treats. Give your bulldog a treat when it is good.

Bath

Bulldogs don't like to take baths. Keep your dog away from dirt or it might get sick. Bull dogs are the best.

The writer told about the topic part by part.

The writer included facts about the topic.

The writer ended her sentences with punctuation marks.

Grade 2

Bulldogs

The writer taught some important points about the topic.

The writer used commas to tell the reader when to pause.

The writer included facts, tips, and expert language to elaborate on her topic.

The writer used quotation marks to show what a person said and apostrophes in quotation marks.

Bulldogs

I am going to tell you everything you need to know about the best dog ever. Bulldogs are the best kind of dog. My dog Lizzie is a bulldog. She has brown and white fur that is really short. She has a wrinkled face. She uses her nose to smell lots of things. Bulldogs are not too big and not too small.

Take Care of Your Bulldog

You should walk your bulldog every day. For example, you need to make sure your bulldog gets lots of exercise. Another thing you need to do is brush its coat and its teeth to keep it looking nice.

What Bulldogs Eat

Bulldogs eat many kinds of food, but you shouldn't feed them too much. They love special kinds of dog food. We feed our bulldog a special kind of food with a green can and biscuits. On the ad it says that if you feed your bulldog the wrong kind of food it could get tired or sick. Give your dog treats when it does what you want.

Keeping Them Clean

Bulldogs need to stay clean but they don't like to take baths. My book about bulldogs says that if they aren't clean they could get fleas. "You need to wash him so he stays healthy" my dad says. After the bath they get really tired and they go to sleep. Bulldogs are the best dog ever!

The writer tried to interest readers at the beginning.

The writer used connecting words, such as another.

The writer organized her piece into parts, with each part addressing a different aspect of the main topic.

The writer wrapped up the piece at the end with a concluding sentence.

Grade 3

The beginning helps readers become interested and ready to learn about the topic (in this instance, with an introduction to the subject and questions).

The writer used commas to help readers read with pauses where they are needed.

The writer used punctuation to fix run-on sentences.

Bulldogs

Introduction

Have you ever seen a dog whose face is so wrinkled it makes you laugh? That might be a bulldog. I am an expert on Bulldogs because I have one. I am going to tell you everything you need to know about Bulldogs.

What They Look Like

One fact about Bulldogs is that they have very unusual looks. They have a short, wide body and short legs. They can be different colors but the most common colors are tan, black, and white. The best part about the Bulldog's looks is its face. The Bulldog has a wrinkled looking face and a wide **jaw**. It looks like it is always sad! But don't worry, that's just its look. It has round black eyes and a short **muzzle**. The biggest Bulldogs weigh about 50 pounds.

Bulldog Care

Bulldogs need to be taken care of. It is important for bulldogs to get plenty of exercise. They need to be walked at least once a day. Also, their fur, called the **coat**, can get dirty so they need to be brushed.

The bulldog needs to eat good food in order to stay healthy. Bulldogs can get fat so it's important to feed them just the amount of food they need. Some kinds of food that are good for bulldogs are special dog food, biscuits, and mashed potatoes.

Bulldogs need to take baths about once every month. My dad says, "You need to wash him so he stays healthy!" But just the bath isn't enough. After

The writer grouped information into parts. The subtopics fit with the main topic and are predominately well organized.

The writer included facts, definitions, details, and explanations.

She also included expert words. In some instances, the writer not only included important facts, but explained them to the reader.

The writer used words to show sequence (after), and words to show information that doesn't fit (but).

(continues)

Grade 3 (*continued*)

The writer punctuated dialogue correctly, with commas and quotation marks.

the bath you have to clean around their wrinkles because the wrinkles can get dirty. Also they get really smelly!

Bulldog Pets

One fact about bulldogs is that they are very tame. They are good to have around kids and they are good watchdogs. They may look like they are mean, but really they are not. For example, in my book there was a story about a Bulldog who saved his family by barking when there was a fire.

There are a few different kinds of Bulldogs, like the American Bulldog, English Bulldog, and French Bulldog. If you like dogs and you are thinking about getting one, I recommend a Bulldog.

The ending wraps up the piece and suggests to readers how they might respond.

jaw — muzzle

The writer included a picture with labels and a glossary.

Glossary

Coat: the bulldog's fur
Jaw: bones that hold the teeth
Muzzle: dog's mouth and nose

FIG. 1–6   Sample annotated information demonstration text showing progression from grade 1 through grade 3

to research, assess, draw on sources, get feedback, revise, rethink, and reimagine. We trust that you, our reader, understand that it is through a deep engagement in the writing process that students' abilities are stretched, that their horizons are extended. All of my other publications describe that work and brim with examples of what students can do when given opportunities to engage in the full dimension of the writing process. Keep in mind that the focus in this particular book is on students' on-demand writing—the writing work they can do independently and in a limited time frame.

When you first assess your students, you will probably find that their work is considerably below the level of expectation outlined in the Common Core or in the standards adopted by your district. Don't be dismayed. I recently heard a group of people who have been hard at work developing the new tests say that the expectation is that only 20% of students will score "at-standard" on new tests when they are first rolled out. So you should not be surprised that the expectations in this assessment system may at first seem uncomfortably high. After all, although a single year of strong writing instruction can produce impressive results, growth takes time, and it would be unrealistic to expect a fifth-grade teacher to produce fifth-grade level writers if students entered that classroom with the skills of second-grade writers.

While it may well take more than a single year to bring students up to level across a classroom, school, or district, we believe that the progressions in this book represent work that most students can do if they are given a sequence of skilled teaching, a coherent and rigorous writing curriculum, and a set of assessment tools such as these. Additionally, students' progress in any one genre can be drawn upon to support their progress in other genres (see Figure 1–7) as long as they receive help in understanding the reciprocity between genres, and the coaching needed to transfer what they've learned from one kind of writing to the next.

WHY THIS ASSESSMENT IS EFFECTIVE

We've built this assessment system to embody the characteristics of effective formative assessments. To do this, we paid attention to the research on factors comprising effective teaching. In the research article "Assessment and Classroom Learning" (*Assessment in Education*, 1998 (5): 7–74), the authors summarize key findings, suggesting that improving learning through assessment depends on five deceptively simple key factors: the provision of effective feedback to pupils; the active involvement of pupils in their own learning; the adjustment of teaching to take into account the results of assessment; a recognition of the profound influence assessment has on the motivation and self-esteem of pupils, both of which are crucial influences on learning; and the need for pupils to be able to assess themselves and understand how to improve.

The approach to assessment in *Writing Pathways* will support both you and your students in taking a reflective stance, creating consistent occasions for looking backward, looking forward, goal-setting, and deliberate practice. In this book, you will find an emphasis on the following priorities:

- **Students can be active agents** of their own writing development, self-assessing their own work often and reaching toward next steps. Students can see what is expected of them, can study concrete examples of texts at the next level, and can emulate examples of those benchmark texts. The assessment tools help students clarify their next steps so they can work with expediency to move forward. They can approach a new chunk in an information text or a story and think, "Wait, what are my goals for this part of a piece?" and then work with resolve to achieve those goals.

Craft Descriptor Across Three Types of Writing

	Argument/Opinion	Information	Narrative
2nd grade	The writer chose words that would make readers agree with her opinion.	The writer tried to include the words that showed she was an expert on the subject.	The writer chose strong words that would help readers picture his story.
3rd grade	The writer not only told readers to believe him, but also wrote in ways that got them thinking or feeling in certain ways.	The writer chose expert words to teach readers a lot about the subject. He taught information in a way to interest readers. He may have used drawings, captions, or diagrams.	The writer not only told her story, but also wrote it in ways that got readers to picture what was happening and that brought her story to life.
4th grade	The writer made deliberate word choices to convince her readers, perhaps by emphasizing or repeating words that made readers feel emotions. If it felt right to do so, the writer chose precise details and facts to help make her points and used figurative language to draw readers into her line of thought. The writer made choices about which evidence was best to include or not include to support her points. The writer used a convincing tone.	The writer made deliberate word choices to teach his readers. He may have done this by using and repeating key words about his topic. When it felt right to do so, the writer chose interesting comparisons and used figurative language to clarify his points. The writer made choices about which information was best to include or not include. The writer used a teaching tone. To do so, he may have used phrases such as *that means . . . , what that really means is . . . , and let me explain . . .*	The writer included precise and sometimes sensory details and used figurative language (simile, metaphor, personification) to bring his story to life. The writer showed why characters did what they did by including their thinking. The writer made some parts of the story go quickly, some slowly. The writer used a storytelling voice and conveyed the emotion or tone of his story through description, phrases, dialogue, and thoughts.
6th grade	The writer chose words carefully to support his argument and to have an effect on his reader. The writer worked to include concrete details, comparisons, and/or images to convey his ideas, build his argument, and keep his reader engaged. When necessary, the writer explained terms to readers, providing definitions, context clues, or parenthetical explanations. The writer made his piece sound serious.	The writer chose his words carefully to explain his information and ideas and to have an effect on his reader. The writer worked to include concrete details, comparisons, and/or images to explain information and concepts, and to keep his reader engaged. The writer incorporated domain-specific vocabulary, and when necessary, explained terms to readers, providing context clues, parenthetical explanations, text boxes, or similar support. The writer supported readers' learning by using a teaching tone and a formal style, as appropriate.	The writer developed some relationship between characters to show *why* they act and speak as they do. He told the internal, as well as the external story. The writer wove together precise descriptions, figurative language, and some symbolism to help readers picture the setting, actions, and events and to bring forth meaning. The writer used language that fit his story's meaning and context (e.g., different characters use different kinds of language).

FIG. 1–7   This chart, excerpted from the learning progressions, highlights how the craft component is connected across all three writing types. You can see how skills such as precise word choice and tone carry throughout argument, information, and narrative writing.

- The assessment tools are **aligned to the Common Core State Standards but not limited to them**. That is, when the standards are obscure, leaving teachers and kids thinking, "What? What does that mean?" this system is crystal clear, providing the Teachers College Reading and Writing Project's knowledgeable interpretation of sometimes unclear expectations. In instances when research on writing development reveals that the CCSS have neglected a key developmental step in writing, we've filled in that step. Then, too, when expectations in the CCSS arrive out of the blue without precursor steps or are embedded in the sample texts but not the descriptors, this assessment presents a more detailed progression.

- The assessment tools **help students transfer their skills from one type of writing to another** by showing them ways expectations for the different types of writing are similar to each other. That is, although the specific nature of elaboration will be different whether one is elaborating in narrative, argument, or information writing, it is consistently true that across the three types of writing, a degree and a variety of elaboration is required. It is also true that elaboration tends to be most important in key areas of a text—in a narrative scene that reveals a character's true motivations or relates back to the theme of the story, in the parts of an essay where the writer is trying to make an important point or rebut a counterargument, and so on. Expectations for introductions and endings, transitions, and so forth tend to be aligned across all the different types of writing as well. Conclusions, for example, are best if they relate back to the heart or central ideas in a text, whether that text is an essay, a story, or a research article.

- The assessment tools are based on the assumption that **students will usually choose their own topics for writing**, allowing them to demonstrate what they can do as writers when writing about topics they know and care about. In some schools and districts, teachers may have received the message that for a writing assessment to be reliable, every student must respond to an identical writing assignment. The problem with this is that when students all respond to the same assignment, it becomes unclear whether the assessment is of the student's writing ability or of the student's knowledge of the content contained in the assignment. Similarly, if an assessment asks students to respond to reading, conflating reading and writing, it is hard to discern if their trouble lies in the writing alone or if they simply haven't understood enough about the content—the reading—to write well. These writing assessments, therefore, are designed to **assess *writing* separately from reading**. Assessing writing about reading is described in Chapter 9 of this book.

- The gridlike design of the assessments highlights ways students engage with skills with more or less complexity, depending on their level of proficiency. This means that these assessment tools, like the standards themselves, **allow students to move ahead as quickly as possible**, while also **allowing teachers to differentiate instruction**. For example, a fourth-grade teacher can teach the importance of elaboration in opinion/argument writing, keeping in mind that some of his students are still at the third-grade level of learning about producing reasons, while others are working on the fifth-grade skills of making sure their reasons are parallel and don't overlap.