

## **Focus Correction Areas (FCAs) for Narrative Writing Grades 6–8**

The Common Core categorizes writing into three types: argument, informative/explanatory, and narrative. This document provides users of the Collins Writing Program with focus correction areas (FCAs) for narrative writing in grades 6 to 8. The FCAs listed and described here do not include all writing skills (conventions of language, style, etc.) but instead focus on the critical, specialized skills that students will need to be effective narrative writers. In addition, it would be impossible to focus on the FCAs listed here and not teach many of the other Common Core State Standards; for example, the skills we list as FCAs also impact Standard 4 (clear writing), Standard 5 (revision), Standard 6 (using technology to produce and publish), Standard 7 (conduct short and sustained research), Standard 8 (gather information), Standard 9 (draw evidence), and Standard 10 (write routinely).

The Core introduces narrative writing in kindergarten with Anchor Writing Standard 3: “Use a combination of drawing, dictating, and writing to narrate a single event or several loosely linked events, tell about the events in the order in which they occurred, and provide a reaction to what happened.” In grade 3, when the tests are introduced, Anchor Writing Standard 3 asks students to “write narratives to develop real or imagined experiences or events using effective technique, descriptive details, and clear event sequences.” In grade 6, the Anchor Standard adds “relevant descriptive details and well-structured event sequences.”

**Narrative Vocabulary:** On page 2 is a list of general academic vocabulary words related to narrative writing. It is not a complete list but is an excellent starting point.

**Critical FCAs List:** Beginning on page 3 is a list of critical FCAs. In column two, each FCA is described and referenced to the specific standard in the Core. Column three has examples of student-level text that would meet the standard set by each FCA.

**Eight-Step Process:** On page 6, you’ll find an eight-step process to teach FCAs to mastery. Don’t let the fact that there are eight steps cause undue concern about time. The steps include activities you are doing already and may be done over a period of days or weeks. In addition, the steps use all aspects of the Collins Writing Program, from Type One, accessing and assessing prior knowledge, to Type Five, publishing the best examples for the class to use as models. Because the FCAs listed on pages 3–5 are so critical, the time spent teaching and perfecting them is well worth the investment.

**Consistent Terminology:** Because the Common Core Standards are for literacy in all subjects, we encourage teachers to use the FCAs as they are presented here so that students have a consistent set of expectations and a common language across subjects and grades. Some teachers might find these FCAs too prescriptive or formulaic, and, for our most sophisticated writers, this criticism may be valid, but for many of our students, these standards and FCAs will be new and will need to be presented as clearly as possible. As students become more capable narrative writers, consider adding qualifiers to make the FCAs more rigorous.

As you consider how specific to make an FCA, remember that the tests for the Core (PARCC and Smarter Balanced Assessment Consortium) are same day events. Students will not have the benefit of extended time to consider and reconsider their approach and structure. The FCAs provided here will give students specific criteria that is essential for narrative writing. Students will be able to show their creativity and style through word choice, sentence structure, selection of details, examples, and text structure.

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**Narrative Vocabulary:** The Core divides vocabulary into two types: domain specific and general academic. Domain-specific words and phrases are “specific to a particular field of study,” and, therefore, are more likely to be taught directly. General academic words and phrases are “vocabulary common to written texts but not commonly a part of speech” (CCSS, Appendix A, p. 42). David Coleman, one of the authors of the Common Core, calls general academic vocabulary “the language of power.” As you introduce students to the Standards, take care to define words that students will need to understand. Here are some general academic terms with brief, student-friendly definitions that students will need to know:

capture	to hold the attention of the reader
clause	one part of a complex or compound sentence with its own subject and predicate
concrete	dealing with facts and certainties; not general ideas
connection	linking events together, showing the reader how they are related
context	the information surrounding a word or phrase that determines exactly how it was meant
convey	to tell or explain clearly so that the reader can understand without confusion
descriptive	giving an explanation of what something is like; how things can be seen, heard, or felt in some way
engage	to get and hold the attention of
logical	each idea that follows is connected to the one before so that it makes sense
orient	to give knowledge of a new situation; to become familiar with
pacing	the speed at which the story moves along and the way in which the story is revealed
point of view	in narrative writing, the position of the narrator in a story: first-person, second-person, or third-person
precise	exact; expressed clearly and not in general terms
reflection	in narrative writing, when a character describes learning resulting from the events or actions
relevant	closely relates to and supports the point you are making
sensory language	words relating to the senses of sight, touch, sound, smell, and taste
setting	the particular place and time where an event occurs
shift	a change in time frame or setting
time frame	the length of time during which an event or experience develops
transitional words	a word or phrase that helps the story change from one setting or time frame to another
well-structured	organized; logical

The Collins Writing Program strongly recommends the Vocabulary Card assignment in *Improving Student Performance* (pp. 73–76) as a strategy to teach these terms.

## Focus Correction Areas (FCAs) to Address Narrative Writing, Grades 6–8

(Note: For Conventions FCAs, see Check Mate Level A or B)

**Anchor Standard:** Write narratives to develop real or imagined experiences or events using effective technique, relevant descriptive details, and well-structured event sequences.

FCAs for Grade 6	FCAs for Grade 7	FCAs for Grade 8
<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Engaging context &amp; setting</li> <li>Introduce narrator/characters</li> <li>Dialogue/pacing</li> <li>Clear sequence of events</li> <li>Relevant details</li> <li>Sensory/precise words</li> <li>Conclusion</li> </ol>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Engaging context &amp; setting                             <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Establish point of view</li> </ol> </li> <li>Introduce narrator/characters</li> <li>Dialogue/pacing</li> <li>Clear sequence of events</li> <li>Relevant details</li> <li>Sensory/precise words</li> <li>Reflective conclusion</li> </ol>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Engaging context &amp; setting                             <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Establish point of view</li> </ol> </li> <li>Introduce narrator/characters</li> <li>Dialogue/pacing</li> <li>Clear sequence of events</li> <li>Relevant details</li> <li>Sensory/precise words</li> <li>Reflective conclusion</li> </ol>

### FCAs

### DESCRIPTION

### EXAMPLE<sup>1</sup>

<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li><b>Engaging context &amp; setting</b></li> </ol>	<p>Student creates a clear sense of a problem or situation, including time and place, in a manner that captures the readers’ curiosity or interest. (W.6,7,8.3a)</p> <p><b>Tip:</b> Have students use dialogue or a character in action to capture the readers’ interest and curiosity.</p>	<p>Miss Sadie no longer sits in her rocking chair on her porch on summer days. But I can still see her.</p>
<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li><b>1a. Establish point of view (grades 7–8)</b></li> </ol> </li> </ol>	<p>In grades 7 and 8, student provides a sense of who is telling the story; a character or an external narrator; first person or third, and reveals the overall attitude toward the event or situation. (W.7,8.3a)</p> <p><b>Tip:</b> Have students circle the words that indicate in which person they are telling the story, e.g., <i>I, he, they</i>.</p>	<p>I miss the days when I would sit on that shabby old porch and listen to her stories.</p>
<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li><b>Intro narrator/characters</b></li> </ol>	<p>Student introduces the storyteller and the characters in the story through an organized and logical event sequence. (W.6,7,8.3a)</p>	<p>"Melissa!" she would holler. "What `chu doin' here? Come see me and my poor self, have ya?"</p>

<sup>1</sup>All examples from *Common Core State Standards Appendix C: Samples of Student Writing, Grade 8, "Miss Sadie"* pp. 52–56.

## Focus Correction Areas (FCAs) to Address Narrative Writing, Grades 6–8

<p><b>3. Dialogue/pacing</b></p>	<p>Student uses techniques, such as dialogue and description, to make the characters more life-like and to improve the pacing of the narrative. (W.6,7,8.3b)</p> <p><b>Tip:</b> Have students work with the techniques of flashback and foreshadowing to control the pacing of a story.</p>	<p>"Melissa! Whattaya want with that old, fat, black lady, anyways?"</p> <p>"Miss Sadie, it's me, Melissa."</p>
<p><b>4. Cl sequence of events</b></p>	<p>Student provides a sense of time order so the reader can easily follow the narrative. Student uses transitional words, phrases, and clauses to manage the sequence of events.</p> <p>Student moves characters from one place to another or from one time to another without confusing the reader. (W.6,7,8.3c)</p> <p><b>Tip:</b> Provide students with a list of temporal transition words to use, e.g., <i>after that, and then, at this point, at this time, before, concurrently, during, finally, first, followed by, formerly, immediately, meanwhile, next, once, previously, soon, subsequently, thereafter.</i></p>	<p>Once, Jimmy Taylor came walking by us . . .</p> <p>One day I was thinking, I haven't seen Miss Sadie in a while.</p> <p>My visits became less frequent when school started.</p> <p>She once told me of her grandmother who escaped slavery.</p>
<p><b>5. Relevant details</b></p>	<p>Student adds descriptive details of time, place, and physical characteristics to create a unique picture. (W.6,7,8.3d)</p> <p><b>Tip:</b> As a proofreading focus, have students highlight time in yellow, place in green, and physical characteristics in blue.</p>	<p>I used to bring Miss Sadie cookies every summer day of 1988.</p> <p>Mama said, "Miss Johnson has a disease. Alzheimer's disease. It makes her forget things . . . people, family even."</p>
<p><b>6. Sensory/precise words</b></p>	<p>Student uses specific words and descriptive sensory details that help the reader imagine a clear, unique picture or capture the action, thoughts, and feelings of the characters. (W.6,7,8.3d)</p> <p><b>Tip:</b> As a proofreading focus, have students highlight actions in yellow, thoughts in green, and feelings in blue.</p>	<p>The old chair squeaking with every sway of her big, brown body. Her summer dress stained from cooking in her sweet smelling kitchen.</p> <p>So after school, I trotted up to her house amidst the twirling, autumn leaves.</p>

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<p><b>7. Conclusion</b> <b>(grade 6)</b></p>	<p>In grade 6, student provides a logical ending to the story that follows from the narrative events or experience. (W.6.7,8.3e)</p>	<p><i>That Christmas, I went to bring Miss Johnson cookies. She wasn't there. I learned from a family member that she was in the hospital and that she'd die very soon.</i></p>
<p><b>7. Reflective conclusion</b> <b>(grades 7–8)</b></p>	<p>In grades 7 and 8, student comments on what characters learned from the experience or characters reflect on event or experience. (W.7,8.3e) <b>Tip:</b> Have students underline the learning or reflection.</p>	<p><i>Today, I've learned to love old people . . . I've learned to always treat people with kindness no matter how cruel they may seem.</i></p>

## Teaching FCAs for Narrative Writing, Grades 6–8

When introducing new FCAs to your students, you may want to consider the following steps, based on a modified version of P. D. Pearson and M. C. Gallagher's gradual release of responsibility teaching model.

**Step One:** Select an FCA and ask students to complete a Type One writing assignment. For example, "We are going to be studying 'vivid and precise vocabulary' in narrative writing. In at least four written lines, define 'vivid and precise vocabulary' and give examples of vocabulary this is and is not vivid and precise. If you are not sure what to write, give your best guess. You'll have three minutes." This activity will give you an immediate sense of what students know or don't know and an opportunity to see if there are differing definitions of the terms.

**Step Two:** After sharing what students think, share your school's official definition for the FCA and begin to explain any words in the definition that students may not know. Give students examples so they can see exactly what you mean. A great source for examples is Appendix C of the Common Core that gives samples of student-created assignments that meet the standards. Then ask for examples from everyday life to be sure that students have a full understanding of the FCA before they have to apply the skill in a more-rigorous academic situation. For example, you might ask, "Here is a description from yesterday's newspaper describing \_\_\_\_\_. Would you consider it vivid and precise? Give two to three specific examples to support your opinion."

**Step Three:** Give frequent Type Two quizzes that ask students to produce brief written answers to demonstrate that they understand the FCA. For example, after reading a short story, you may ask students, "On a one-to-five scale, rate the introduction to the short story on whether or not it had an 'engaging situation or setting.' Give two examples to support your rating." Many of the standards in the Core may be new to students. Asking them to demonstrate understanding of "engaging situation or setting" will give students a chance to become familiar with the terminology and practice applying the concepts to others' writing before they have to create new text to meet the standards set by the FCA. It is always easier to judge than to be judged.

**Step Four:** Have students edit past papers from their writing folders (other students' and their own) for the FCA. Have students find examples of the FCA or find places where the FCA was missing or in error. Then have students edit directly on their past papers. This step helps make the transfer from knowing to using. For example, if the FCA is "reflective conclusion," ask students to edit past narrative papers for "reflective conclusions."

**Step Five:** Assign the FCA on an original (Type Three) paper and permit the students to peer edit for the FCA (Type Four). Many students are convinced that they know and can apply a skill only to discover a peer has a different understanding. This practice will give students an opportunity to try out the skill and get feedback before the teacher officially evaluates them. A highly effective variation of peer editing is to ask a student to volunteer to read or show on a document camera the section of the paper that demonstrates the FCA in question, with the promise that if the writing does not meet the standard, the teacher and class will fix it, guaranteeing a good evaluation.

**Step Six:** Evaluate the class set of papers for the FCAs in question and determine if the class can apply the FCA in an academic setting. In some cases, more instruction will be necessary, but you will have the benefit of authentic student examples to show the class.

**Step Seven:** Repeat the FCA on new assignments until you feel the students have mastery. One of the advantages of the Core is that it requires the same skill over many years and many subjects; for example, students are asked to use dialogue and establish a situation from grades 3 to 12. As students progress, some of the skills will become habits, and once the skills are habits, students' intellectual energies can be directed to producing writing with more sophistication and nuance.

**Step Eight:** Post or publish some of the best examples of FCAs from student work (Type Five). This practice will give students examples of transitions, effective use of dialogue, and strong conclusions. It also provides recognition and motivation for the top performers.