

Connections: *Writing Next* and the Collins Writing Program

In 2007, the Carnegie Commission published an important study, *Writing Next, Effective Strategies to Improve Writing of Adolescents in Middle and High Schools*. The study presents eleven recommendations of a successful writing program which were determined by “summarizing the results of a large-scale statistical review of research into the effects of specific types of writing instruction on adolescents’ writing proficiency . . . The special strength of this report is its use of a powerful statistical method known as meta-analysis. This technique allows researchers to determine the consistency and strength of the effects of instructional practices on student writing quality and to highlight those practices that hold most promise.”

Used for over twenty-five years by thousands of schools in the United States and internationally, the Collins Writing Program is built on the kind of best practices ideas cited in *Writing Next*. This paper summarizes how the Collins Writing Program connects to the findings of *Writing Next*. For additional research about the Collins Writing Program visit www.collinseducationassociates.com.

The chart below provides a very brief summary of the Collins Writing Program, which utilizes Five Types of Writing. Following the chart is an explanation of the connections between the Collins Writing Program and the eleven elements of the *Writing Next* report.

FIVE TYPES OF WRITING	
TYPE ONE WRITING: CAPTURE IDEAS	Type One writing gets ideas on paper – brainstorming. Type One is timed and requires a minimum number of items or lines. Questions and/or guesses are permitted. Evaluated with a check (✓) or minus (-). <i>One draft.</i>
TYPE TWO WRITING: RESPOND CORRECTLY	Type Two writing shows that the writer knows something about a topic or has thought about the topic. It is a correct answer to a specific question, graded as a quiz. <i>One draft.</i>
TYPE THREE WRITING: EDIT FOR FOCUS CORRECTION AREAS	Type Three writing has substantive content and meets up to three specific standards called focus correction areas. It is <i>read out loud</i> and reviewed to see if the draft meets the following criteria: completes the assignment, is easy to read, and meets standards set by the focus correction areas. Revision and editing are done on the original. <i>One draft.</i>
TYPE FOUR WRITING: PEER EDIT FOR FOCUS CORRECTION AREAS	Type Four writing is Type Three writing that is <i>read out loud</i> and critiqued by another. <i>Two drafts.</i>
TYPE FIVE WRITING: PUBLISH	Type Five writing is of publishable quality. <i>Multiple drafts.</i>

Writing Next, Recommendation #1: Writing Strategies – teaching students strategies for planning, revising, and editing.

Collins Writing Program Response: The Collins Writing Program greatly emphasizes planning, revising, and editing. Students regularly practice Type One writing to brainstorm, list, create/use graphic organizers, and otherwise plan as the writer’s first step in creating a composition.

Revising and editing are required in Types Three, Four, and Five. Self-editing, peer editing, and teacher editing all contribute to the revision of students' writing. The Collins Writing Program advocates simple but effective strategies for revision: skipping lines to leave room for edits, reading aloud to pay close attention to what has been written, and using past papers to practice new skills. Other "self-regulating strategies" include the Cumulative Writing Folder. Each student manages his/her own writing folder, and the papers and entries in the folder include a self-appraisal comment: What did I learn as a result of writing and editing this paper and receiving teacher feedback?

***Writing Next*, Recommendation #2: Summarization – explicitly and systematically teaching students how to summarize texts.**

Collins Writing Program Response: When teachers, particularly in disciplines other than English/Language Arts, ask "What do you recommend for writing projects for my students?" Collins Associates usually start with summarization. Writing summaries exercises reading, writing, and critical thinking skills. Many of the Collins Writing Program publications feature assignments that require summarization, providing practice in this important skill.

***Writing Next*, Recommendation #3: Collaborative Writing – using instructional arrangements in which adolescents work together to plan, draft, revise, and edit their compositions.**

Collins Writing Program Response: Especially in Type Four writing, the Collins Writing Program requires collaboration; each student listens to a partner read his/her paper aloud and receives editing advice from that partner. Depending upon instructional strategies employed by the teacher, all types of writing in the Collins program are open to collaborative activities.

***Writing Next*, Recommendation #4: Specific Product Goals – assigning students specific, reachable goals for their writing.**

Collins Writing Program Response: Teachers familiar with the Collins Writing Program recognize specific product goals as a cornerstone of our approach – using focus correction areas (FCAs). This strategy means the student is given one, two, or three specific expectations, which will be self-evaluated by the student and graded by the teacher. Teachers who use the Collins Writing Program have long known what the *Writing Next* study discovered: "specific structural elements" resulted in significantly better performance than just assigning a "general overall goal." FCAs provide the student with this specificity and focus.

The study also suggests the teacher and the student identify "the purpose of the assignment." The Collins Writing Program asks teachers and student writers to attend to seven key elements when planning a composition, one of which is the *writer's purpose*. Other elements include the *writer's role*, the *audience*, and the *form* (genre) of the piece.

***Writing Next*, Recommendation #5: Word Processing – using computers and word processors as instructional supports for writing assignments.**

Collins Writing Program Response: Because the Collins Writing Program requires editing, revising, and rewriting, all Collins Associates advocate the use of word processing, which reduces the tedium of rewriting. Except in the case of special needs students whose IEPs require keyboarding, all students are expected to be able to write with pen and paper (as required on state tests) as well as with the word processor, which is not always available.

Writing Next, Recommendation #6: Sentence Combining – teaching students to construct more complex, sophisticated sentences.

Collins Writing Program Response: This element provides an excellent example of an effective and often-used FCA. Depending upon the individual writing skills of the student, FCAs are assigned to develop, improve, and practice important sentence elaboration skills. A key element of the Collins Writing Program has students keep their completed compositions at school in a cumulative writing folder. Sentence combining skills – as well as many other writing skills – are developed by having students practice on their own writing samples.

Writing Next, Recommendation #7: Pre-writing – engaging students in activities designed to help them generate or organize ideas for their composition.

Collins Writing Program Response: Students given frequent Type One and Type Two writing assignments, whether operating individually or sharing with one or more peers, learn to take these assignments beyond brainstorming to use as pre-writing. They learn how to function independently from the teacher, whether mapping out a plan by making a list, a web, or an outline. Students trained in the Collins Writing Program have been known to jot down their FCAs and create a web on a state test before they begin to write their essay!

Writing Next, Recommendation #8: Inquiry Activities – engaging students in analyzing immediate, concrete data to help them develop ideas and content for a particular writing task.

Collins Writing Program Response: In every subject area, ranging from literary analysis in English/Language Arts to data analysis in a lab science, students need guidance and practice to develop their capacity for inquiry. The Collins Writing Program, through the use of FCAs, provides teachers with a simple mechanism for guiding student inquiry activities. By focusing on effective and specific inquiry activities (designed by the teacher in the form of FCAs), the student can learn the skill and practice it in relative isolation from the myriad concerns each writer faces.

Writing Next, Recommendation #9: Process Writing Approach – interweaving a number of writing instructional activities in a workshop environment that stresses extended writing opportunities, writing for authentic audiences, personalized instruction, and cycles of writing.

Collins Writing Program Response: The Collins Writing Program offers teachers a practical way to manage the writing process in their classrooms. Type One and Type Two writing are used frequently as prewriting activities that help clarify topics, brainstorm ideas, and organize thoughts. The focus correcting strategy (using FCAs), which is used for all composition writing, enhances the writing process of both teachers and students. Using FCAs allows teachers to clarify their expectations, tailor their instruction, and simplify the assessment of assignments. Naturally, students also benefit from the clarity of expectation and strategic instruction. The Collins approach to the writing process helps create a laboratory environment where steady incremental improvement in writing is the expectation.

Writing Next, Recommendation #10: Study of Models – providing students with opportunities to read, analyze, and emulate models of good writing.

Collins Writing Program Response: Among the highly effective teaching strategies included in Collins Writing Program teacher training workshops is the use of the overhead projector to guide students through sample papers written by peers. Just as the study recommends, teachers trained in the Collins program routinely lead their students through an analysis of sample papers-- evaluation that often includes assigning a grade. These papers include excellent models for emulation as well as flawed pieces of writing for critique and correction.

***Writing Next*, Recommendation #11: Writing for Content Learning – using writing as a tool for learning content material.**

Collins Writing Program Response: The Collins Writing Program has long been valued as an effective, manageable, and non-threatening model for engaging teachers of all subject areas in writing across the curriculum. It can make teachers of all disciplines more confident and capable of incorporating writing in their everyday instruction.

(For more information about Carnegie's *Writing Next* report, go to www.all4ed.org and click on "publications and materials" and then on "reports." For more information about the Collins Writing Program, go to www.collinseducationassociates.com.)

Collins Education Associates
320 Main Street
PO Box 957
West Newbury, MA 01985
800-932-4477
www.collinseducationassociates.com