



Research-Based Writing Supported by 30 Years of Proven Results

February 2017

The Collins Writing Exchange

Ideas, Tips, and Resources on Writing from [Collins Education Associates](#)

Featured Writing Assignment

Personal Vocabulary Cards

Vocabulary development is essential to learning. Every teacher is involved in teaching vocabulary, whether the focus is on technical terms specific to a content area or on general academic vocabulary that spans all disciplines (and often appears in high-stakes assessment prompts). This writing project represents a best practice strategy advanced by Robert Marzano and colleagues in his books *Building Background Knowledge for Academic Achievement* (2004) and *Classroom Instruction That Works* (2001).

Creating a single vocabulary card does not involve a great deal of writing or take much time, but when vocabulary cards are created on a regular basis, the results are impressive. Students will write a great deal that is directly related to key learning concepts in your class, and they will have a hands-on learning tool that can be used to reinforce vocabulary throughout the year.

Collins Writing considers this an essential writing assignment and has numerous resources to support you and your students. Use the links below to get started with this high-impact assignment.

- [Why Vocabulary Cards Are Essential: Notes to the Teacher](#) (all grades)
- [Personal Vocabulary Cards Assignment for Elementary](#) (grades 2-5)
- [Personal Vocabulary Cards: Developing Your Own Study Aids for New Vocabulary Terms](#) (grades 6-8)
- [Vocabulary Cards: Using Cards to Master Technical Vocabulary](#) (grades 9-12)

| | |
|------------------------|---|
| Term: <u>quotation</u> | Definition: <u>the exact words of someone else used to make a point or clarify an idea.</u> |
| Illustration: | Sentence: <u>I used a great quotation from Martin Luther King, Sr.</u> |


Special Note:

To support your teachers' use of the program, consider having a Collins Associate demonstrate the vocabulary card assignment or other lessons in your school's classrooms. To learn more, [email](#) us or call us at 1-800-932-4477.

*General Academic Vocabulary***How to Break the "Curse of Knowledge"**

Teachers are well accustomed to teaching the domain-specific vocabulary of their own discipline. But as Collins Associate Cheryl McDonough points out, because of their own knowledge and familiarity, few teachers explicitly teach general academic vocabulary (GAV).

Harvard linguist Steven Pinker calls this the "curse of knowledge." To help teachers break this curse, McDonough has compiled a list of over 60 essential GAV terms, complete with student-friendly definitions and sentences in which the words might be found in an academic context. Download the [list](#) as well as Cheryl's [explanation](#) of how the words were chosen and suggestions for teaching them.

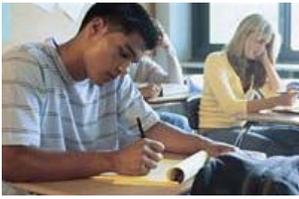
Suggested Strategies for Teaching and Assessing General Academic Vocabulary

- Use the Word Knowledge Checklist, a graphic organizer shown below, to help students' self-assess their understanding of the words in the Essential GAV (general academic vocabulary) list.

| Word | I do not know this word | I know this word | I know and can use this word |
|-----------------|-------------------------|------------------|------------------------------|
| <i>evidence</i> | | | x |
| <i>infer</i> | x | | |
| <i>justify</i> | | x | |

*Strategies That Work***Got Those Test-Prep Blues?**

For many teachers, the time leading up to their state's high-stakes assessment is a dreaded season. With the test looming, it's hard not to feel the pressure to prepare students for the writing tasks they have to do. A frequent



strategy is to engage students in an intensive regimen of writing as a way to "coach them up" for the test.

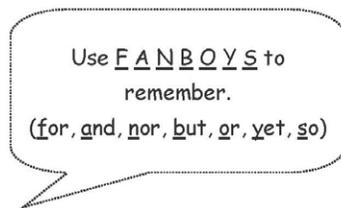
Collins Associate Joan Pokrant, author of *Open Response Writing*, says this last-minute approach is rarely effective and often turns students off. Joan advocates a better, more practical way in her blog post, "[How To Avoid Those Winter Test-Prep Blues.](#)"

Special Note:

For an in-depth analysis of strategies designed to help students improve their writing skills when answering constructed response questions, see Joan Pokrant's book, *Open Response Writing: 18 Strategies to Improve Student Performance*. Visit our web store to [preview the book](#). Be sure to check out Chapter 3, where you can assess your current practices for teaching students how to write open response answers.

Convention Wisdom

One-Minute Clinic: FANBOYS Can Help with Commas



HINT

A frequent comma problem for many students is remembering to use a comma to join two independent clauses. Those independent clauses are typically joined by one of seven coordinating conjunctions: *for*, *and*, *nor*, *but*, *or*, *yet*, and *so*. Use the **FANBOYS** acronym to remember the conjunctions.

But that doesn't mean that a comma is *always* used before those coordinating conjunctions. It's only when they join independent clauses. Look at the four sentences below. Which sentence has no comma problems? Can you identify the missing or unnecessary commas in the other sentences?

I go to the park every week, and I watch the softball games there, and the fans who cheer the players on.

I watch the games, and enjoy them, but many take forever to complete.

Sometimes I listen to music while I watch or occasionally I will read a book.

I enjoy watching the games, so I look forward to softball season each year.

See the [answer key](#) to check on your answers. Download a PDF with essential comma rules from our *Check Mate* guides for students.

- [Level P](#) (grades 2-3)
- [Level A](#) (grades 4-6)
- [Level B](#) (grades 6-9)
- [Level C](#) (grades 9-12)

Special Note:

To help your students with commas and other rules of writing, see *Check Mate*,

the student guide for essential conventions. Or order the *Essential Conventions* Teacher Resource Guide (\$25 for the PDF; \$30 for hard copy) from our [web store](#). You can also download free [Samplers](#) of each Teacher Resource Guide to try with your students.

Quick Links

Revision and Editing Marks Posters

Teachers in all grades and disciplines use our revision and editing marks classroom posters. The posters clearly show the most frequently used revising and editing symbols and remind students how to make changes to their drafts.

We offer the [Writer's Mark poster](#) for grades 1-3 and the [Revision and Editing Symbols poster](#) for grades 4-12. You can download a mini-poster version of Revision and Editing Symbols from the [Free Resources](#) page on our website.

Upcoming Events

John Collins, Kristine Gibson, and Bill Atwood in Pennsylvania, New Jersey, and New Hampshire



| Date | Location | Session | Grades | Presenter |
|-------------------|---------------------------|--|--------|-----------------|
| February 28, 2017 | Diocese of Scranton, PA | Improving Student Performance Through Writing and Thinking Across the Curriculum | K-8 | Bill Atwood |
| February 28, 2017 | MUJC, New Providence, NJ | How Did You Get That? Improving Open-Ended Responses in Mathematics Details Register | 4-12 | Kristine Gibson |
| March 1, 2017 | NEIU #19, Archbald, PA | How Did You Get That? Improving Open-Ended Responses in Mathematics | 2-12 | Bill Atwood |
| March 2, 2017 | CIU #10, West Decatur, PA | Introducing the Collins Writing | K-3 | Kristine Gibson |

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|----------------|---------------------------|---|------|-----------------|
| | | Program in the Primary Grades (Day 2) | | |
| March 3, 2017 | AIU #8, Altoona, PA | Meeting the Challenge of the PA Core (Day 3) | K-3 | Kristine Gibson |
| March 8, 2017 | IU #9, Smethport, PA | How Did You Get That? Improving Written Responses in Math | K-6 | Kristine Gibson |
| March 9, 2017 | IU #9, Smethport, PA | How Did You Get That? Improving Written Responses in Math | 7-12 | Kristine Gibson |
| March 15, 2017 | MUJC, New Providence, NJ | More Writing ... Less Grading: A Manageable Approach to Writing Across the Curriculum Details Register | K-5 | Kristine Gibson |
| March 22, 2017 | CIU #10, West Decatur, PA | Opinion and Argument Writing | 4-12 | John Collins |
| March 24, 2017 | Pittsburgh, PA | Three Essential Writing Assignments: Preparing for the PA Core | 3-12 | John Collins |
| April 5, 2017 | SERESC, Bedford, NH | Tell a Story About a Time: Improving Narrative Writing | 1-8 | Bill Atwood |

[View more training events here.](#)

New offerings are added regularly, so if you don't see something in your area, check back soon.

Collins Training

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Collins Education Associates | 800-932-4477 | Fax 978-363-2212 |
info@collinsed.com | www.collinsed.com